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2004

Utilizing a Structuration Perspective to Examine Perceptions of Labor Market
Opportunities & Constraints in a Distressed Urban Neighborhood

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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ABSTRACT

UTILIZING A STRUCTURATION PERSPECTIVE TO EXAMINE
PERCEPTIONS OF LABOR MARKET OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS IN
A DISTRESSED URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

Sharon M. McDonald

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2004

Major Director: Elizabeth Doran Hutchison, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
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The purpose of this study is to understand how members of an urban extreme poverty neighborhood experience the labor market and how they perceive the role of social policies and institutions that attempt to facilitate or mediate employment opportunities.

Residents of extreme poverty neighborhoods have been the subject of numerous public policy efforts designed to ameliorate the geographic concentration of poverty as well as strategies to promote work participation based on existing theoretical models of how work participation can be induced. It is argued that the predominant theoretical models that shape inquiry and the development of policy recommendations are incomplete and that adoption of a new orientation may offer additional insight. It is further argued that the use of a structuration perspective to guide research inquiry may extend existing knowledge and facilitate the development of responsive social policies and practice strategies (Wilson, 1995).

A structuration perspective guides the researcher to analyze the labor market participation of a stigmatized group with a different lens. It recommends focusing on the individual's perceptions of how labor market engagement is constrained and enabled by structural properties. It further recommends attending to the resiliency of individuals by examining how participants respond to such constraints: how they are navigated, how they are transformed, and how they are reproduced.

The research design may best be described as an instrumental single case study using qualitative methods (Creswell, 1998). The focus of the study is the experiences of residents in one bounded community; it relies on multiple sources of data and closely attends to how the phenomenon is embedded within the social-political context. The goal of the research is to develop new understanding and build or extend theory.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 residents, 11 community based service providers or program and policy administrators, and 1 staff person of an elected city official. A purposive sampling strategy was utilized. To increase the likelihood that diverse perspectives were captured among residents, variation was sought in employment and housing status, age, gender, and use of public benefits. An elite sampling strategy was utilized with city program administrators and service providers nominated by residents based on their identified role in the community or their capacity to provide rich information. Interviews were taped and all audiotapes were fully transcribed. Data were analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. Rigor was achieved by meeting Lincoln and Guba's (1985) standards for assessing the trustworthiness of interpretive research.

This study highlights constraints and how people respond to them. Residents of the extreme poverty neighborhood interviewed for this study face significant stressors and challenges simply to live safely in their neighborhood. There are a number of responses by residents to these challenges, including learning how to live within the context of those constraints, working to change those constraints for members of their community by contributing personal strengths and resources, or by trying to leave.

Residents of the neighborhood also report significant employment barriers that are constraining. The residents and service providers alike respond in various ways, including trying to dismantle those barriers, managing within the context of those barriers, or giving up. Service providers and city administrators have tools to intervene but can feel similarly constrained by limited resources, lack of flexibility in how resources can be utilized, program rules and practices, and imposed outcome requirements that occasionally seem counter-productive to shared goals. In each instance, whether responding to the challenges of living within an extreme poverty neighborhood or by responding to employment barriers, residents and service providers require additional supports and resources to strengthen their existing efforts.

Chapter One: Introduction

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived barriers and opportunities for employment in an extreme poverty neighborhood and the role of social policies and programs that attempt to facilitate greater employment among community members.

In recent years, poverty and unemployment have begun to increase following a sustained period of economic prosperity during the late 1990s that had led economic commentators to speculate that the United States had entered a new economic era and that prosperity could continue unabated (Nasar, 1998). Despite recent increases, poverty and unemployment remain low and significant disparity between racial groups continues to prevail. The economic expansion of the late 1990s and the job opportunities it created, as well as shifts in social policies that limited provision of financial assistance to poor families and promoted work participation requirements, have been credited with the increased work effort among low-income families and the decline in poverty.

The current Administration has two predominant policy efforts to combat poverty among poor families as evidenced by proposed policy shifts in the reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant program: increasing work participation and promoting marriage. While the emphasis on marriage promotion may be new, social policies have historically played an important role in restricting financial aid in an effort to mediate how poor people engage the labor market (Katz, 1996).

Policies have been carefully crafted to differentiate among the poor who “should” receive financial assistance and those who should be expected to meet their needs

through participation in the labor market (Piven & Coward, 1993). Through categorical programs, social policies have attempted to restrict access to aid so as not to discourage those who might otherwise participate in wage labor. Social policies also reflect shifting cultural expectations of who should be in the workforce and may attempt to reinforce such shifts through restricting or expanding financial transfer programs, attempting to facilitate entry or exit from the labor market, and through supporting or promoting expansion of employment opportunities (Peck, 1996).

It is clear, however, that encouraging work among very poor individuals and families as the best mechanism to overcome poverty has attained widespread acceptance. Differences in social policy discourse seem only to center on the finer points within that construct: How much time should a welfare recipient be allowed to participate in education and training before being required to work while retaining financial assistance? Should full-time work ensure that a family is “lifted” out of poverty or is shifting families from welfare dependency to poverty wages considered a sufficient accomplishment? Can unemployment compensation be extended without undermining work effort?

Recently, social science researchers have argued that social policy efforts that focused on the “individual” have neglected an important element – the importance of “place” and place-based interventions to address communities of entrenched poverty (Katz, et al., 2003). Between 1970 and 1990, the number of concentrated poverty neighborhoods in the country had doubled. The extreme poverty neighborhoods, neighborhoods in which 40% or more of residents have incomes below the poverty level, disproportionately affected minority households. Over a third of poor Black households

lived in an extreme poverty neighborhood in 1990, compared to only six percent of poor White families. Extreme poverty neighborhoods were also highly racially segregated. In 1990, the majority of poor Black households living in an extreme poverty neighborhood also lived in neighborhoods that were 90% Black (Jargowsky, 1997).

According to Paul Jargowsky, residents of extreme poverty neighborhoods have much to contend with other than the lack of financial resources to meet their families' needs:

Concentrations of poor people lead to a concentration of the social ills that cause or are caused by poverty. Poor children in these neighborhoods not only lack the basic necessities in their own homes, but they must contend with a hostile environment that holds many temptations and few positive role models. Equally important, school districts and attendance zones are generally organized geographically, so that the residential concentration of the poor frequently results in low-performing schools. The concentration of poverty in central cities may exacerbate the flight of middle income and higher income families to the suburbs, driving a wedge between social needs and the fiscal base required to address them (Jargowsky, 2003, p. 2).

By definition, extreme poverty neighborhoods have a high concentration of households with incomes below the poverty level. Many of these communities also have a high proportion of residents with long-term welfare use, low educational attainment, and high levels of unemployment (Jargowsky, 1997). Men in extremely poor neighborhoods are more likely to be outside the labor force; neither working nor seeking

employment and those who are working are less likely to be working in full time, year-round employment. Workers also tend to be concentrated in entry-level, low-skilled positions. Less than a quarter of men and women residing in extreme poverty neighborhoods worked full-time, year-round in 1990. An additional 40% of the men and 32% of the women worked at least part of the year or part time, however, demonstrating significant labor market participation in communities where work effort is perceived to be minimal (Jargowsky, 1997).

Since 1990, there has been a decline in the number of concentrated poverty neighborhoods with the bulk of the decline occurring in the South and the Midwest. The proportion of poor Black households residing in an extreme poverty neighborhood declined from 30% in 1990 to 19% in 2000 (Jargowsky, 2003). The concentration of poverty in the Northeast remained the same over the ten-year period (Jargowsky, 2003). Social scientists are uncertain about how to credit the change but point to increases in employment, welfare reform, and housing policies. The decline in poverty alone can explain some of the decline in concentrated poverty but not to the extent demonstrated over the last ten years (Katz et al., 2003).

Whatever the cause, the proportions of poor people residing in extreme poverty neighborhoods declined through the 1990s. Whether the progress made through the 1990s can withstand a recession or a “jobless” economy recovery is yet to be seen and social scientists fear a “reconcentration” of poverty – perhaps in outlying suburbs.

The remaining residents of urban extreme poverty neighborhoods, however, continue to experience the double hardship of incomes below one's family's needs and living in a neighborhood that may have limited social and economic resources.

Despite the expressed concern that policymakers are attending to "people-oriented" social policies, such as welfare reform, at the expense of "place-based strategies," a number of economic development strategies have been designed to deconcentrate poverty, revitalize distressed communities, and increase work participation among residents in distressed neighborhoods. What has not been attended to, however, is the interaction of those policy strategies.

Residents of extreme poverty neighborhoods are subject to policies targeted to place and people. It has been argued that it is the inner city poor, who have been reified in popular culture as belonging to an underclass with separate norms and values from mainstream America (Gans, 1995), that have compelled the shifts in social policies and are the true target of poverty policy interventions. For these reasons, examination of how social policies and programs are creating change for people living in poverty should begin in an extreme poverty community.

Social policies are a value-laden product that reflects, in part, the worldview of policymakers and stakeholders (Stone, 2002). Policymakers may select among an array of policy recommendations and options promoted by theorists, researchers, and advocates who share their values, worldview, and definition of the problem. As such, inquiry and policy development mutually inform and constrain; the worldview and theoretical orientation of researchers guides inquiry and, thus, findings and recommendations. To

the extent that policymakers rely on research to shape their political agenda, social policy is similarly constrained by that worldview. Policy evaluation serves to “test” the efficacy of the intervention while not necessarily challenging the underlying theoretical orientation.

It is argued that the predominant theoretical models that shape inquiry and the development of policy recommendations are incomplete and that adoption of a new orientation may offer additional insight. Theoretical explanations of low work attachment in poor communities are often dichotomized into structural and individual/cultural level causes (Holzer, 1994; Skinner, 1995). Structural theories focus on the constraints residents of low-income communities may face in accessing and maintaining employment and might include discrimination and loss of employment opportunities through the out-migration of industry. Individual and cultural level theorists focus on individual agency and capacity, the values and norms held by the resident and the larger community that might undermine work effort and participation. Rational choice theory is an exception to the dichotomy; while acknowledging structural level constraints, the focus is largely on how individuals make choices from an array of options within the context of those constraints (Abell, 1996; Ritzer, 1992).

Examples of the influence of the three theoretical foundations—individual/cultural, rational choice, and structural—can be found in contemporary policies. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), for example, gradually eliminates cash benefits and imposes behavioral requirements in an attempt to re-shape the work norms among the target population and is

largely derived from individual/cultural explanations of poverty and unemployment. In addition to ameliorating the effects of low wages, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is believed to increase labor market participation by providing a greater benefit from work effort (Economic Report of the President, 1998) and is consistent with a rational choice model. Finally, tax credit waivers attempt to promote business investment in distressed communities thereby generating work opportunities and are examples of policies derived from a structural-level explanation of poverty and unemployment in extreme poverty neighborhoods.

The predominant theoretical models that shape inquiry and the development of policy recommendations are incomplete. Individual and cultural models emphasize the role of social learning, individual agency (power), and meaning-making, but inappropriately discount real structural constraints. Structural theories acknowledge those constraints, but discount individual agency (Giddens, 1984). While a rational choice perspective does accommodate individual agency and praxis within a context of structural constraints and opportunities, the focus on choices within an interaction is overly narrow. It fails to attend to the experiences and perceptions of those making such choices and to social and cultural level influences (Ritzer, 1992).

Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration provides a framework to understand the interdependence of individual agency and structural properties. By setting forth a new model of the creation and re-creation of structural properties that relies on the agency of individual actors to sustain or transform them, the researcher is provided a new lens through which new insight may be developed (Wilson, 1995). While the social lens

utilized always limits knowledge, the use of a structuration perspective to guide the research may allow for an extension of existing knowledge and thus facilitate the development of responsive social policies and practice strategies.

Research Question

The theoretical stance of the researcher provides a lens through which the social world is understood. It is argued that the predominant theories, and thus the lens, have provided an incomplete and overly narrow understanding of how residents of low-income communities experience the labor market. As policymakers turn to theorists to understand social problems and their potential solutions, they are offered proposals restricted by the theoretical stance of the researcher.

Social policies shape and reflect cultural goals. A predominant and increasingly present goal appears to be the movement of the poor into the labor market and a resulting higher reliance on wage labor to meet the needs of poor families. To ensure the development of policy that is attendant to the realities and complexities of individuals' lives, a new model must be developed. It is proposed that utilizing a structuration perspective to investigate how members of an extreme poverty neighborhood engage the labor market and their perceptions of how work participation is facilitated, sustained or impeded, may provide further insight and foster the development of a more responsive social policy agenda. Thus, the research question is: How do residents of an extreme poverty neighborhood engage the labor market and how is work participation facilitated, sustained, or impeded by social policies, programs, and the actions of residents? The overarching analytical question is: How is labor market marginalization being reproduced

and transformed within an extreme poverty neighborhood and what is the role of social policies, programs, and the praxis of actors in the reproduction and transformation of disadvantage?

Relevance to Social Work

The capacity of families to capture the economic resources necessary for their well-being must be the central concern for social workers committed to social justice. Participating in wage labor is increasingly essential for families to meet the most basic needs of its members. It remains the best avenue for achieving social mobility and protecting families from poverty. It is paramount, therefore, that social workers understand how low income people engage the labor market and how sustained employment and opportunities for employment that will confer greater monetary and social benefits to the worker are impeded and facilitated.

It is also important that policy practitioners are informed by those most affected by the social policies that they craft. An understanding of the perspective of those impacted by such policies is particularly important to policy advocates, as true advocacy must be informed with the expertise of those experiencing the consequences of poverty and the impact of social policy shifts. Finally, Black feminist theorists have pointed to the unique and valuable standpoint that those who are marginalized in our society can offer to social scientists. In interaction with the larger social world, they are exposed to the commonly held beliefs of how the social world works, yet they are also exposed to interwoven oppressive influences, including sexism, classism, and racism. Thus, they are

aware of the contradiction between dominant beliefs and their own lived experiences
(Hill-Collins, 1990).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Historical Overview

Before turning to the national economic context and social theory, a historical review is necessary. Cornel West (1993) has suggested that the greatest deficiency in contemporary social theories examining the well-being of Black Americans is the ahistorical perspective adopted by theorists. Tilly and Tilly (1998, p. 5) argue that neoclassical and contemporary wage labor economists have also largely ignored issues of history and power, arguing that change is constrained by "[h]istories embedded in law, memory, prevailing beliefs, accumulated knowledge, and existing social relations." Finally, examination of history is a central and defining element of a structuration perspective that has a primary focus on recursive social practices—how practices are reproduced and transformed across time and space (Giddens, 1984).

A historical overview highlights the centrality of the value of work in the nation's history. If the disproportionate under-employment of Black Americans can be seen as an indication of labor market marginalization, this too has a historical context. The coercion of labor and the role social policies have played in sustaining such coercion and marginalization is highlighted by a historical overview. Finally, efforts to help poor people in the United States have historically attended to the promotion of work and the need to avoid providing aid to those who, with other means of support, might be deterred from engaging in the wage labor market (Katz, 1996).

Work Values

The importance of work is a cultural value that is strongly embedded in social policy efforts to address poverty. The meaning and importance of work is strongly rooted in the fabric of our socio-cultural heritage and is a value that some would argue is universally held across all social groups in the United States.

The origins of the value of work can be traced back to the nation's earliest days. European Protestant leaders such as Calvin and Luther stressed that work was a spiritual obligation. Weber proposed that it was this belief system that allowed capitalism to flourish in Europe and the United States, compelling faithful followers to engage in work effort. Later theorists have proposed that the spiritual leaders had instead responded to the needs of capitalism (Bernstein, 1997). The non-industrious were viewed as failing in a moral obligation, providing fertile ground for evolving social policy efforts that attempted to distinguish between the "worthy" and "non-worthy" unemployed and poor.

Economic shifts in Europe during the 18th and 19th century helped fuel immigration to the United States. As economic turmoil in their native country compelled many to immigrate, the belief in limitless opportunities within the United States served to attract them. Land was readily available and the visible success of entrepreneurs and previous immigrants fed a prevailing belief that with diligence and hard work anyone could do well in the United States. This belief in a "land of opportunity" for all, still evident in the cultural landscape, suggests that those who are not successful have only themselves to blame.

Two influential industrial movements are thought to have contributed to the alienation of workers, Taylorism and Fordism. Frederick Taylor introduced standardization of labor in production, prescribing the precise movements of workers on factory lines to ensure efficiency. Ford extended scientific management, and intruded into the private lives of many workers in order to acculturate them to the American values he believed were essential components of good factory discipline (Green, 1980). Both Taylor and Ford proposed that workers would be loyal and comply with rigid oversight if they were sufficiently rewarded. This belief was countered by high rates of turnover, attempts by workers to resist oversight, increasing alienation of workers, and the strengthening of unions (Bernstein, 1997). Some remnants of scientific management may remain within many industries and may be accompanied by the alienation of some workers who believe they are overly controlled in the workplace.

Welfare capitalism was introduced in the 1930s as a response to the alienation of workers (Bernstein, 1997). The failure of scientific management led to attempts in some workplaces to foster the cooperation of workers and their investment in the corporation's success, in hope of improving productivity. Welfare capitalism included the development of model cities, profit-sharing ventures, and extension of benefits to workers. Inherent within welfare capitalism was the belief that corporate success provided benefits to workers and their community. The belief in the interdependence of corporations, workers, and their communities helped to further foster worker loyalty.

By the late 1940s, group theorists and psychologists began to attend to the needs of workers within corporations. They recognized that workers seek more than monetary

reward from the workplace and productivity is enhanced by attention to the psychological and social needs of the workers. A 1983 study by Yankelovich and Immerwahr found that recognition, respect, interesting work, and opportunities to develop skills impacted workers' employment decisions (Bernstein, 1997). Attention to the individual and group needs continue to influence management practices (Moxley, 2000; Weisbord, 1987).

Corporate downsizing was the focus of a 1996 *New York Times* series. Coupled with expressed concerns of economic theorists over an increase in the number of corporations relocating to reduce overhead, it appeared as if the bonds that have tied workers to corporations were under stress. This suggests a disenfranchisement of middle level workers by the corporations that have formerly provided long-term work security. Indeed an article included in a 2003 *Wall Street Journal* series on the changing labor market notes a trend among some businesses of reducing costs by replacing higher paid staff with lower paid new workers (Tejada & McWilliams, 2003). More recently, attention has focused on the loss of manufacturing positions that have offered work security and good paying positions to low-skilled workers in some communities. It appears that economic recovery and even improving economic performances by these manufacturers will not replenish the jobs that have been lost. A *Wall Street Journal* reporter writes "something historic and fundamentally different is occurring now. For manufacturing, this isn't a cyclical downturn. Most of these basic and low skill factory jobs aren't able to come back" (Ansberry, 2003).

Beyond the need to meet one's basic needs, many Americans derive meaning from their work. This is reinforced by the dominant cultural norms of the importance of

work and a sense of mutual loyalty between many employers and workers that was a by-product of efforts by employers and unions to promote security and productivity. An overview of the history of work in the United States would be incomplete without attending to the coercion of labor that includes indentured servitude and slavery, however.

Coercion of Labor

Indentured servitude accounted for 75% of the immigrants to the colonies in the 17th and 18th century (Jacoby, 1998), many of whom entered servitude involuntarily (Abramovitz, 1988). Indentured service contracts were enforced in criminal courts (Jacoby, 1998), those who failed to meet their obligations were subject to incarceration or ordered to spend additional years in servitude. Prior to being enslaved, kidnapped Africans brought to the country initially entered indentured servitude in the colonies and achieved freedom with the completion of a contract similar to indentured servants of European descent. A decline in the number of indentured servants entering the colonies from European nations resulted in an expansion of enslavement of Africans (Jacoby, 1998).

Slavery is the most extreme and egregious example of coerced labor in the history of the nation. It is worth noting that the enslavement of people was not merely tolerated by existing laws but was sustained by them. To protect those who enslaved people of African descent, states created militias and funded bounties to return those who escaped. The movement of free Black Americans was periodically restricted because it was viewed as a threat to the institution of slavery (Christiansen, 1995).

It was not uncommon for those who were enslaved to engage in wage labor or selling crafts to increase their family's resources or provide the means to purchase freedom. States periodically further restricted the limited freedom of enslaved people. Access to wage labor and the marketplace were occasionally restricted by state law. For example, Virginia imposed fines on those who made purchases from enslaved people and implemented a legislative order that all property held by people who were enslaved be seized and sold with proceeds distributed between the informant and the county overseer of the poor. A Maryland law actually restricted the freedom of the enslaver, requiring fines on those who permitted enslaved people to engage in work for wages.

Coerced labor and restrictions of alternate sources of livelihood continued after slavery ended. In rural areas, sharecropping and peonage perpetuated coerced labor. Presidential Reconstruction restored abandoned and confiscated land to former enslavers (Harris, 1982) and the Freedman's Bureau facilitated sharecropping contracts between landowners and those who were formerly enslaved. Sharecroppers agreed to yearly contracts and were provided provisions, called furnishings, from the landowner throughout the year. The sharecropper's salary was paid at the end of the year and was equivalent to a portion of the value of crops raised minus the value of furnishing provided. The landowner was responsible for estimating the value of the crop and the value of the furnishing. At the end of the year, few families earned money sharecropping and many moved each year in hopes of finding marginal gains. Other families found themselves indebted to the landowner at the end of the year, resulting in peonage, the

bondage of labor by debt (Jones, 1992). Peonage debt was not ruled unconstitutional until 1917 and after that time the law was rarely enforced (Harris, 1982).

To avoid sharecropping contracts, both Black and White workers participated in day labor and attempted to generate income and meet their family's needs through fishing, hunting, gardening, and selling crafts. Sharecroppers also engaged in these activities to increase their family's resources and men would leave the farms to follow opportunities in other areas and return to their families during busy farm seasons (Jones, 1992).

To promote the attachment of farm-workers to sharecropping contracts, there were efforts to restrict access to alternatives. Vagrancy laws were enacted throughout southern states that allowed prosecution of Black Americans who could not demonstrate proof of employment. Attempts were made to restrict access to rivers and forests where families might catch fish and game. Unemployed Black Americans could be hired out to the highest bidder (Harris, 1982) and children of impoverished families could be apprenticed out (Jones, 1992).

Access to alternative sources of employment was also restricted for many of the free and newly freed Black men who were skilled artisans and craftsmen (Jones, 1992). Those who attempted to move into industrial or service work were often relegated to positions of laborer and domestic servants and as casual versus permanent workers. Businesses resisted employment of Black Americans and White Americans threatened to quit jobs in which they were forced to interact with Black Americans. Restricted access

to industrial positions and opportunities to develop skills led to a decrease in skilled workers among Black American workers following the Civil War (Jones, 1992).

In laws passed after the Civil War and later nullified by the Freedman's Bureau, some southern states permitted convicted Black Americans who could not pay court imposed fines and fees to be hired out to work on public projects (Christiansen, 1995). The practice was still occurring during the turn of the century. A 1903 federal grand jury commissioned in Alabama found a "widespread pattern of peonage...involving the collaboration of wealthy landowners, local constables, justices of the peace and plantation overseers" (Christiansen, 199, p. 293). Black Americans, particularly men, were convicted and sentenced to pay fines they could not afford and were taken to farms to work off those fines.

Coerced labor in prison is one of the last vestiges of coerced labor. Once again, Black Americans are disproportionately affected. In 1999, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that some economists were promoting the use of prison labor to respond to labor shortages (McDermott, 1999). Opposition to prison labor seems less focused on the rights of prisoners than the protection of low skilled jobs in communities ("Don't fill paid jobs," 1999). The increasing privatization and for-profit status of the nation's prisons necessitates attention to ensure that prisons do not exploit their ready access to labor.

Marginalization and Resistance

Attempts to resist marginalization, generate control over their own labor power, maximize autonomy, and increase the well-being of families of Black workers predates slavery (Harris, 1982; Jones, 1992). Attempts by Black workers to unionize occurred

before the Civil War in northern cities and Black women staged a strike in Atlanta shortly after the Civil War. Over 3,000 women who laundered clothes joined the strike that ended after only two weeks when the women encountered threats that charitable contributions would be withheld, as well as threats of evictions and a proposed city council ordinance that would require licenses to continue their work (Jones, 1992). An early strike by cotton pickers ended in violence and the death of 25 people. The organization representing the landowners opposed wage concessions, encouraging landowners to lose crops rather than meet the workers' demands (Foner & Lewis, 1989; Harris, 1982).

As strikes broke out in northern cities, Black workers were recruited to serve as strikebreakers. Many were offered, and sometimes accepted, lower wages for the same jobs the workers they replaced earned. While this exacerbated tension between White and Black workers, as early as 1867 some union leaders recognized the need to unionize across color lines. A report issued at The Address of the National Labor Congress to the Workingmen of the United States argued that Black workers would become "an element of strength or an element of weakness in the labor movement" (Foner et al., 1989, p. 9).

Class consciousness became subservient to racism in most cases. Some attempts to integrate unions were successful, yet unions ultimately failed to provide a long-term commitment to integration thus undermining progress. The Knights of Labor, for example, specifically recruited Black Americans and had 60,000 members by 1886. An unsuccessful sugar strike in Louisiana in 1887 resulted in 20 strikers' deaths and led to disillusionment among those who returned to work under the old conditions. The death

blows to the integrated union effort was the unions' refusal to oppose segregation in 1890 and their adoption of an advocacy position supporting the deportation of Black workers in 1894 (Foner et al., 1989).

The American Federation of Labor (AFL) recruited Black workers who were unwelcome among affiliates and other union members. Affiliates were required to accept Black workers; however, they discouraged Black recruits and honored the refusal of White workers to work alongside them. The marginalization of Black workers within the union was evident in 1902. The concerns of Black members of the United Mine Workers, an affiliate that included more than half of AFL's Black membership, were ignored by AFL union officials (Foner et al., 1989).

In the early 20th century, Black families increasingly left the South for northern cities. This generated concern in southern states over the loss of labor (Jones, 1992). North and South Carolina attempted to restrict the activities of labor agents from the North who attempted to entice Black workers to relocate and offered free transportation to northern states (Harris, 1982). In 1923, a Mississippi Biracial Committee was established to investigate the causes of migration. The Committee found that both social and economic conditions compelled Black workers to leave the South (Harris, 1982). The Committee reported that both civil rights violations and economic devastation contributed to the large migration to the North. Black workers were also attracted to the industrialized North by the tight labor markets generated by World War I. The war had restricted the entry of European immigrants and, with the enlistment of young men in the army, greatly decreased the available labor supply.

The tight labor markets that provided economic opportunity did not mean an easy transition for newly relocated Black workers, however. The large number of southern Black workers' relocating in the North were forced to move into already crowded segregated communities, generating strain within those communities. They often encountered disdain from Black workers already residing in the urban neighborhoods who feared that the large number of southern migrants would threaten their well-being. Racial riots occurred throughout northern cities, resulting in part from White workers' fear of losing jobs to the new migrants (Foner & Lewis, 1989).

The tight labor markets did provide opportunities for Black men and women to enter manufacturing work. By 1920, however, the majority of Black men remained in unskilled or semi-skilled positions; three times the proportion of White men. Black women also remained on the bottom rung of the workforce in industry. Jones (1992, p. 168) argues that the introduction of Black American women to industrial positions served only to "put...white employees on notice that cheap labor was readily available in the event of a protest or job action." Black women remained disproportionately employed in domestic service; fully 80% of Black workers who did not work in agriculture were maids, cooks, or washerwomen in 1920 (Jones, 1992). Whenever possible, Black women attempted to leave domestic service and those remaining utilized labor shortages to leverage employer concessions, including pay increases and the right to live outside the employers' home (Jones, 1992).

Black men were pushed out of industry at a rate far higher than White men with the onset of the Great Depression. Black women who were employed in industry

returned to domestic service, while others in domestic service were displaced by White women (Jones, 1992). In 1931, the National Urban League reported that unemployment among Black workers was 30% to 60% higher than among White workers in 106 cities (Foner & Lewis, 1989). In 1936, the earnings of Black families in the northern cities was 64% of the earnings of White families; in southern cities, Black families earned only 44% of their White counterparts' earnings (Christiansen, 1995).

The Great Depression ebbed with the beginning of World War II. The previously unemployed found new opportunities in the burgeoning defense industries, jobs that were not made available to Black workers who were restricted by corporate policies, discrimination in training schools, and the unions that supplied workers. A. Philip Randolph, a Black American union leader, organized a march on Washington to compel President Roosevelt to take action. The Executive Order 8802 banning racial discrimination in defense industries was signed one week prior to the scheduled march, that Randolph then called off (Foner & Lewis, 1989). The Order also established a Fair Employment Practices Committee to ensure compliance with the Act. The Committee became advocates for Black American workers, providing oversight and enforcement to ensure compliance. AFL leaders vehemently opposed the Act's non-discrimination mandates. Union affiliates had members swear an initiation oath to exclude Black workers and strikes were held in cities to oppose the integration effort.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Black American community was divided over unions' commitment to the economic well-being of Black workers. The NAACP advocated the establishment of an interracial labor commission to promote

integration within unions, also supported by the president of the AFL. The American Negro Labor Congress developed in response to the concerns of some Black Americans that White dominated unions would never adequately represent the interests of Black Americans (Harris, 1982). The American Negro Labor Congress that attempted to advocate and lobby the AFL for concessions for Black American workers was squashed by Black leaders within the AFL (Harris, 1982). Marcus Garvey opposed unions altogether and advocated Black Americans work as strikebreakers and align themselves with capitalists by agreeing to work for wages lower than White Americans in order to win and capture their jobs (Harris, 1982). Conservative Black American leaders also opposed unions, advocating instead a faith in incremental change and belief that progress was inevitable (Marable, 1983).

The Committee for Industrial Organization, later named the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), recognized the need to integrate Black Americans in unions in order to create strength. The CIO remained concerned over the rights of Black American workers. Unlike the AFL, the CIO did not oppose an anti-discrimination clause in the National Labor Relations Act, also known as the Wagner Act. Due to the CIO's apparent responsiveness to Black American workers, both the National Negro Congress and the NAACP promoted the efforts of the CIO. By the early 1950s, the CIO became sensitive to charges of communist loyalties within their progressive affiliates, the very ones most likely to be strong advocates for Black American workers. With the withdrawal of strong support from the CIO, the National Negro Labor Council was formed in 1951 to fill the advocacy void. The organization was quickly dissolved

following threats of an investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Subversive Activities Control Board (Harris, 1982).

In 1955, the AFL and CIO merged. Under the merger negotiations, Black American delegates requested that unions practicing discrimination be barred. A. Philip Randolph requested that the organization investigate discrimination and segregation within unions. Randolph's requests for an AFL investigation of affiliates' discriminatory practices had spanned twenty years. His persistent advocacy efforts on behalf of Black American workers eventually led the AFL-CIO to censure both Randolph and the NAACP. In 1960, Randolph became president of the Negro American Labor Council, the organization that led the 1963 March on Washington.

The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 and eliminated the legal discrimination of persons on the basis of race, sex, creed, color or religion. It established affirmative action programs and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce the law. The following year, the Voting Rights Act was passed and that rendered illegal efforts to prevent Black Americans from registering to vote. The EEOC and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance became tools to attack discrimination.

The adherence of the public sector to Equal Employment standards led to a substantial increase in Black American representation in the public sector. Combined with the strength of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), employment in the public sector has been credited as a stimulant to the growth of the Black American middle class (Kelley, 2000).

The loss of manufacturing jobs, the declining well-being of urban centers, suburban job growth, and the downsizing of the public sector have all had a disproportionate impact on Black Americans over the last thirty years. Conservative policy prescriptions have challenged the provision of financial assistance and the need for affirmative action programs, suggesting that such policy efforts wither Black American self-reliance and potential for social mobility; arguments that appear to be received with increasing credibility (Kelley, 1997).

Encouraging Work in Poverty Programs

Policies to aid people living in poverty have historically made distinctions between those who are believed to be employable and those perceived to be outside the workforce due to characteristics such as disability, gender, or age. Provision of aid has also been tied to distinctions of the worthiness of the recipients (Katz, 1996). The distinctions between the deserving and undeserving unemployed for financial assistance were periodically relaxed during recognized economic downturns (Bernstein, 1997).

The poverty programs of the early United States can be traced to the English Poor Laws. The precedents of the Elizabethan Poor Laws included an act of Parliament in 1531 that required official confirmation of disability before an individual was permitted to beg. Those found begging without such confirmation would be whipped. By 1536, with the passage of the Act for the Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars, parishes were required to provide aid to the poor and a system was set in place to collect resources for them to do so. It further allowed parishes to use such funds to create jobs for those who would work. While this extended the capacity of local communities to

provide relief, it also incorporated further penalties for beggars, including enslavement, whippings, execution, and apprenticing of dependent children (Trattner, 1999).

In colonial America, local governments assumed the role of provider of assistance to the poor, modeled on the English Poor Laws. The locally assumed obligation to extend aid led such governments to attempt to distinguish whether claimants “belonged” to the community and to expel those who did not. There was a further effort to ensure aid was not provided to those who were perceived to be able to work. In colonial Virginia, for example, the Assembly permitted those believed to be idle to be forced into labor. Enslaved Black Americans were seen as the responsibility of their enslaver, while free Black Americans and Native Americans were excluded from any public provision of aid (Trattner, 1999).

In part as a response to the growing concern that the provision of financial assistance promoted idleness among able-bodied adults, there was an increase in the use of institutional support, almshouses, and workhouses (Trattner, 1999). Workhouses were designed for able-bodied poor people and incorporated efforts to promote the value of work among the inhabitants by enforcing work effort among residents (Bernstein, 1997; Trattner, 1999). It is argued that the conditions were designed to deter all but the most desperate (Katz, 1986) and, according to Piven and Cloward (1993), served to further bind those able to work to any form of employment.

Following the Civil War, the Freedman’s Bureau established aid to the formerly enslaved and helped negotiate labor contracts. Such contracts often tied the newly freed once again to land, and often resulted in only clothing, shelter, and rations provided in

exchange for labor (Jones, 1992). Attempts to move those families receiving federal assistance from the responsibility of the Freedman's Bureau included efforts to encourage recipients to utilize their own labor through, according to Bureau Commissioner Oliver O. Howard, "wholesome compulsion." In Richmond, Virginia this included efforts to hire out unemployed Black American women and to create public jobs by establishing a laundry where one could have clothes washed by the women free of charge (Jones, 1992).

With high levels of unemployment during the Great Depression, President Roosevelt began a federal commitment to the extension of relief to poor people. The Federal Emergency Relief Act made funds available to the states for emergency assistance that were administered by states and localities (Trattner, 1999). The Civil Conservation Corps, the Public Works Administration, Civil Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, and the National Youth Administration each provided employment opportunities for unemployed poor people. The Agricultural Adjustment Act paid farmers not to cultivate their land.

Not surprisingly, Black American men and women did not benefit from the programs as much as White men. Gender and race restrictions limited the number of women and Black Americans who could participate in the employment programs (Abramovitz, 1988; Trattner, 1999). The distribution of funds from the Federal Emergency Relief Act was determined at state and local levels, where access and subsidies for Black American applicants were often limited. The Agricultural Adjustment Act provided funds to owners of farmland; however, this left many tenant farmers with no means of support. Finally, initiatives that honored labor union contracts

excluded many Black Americans who had systematically been excluded from those unions.

The Social Security Act of 1935 created protections for workers, incorporating an old age insurance program, an unemployment insurance program, and grants to states to provide relief to dependent children, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Extensions of insurance to workers, such as unemployment compensation and old age insurance, were not provided to all workers. Farm workers and domestics, the occupations of a majority of Black Americans at the time, were excluded from such protections.

Reports of the exclusion of Black American women from the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program and compulsory work requirements that differed by race were reported at hearings convened by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in the 1960s (Piven & Cloward, 1997). In 1961, a study by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare found that 19% of Black American women receiving ADC worked while 10% of White American recipients worked. They further found that 24% of ADC recipients in the South worked, while only 8% of ADC recipients in the rest of the states worked. Black American women on ADC were also provided less money than their White counterparts, with the more extreme disparity in rural areas (Piven & Cloward, 1997).

The ADC program evolved into the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The number of families enrolled in AFDC increased throughout the 1960s. Not coincidentally, a series of Supreme Court cases expanded protections and extended rights to welfare recipients by dismantling discriminatory practices. This had the effect of increasing the sense of entitlement that corresponded with welfare rights organizations'

efforts to de-stigmatize the receipt of aid. Abramovitz (1988) argues that the diminishing capacity of state and local agencies to distinguish between recipients they perceived to be worthy and unworthy welfare recipients for differential treatment resulted in an extension of mistreatment and assumption of unworthiness for all program participants.

The 1960s brought a new commitment to solving poverty. The Economic Opportunity Act was passed in 1964. In addition to an array of social service and community development activities, it included work training, education, and social services to help disadvantaged groups develop skills and attain employment. According to Trattner (1999), the disconnect between what had been promised to people living in poverty under the Great Society programs and what actually reached them led to further disenfranchisement and contributed to the alienation and riots at the end of the decade. Further, it became a cornerstone of conservative argument against government-sponsored aid—offering final “proof” that eradicating poverty could not be achieved through government intervention.

The Manpower Development Training Act (MDTA) responded to the job training needs of disadvantaged and low skilled workers and youth in the 1960s. The program was replaced in 1973 with the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) that also provided job training and also temporarily funded public sector employment for some who could not find employment in the private sector (Blank, 1994). In 1982, CETA was replaced by the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). JTPA emphasized moving disadvantaged workers into private sector employment opportunities. More recently, Congress replaced JTPA with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) that

streamlined and consolidated job training programs previously funded through JTPA. WIA functions as a block grant program and the use of funds are determined at the state and local level with input from the business community. Advocates have expressed concern that because WIA shifts eligibility to higher income groups, the potential impact and assistance for low-income groups will be diffused. There is a further concern that many communities have adopted “work first” strategies, encouraging quick entry to the workforce rather than early assessment and provision of training opportunities (National People’s Action, 2000). The reauthorization of the WIA program is currently under consideration by Congress.

Formal efforts to promote employment of women on AFDC began in the 1960s with the Work Incentive Program. Succeeding efforts, including the Talmadge Amendments, the Family Support Act and, more recently PRWORA, encouraged greater work participation or training among recipients as the value of public assistance benefits sharply declined. PRWORA replaced AFDC with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant program. TANF ended the federal entitlement to cash assistance and provided greater flexibility in the design of the program to states within some parameters. While earlier welfare reform initiatives did require some AFDC recipients to work or lose benefits, it was not until PRWORA that all states were required to impose time limits and work requirements were more universally applied.

The reauthorization of the TANF block grant program is currently under consideration by Congress. The TANF program has been widely lauded as helping many women enter the workforce and exit cash assistance but there have been concerns that

some welfare recipients are worse off than in previous years. Liberal advocacy organizations welcomed the reauthorization of the TANF program to fix what they consider to be the biggest problems in the program. In particular, they identified a need to restore eligibility of benefits to immigrants legally residing in the country, improve access to education, adopt strategies to help people transition out of poverty, and incorporate protections for those with more significant barriers to employment. Given the common perception that welfare reform had largely been successful, advocacy groups were surprised to learn of substantial changes to the TANF block grant program proposed by the Bush Administration. The proposed changes now under consideration by Congress will greatly increase work requirements and reduce state flexibility in the design of welfare to work activities.

The restriction of aid to those who might otherwise work has increased for other programs. Access to food stamps was limited for unemployed persons under PRWORA. The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act (P.L. 105-276) included a requirement that housing assistance recipients participate in community service activities if they are unemployed and not elderly or disabled.

While restricting non-working poor people's access to aid, assistance to the "working poor" remains relatively popular. One example is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) that offers increasing returns to low income workers with greater work effort and clearly links the provision of assistance with work effort; EITC appears to generate continued bipartisan support. Another example is the Tickets to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-107) that dismantles barriers to

work by allowing disabled persons to enter the workforce and retain access to medical care that is typically conveyed with receipt of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) programs.

Summary

There is a rich history of the interaction of social policies in facilitating and compelling employment among poor people. A historic review highlights the forces of labor market exclusion, exploitation, and the use of coercion to generate greater work effort, particularly for poor Black Americans. Social forces are not acted upon powerless persons, however, and those whose efforts to seek inclusion, greater autonomy, and social benefits from the labor market are pivotal in generating social transformation.

A historical review demonstrates the constraining and enabling aspects of social policies and other social structures. It demonstrates the activity of agents who attempted to transform constraining elements through advocacy, resistance, and collaboration. The unwillingness of individuals to honor recursive social practices despite structural constraints is embedded in Black Americans' struggle for progressive social change and is consistent with a structuration perspective. Attention to the current practices that constrain social mobility and labor market participation for disadvantaged groups may offer future opportunities for social transformation.

National Economic Context

The late 1990s heralded in a tremendous period of economic well-being. The unemployment rate reached a 30-year low and the tight labor markets pulled more people into the workforce without stimulating inflationary pressures. The prosperity resulted in

enhanced well-being of many citizens. Poverty rates declined and the tight labor market generated opportunity and wage growth for those in the bottom rung of the workforce. Indeed, real wages for workers with income in the lowest 10th percentile rose 9.3% from 1995-1999, reversing fifteen years of stagnant wages for low-wage workers (Mishel, Bernstein, & Schmitt, 2001).

Poverty

Poverty rates plummeted across demographic groups through the late 1990s. Poverty among all people declined from 15.1% in 1993 to a low of 11.3% in 2000. A third of Black people, 33%, lived in poverty in 1993. This improved steadily throughout the 1990s and reached a low of 23% in 2000. The poverty rate among White people dropped from 10% in 1993 to 7.4% in 2000. This, of course, had benefits for children. In 1993, 46% of Black children lived in families with incomes below the poverty level. In 2001, the poverty rate of Black children was down significantly, to 30%. The poverty rate of White children dropped from 14% in 1993 to 9% in 2000 (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003).

While changes to the welfare law are often credited with reducing poverty among single female-headed households, census data indicates that the trend preceded the implementation of the 1996 Act. In 1991, 55% of Black single women with children had incomes below the poverty level. The poverty rate steadily declined throughout the early 1990s and by 1996, it had declined to 46%. The poverty rate of Black single heads of household reached a historic low of 37% in 2001. A similar trend occurred for White

single heads of households, from 1993 to 2001 their poverty rate dropped from 27% to 19% (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003).

The impact of economic prosperity of the 1990s on reducing poverty among families and children may indicate that the best poverty policy is an economic growth policy. In 1997, in the heights of economic prosperity, President Clinton's Economic Report heralded the capacity of tight labor markets to enhance the well-being of American citizens.

It increases the confidence of job losers that they will be able to return to work; it lures discouraged workers back into the labor force; it enhances the prospects of those already at work to get ahead; it enables those who want or need to switch jobs to do so without a long period of joblessness; and it lowers the duration of the typical unemployment spell. It can reduce long-term structural unemployment by providing jobs and experience to younger and less skilled workers, thus increasing their longer run attachment to the labor force. In short, a sustained tight labor market helps the rising tide of economic growth lift all boats.

(Economic Report of the President, 1998, p. 27).

Though the declining poverty rates have been heralded, it is worth noting that some argue that the poverty rate greatly under-estimates the problem of families with too little income to meet their basic needs. Indeed, the validity of the poverty rate has been challenged on both sides of the political spectrum. In 1995, the National Research Council (NRC) developed an alternative measure that included in-kind benefits (e.g. food stamps and housing benefits), modified the family consumption criteria to better reflect

the actual cost of living, and subtracted expenses (medical and work). Using the NRC alternative measure, the overall poverty rate in 1999 would be 15%, as opposed to 11.8%. The greatest increase in poverty under the alternative definition is among the elderly, residents of the Northeast and West, and central city and suburban dwellers (Mishel, Bernstein, & Boushey, 2003).

An analysis of the dynamics of poverty from 1996 to 1999 indicates that very few people living in poverty remain poor for a sustained period of time. Indeed, over that four year time period, only 2% remained poor throughout and slightly over a third had incomes below the poverty level for two months. Sustained poverty level was much higher for people of color, however. One percent of the nation's White population remained poor throughout the period tracked, as compared to 5.6% of Hispanic individuals and 5.1% of Black individuals. Over the late 1990s, more people moved out of poverty than moved into poverty, and this is reflected in the drop of the overall poverty rate for the time period (Iceland, 2003).

The United States entered a recession in 2001. There have been increases in unemployment and poverty across all the demographic groups, but such increases are somewhat modest given some of the large gains captured in the 1990s. In 2002, 34.6 million people in the United States, including 12.1 million children, lived in poverty. The poverty rate among White, non-Hispanic individuals is 8% and it is 24% among Black individuals. From 2001 to 2002 the number of people living in households with incomes below half the poverty threshold increased from 13.4 million people to 14.1 million. For clarification purposes, a weighted poverty threshold for a family of three is \$14,348. A

family of three under half the poverty threshold would have incomes below \$7,200 annually (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003).

Employment

In the late 1990s, the unemployment rate dropped dramatically and along with it, poverty rates. The real median income of Black families grew 16% between 1995 and 2000, and the median income of Hispanic families grew by 25%. Unemployment rates for Black workers reached the lowest level ever recorded, 7.6% in 2000. It did, however, follow historic patterns, remaining at least double the unemployment rate of White workers (Mishel et. al, 2003).

The tight labor markets pulled more workers into the labor force, with particularly high increases in employment among traditionally disadvantaged groups. It also contributed to wage increases. The lowest wage earners saw the greatest wage increases, 7%, between 1995 and 2000. The tight labor markets managed to counteract some structural shifts in the labor market that tend to dampen wages. These shifts include the declining value of the minimum wage, the decline in manufacturing jobs, and union participation. Indeed, it is argued that the decline in the value of the minimum wage and the loss of union strength can account for one-third of the growth in wage inequality across income groups that marked the 1980s and early 1990s. It is further argued that globalization, including immigration, trade, and shift of employment from manufacturing, can explain another third (Mishel et. al, 2003).

The value of the minimum wage declined 21.4% between 1979 and 2001. Union membership among high school graduates declined from 38% in 1978 to 21% in 1997.

In 1979, manufacturing jobs represented 23.4% of all employment and services represented 19.1%. In 2001, manufacturing represents 13.4% of employment and services represents 31% (Mishel et. al, 2003). Together these factors contribute to the declining value of wages that occurred through the last two decades.

From 1979 to 2000, men in the 10th percentile saw the value of their hourly earnings decrease 2.6%. For women, the rate was similar, 2.2% decrease in the value of their earnings. Every other group of women, however, saw the value of their earnings increase. Only men in the 60th percentile and above, however, saw an increase in the value of their hourly earnings between 1979 and 2001. This contributed to the recent declining wage inequality between low-wage and middle-wage workers and an increase in wage inequality between high-wage workers and all others (Mishel et. al, 2003).

It is important to note that while there were wage increases during the late 1990s, there were a significant proportion of workers earning hourly wages insufficient to lift their family out of poverty with full-time, year-round work. In 2001, 25.7% of Black men and 35.8% of Black women still earned poverty level wages as contrasted with 14.5% of White men and 10.4% of White women (Mishel et. al, 2003). Earning less than a poverty level wage does not necessarily mean living in poverty, however. There may be more than one earner in the household, a worker may hold more than one job, and anti-poverty programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) may supplement a worker's wage sufficiently to lift the family out of poverty.

The recession began in 2001 leading to increases in unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. The recent recession differed from others in two

substantial ways. First, unemployment impacts were felt across educational groups. Second, the recession led to a reduction of service jobs after September 11, 2001, though typically recessions lead to some increase in service positions. The recession has been particularly hard among Black workers and women (Mishel et. al, 2003). Workers are also spending longer in unemployment as contrasted with other recessions.

Unemployment remained relatively low during the recession, however. At 4.8% in 2001, unemployment remained under what had been considered for years to be “full-employment.” While unemployment rose only slightly as contrasted to earlier economic downturns, the increase had a dampening effect on wage growth. Without the tight labor markets of the late 1990s, there was no countervailing force to protect low-wage workers from the structural changes—including the decline in union participation, the declining value of minimum wage, and the impact of globalization—that contribute to declining wages (Mishel et. al, 2003).

This leads to concerns regarding the future if tight labor markets cannot be sustained. The decline in poverty is clearly related to earnings from increased work among low-income families and the EITC that effectively lifts many families with workers out of poverty. In recent years, however, the value of public assistance declined considerably. In 1979, the combination of taxes and public assistance reduced poverty among single-headed households by 47%. In 2000, the rate was similar; taxes, including the EITC, and public assistance reduced poverty by 43%. However, much of the poverty-reducing effect is now attributable to the EITC as opposed to public assistance. The reduction in the effectiveness of public assistance to reduce poverty can result in

devastating consequences for families who fall out of the labor market and lose both earnings and income from the EITC (Mishel et. al, 2003).

Summary

The 1990s demonstrate the importance of attaining and maintaining low unemployment rates for the well-being of the nations' poorest citizens. It also demonstrates that low unemployment can be sustained without creating inflationary pressures and disrupting economic growth. While facilitating greater work participation among poor individuals and families alone can make significant progress in reducing poverty, it does not address the great disparity between groups.

It is also notable that employment alone did not reduce poverty. First, many states responded to the increased flexibility in providing public assistance to low-income families by providing more supports, such as child care and transportation assistance, that allowed low-income single heads of household to enter the workforce. Second, much of the decline in poverty is attributable to the EITC. The continuation, and expansion, of work supports and income transfer programs are essential to ensure that low-wage workers can escape poverty. The need for work supports and income transfer programs can be mediated if efforts were made to strengthen unions and reverse the dramatic declines in the value of the minimum wage.

The poverty-reducing effects of increased income from earnings and the EITC were counteracted by the diminishing effectiveness of public assistance in reducing poverty. The increased importance of earnings from employment and an employment-

conditioned tax program for reducing poverty leaves families in much more precarious situations when there is a loss of employment.

Finally, it is worth noting that even in the very tight labor markets of the late 1990s, there were individuals who remained outside the workforce, both voluntarily and involuntarily. Further, substantial disparity between groups remained, though considerable progress was made in reducing both unemployment and poverty. For many, too, poverty deepened.

The progress of the sustained economic prosperity in the late 1990s in reducing poverty appeared to have muted expressions of concern in the political discourse about poverty. There is debate on what “caused” the decline in poverty and the increase in work participation among poor families; whether it is attributable to time limits under welfare reform, extensions of work supports, or increased opportunities introduced by tight labor markets. There is not, however, much reflection on the merits of the theoretical assumptions underlying the political policy strategies that explicitly strive to facilitate the work participation of people living in poverty, or, minimally, off of forms of social assistance. This appears particularly problematic as unemployment rises.

A case study of an extreme poverty neighborhood will likely reflect many of the transitions evident in the national data. Overall, there is an increase in the number of poor people who are working and wages have increased, though there has been a reversal in recent years. Female heads of families with children have greatly increased their work participation, yet many remain in poverty and a substantial proportion report no annual work hours. Although poverty has decreased for many families, it has also deepened for

others. Some families are considerably worse-off than they were in recent years and this is particularly true for those outside the labor market. A case study will also highlight what is missed in the national data. What barriers to employment remain for members of an extreme poverty neighborhood in still relatively tight labor markets? How are those barriers navigated and overcome by those who have entered the workforce? And, finally, what are the perceived impacts of policy efforts and programs designed to facilitate employment for disadvantaged workers?

Theoretical Perspectives

Contemporary theorists of poverty and unemployment in urban communities have focused on identifying explanations for racial and spatial disparity. Theorists have been classified as structuralists or individual/cultural theorists based on where they perceive the primary agency to be and the relationship between overarching structures and the individual. Contemporary theorists derive ideas from those who preceded them; in applying these ideas to understanding their own area of research and interest, they blend and adapt theory.

Structuralists have largely been influenced by structural functionalism and conflict theories, including Marxist and feminist theory. Structuralists explain persistent poverty and unemployment in urban communities by discrimination and economic shifts, including globalization, by a shifting demand for highly skilled labor, and by spatial and skills mismatches. The existence of geographic disparity is also explained as a by-product of persistent housing discrimination and social policies that have reinforced and

promoted segregation (Massey, 1994; powell, 1999). Structural theorists are likely to refute the claim that other neighborhood variables, such as high use of welfare, teen pregnancy, and criminal activity that are often present in extremely poor communities are the cause of labor market disengagement. They suggest that these neighborhood traits are, instead, a product of social and economic isolation (Wilson, 1987). This is in direct conflict with other theorists who propose that such social indicators cause and reinforce disengagement from the labor market (Mead, 1986).

Individual and cultural theorists appear to have been influenced largely by social learning theories and biological determinism. Individual theorists focus on the individual's intelligence, skills, motivation, and desire to participate in wage labor. Cultural theorists also focus on the role of the community's culture, suggesting that residents of urban poor communities where many are unemployed have come to disparage work. The community values and norms are transferred to the younger generation through social learning, resulting in whole segments of the population who are disengaged from the labor market. Such theorists may point to the high welfare use, teenage pregnancy, and criminal activity within such neighborhoods as perpetuating a social norm that further undermines work effort. Social policies, such as the provision of financial assistance to single mothers with children, offer options to those who would otherwise participate in wage labor, thus, it is argued, they contribute to shifting cultural norms that are ultimately destructive to the individual and the community.

Rational choice is a theoretical perspective that has evolved from the study of economics and the behavior of a rational man in the marketplace. Rational choice

theorists focus on the decision-making of individuals who choose among an array of options. While acknowledging structural level constraints, such as spatial and skills mismatches and discrimination, the focus remains on how people make choices. The individual is seen as a rational actor who will naturally select among available options the choice that will provide the maximum satisfaction. This perspective guides the researcher to investigate the incentives and disincentives of various choices for social groups. The resulting policy prescriptions may attempt to shift the cost and benefits of individual-level choices in order to shape behavior.

The structural models have been criticized for negating the individual's capacity to generate change in the social system and de-emphasizing the role of a thinking actor. Giddens (1984) objects to the lack of attention paid to individual autonomy by structural models, arguing that the theories explain both social reproduction and social change without attending to the activities of human agents. Individual and cultural level theorists have been criticized for ignoring the very real constraints social systems impose in shaping how individuals experience their world. As Cornel West (1993, p. 18) argues "we must acknowledge that structures and behavior are inseparable, that institutions and values go hand in hand. How people act and live are shaped—though in no way dictated or determined—by the larger circumstances in which they find themselves. These circumstances can be changed, their limitations attenuated, by positive actions to elevate living conditions."

While empirical evidence may be presented as theory free, Calhoun (1996, p. 432) argues that such a presentation is misleading.

Even when empirical researchers leave their theoretical orientations completely inexplicit, and claim—like Sherlock Holmes to be working with 'nothing but the facts,' they rely on concepts, ideas about causality, and understandings of where to look for empirical relationships that cannot be derived entirely from this realm of facts, and that are necessary to constitute both facts and explanations. One of the major jobs of theoretical sociology is to make explicit, orderly, consistent—and open to critical analysis—these 'orientations' that are usually taken for granted by empirical researchers.

Empirical Data for Existing Perspectives

Efforts to understand how poor African-American workers or members of “underclass” communities are marginalized or under-represented in the labor force is typically bifurcated along theoretical lines to demand-side (structural) and supply-side (individual/cultural) explanations.

Structural or “Demand Side”

W. J. Wilson (1987) argues that urban African-American unemployment disparity can be attributed to economic shifts, including a loss of manufacturing jobs, spatial mismatch as jobs moved from urban centers to the suburbs, and skills mismatch as available urban positions required more skilled workers. He hypothesized that the economic shift had other impacts in urban poor communities, including a reduction in marriageable Black men and a resulting increase in single-parent family households and welfare dependency. As middle class and working African American families moved from urban centers, pockets of socially isolated, extremely poor families were left behind

with fewer working role models or community sanctions against deviant behavior. He hypothesized that as a result social networks of working adults that might serve as job contacts and role models are largely absent. W. J. Wilson's (1987) work was built, in part, on existing research and continues to spark efforts to capture the role of labor market dynamics and economic shifts on the under-representation of urban poor African-Americans in the labor force.

Ethnographic examinations of the labor market experiences of young Black American men residing in distressed urban neighborhoods in Chicago in the late 1980s supported Wilson's hypotheses. The men recognized the loss of employment opportunities as demand for labor shifted to the suburbs and there was an increasing demand within urban centers for skills they did not possess. Discriminatory practices of employers were reported by the men, including efforts to restrict potential applicants by advertising only in suburban newspapers, perceived differential treatment in promotion and lay-off decisions, and discrimination based on residence within a stigmatized neighborhood. The men noted a lack of social contacts that assisted others in finding work (Venkatesh, 1994; Laester, 1997).

Despite the recognition of structural constraints, respondents also reported that the availability of welfare, lure of street life, and "laziness" kept others in their community from working. The respondents reported relying on part-time or temporary work periodically, but it was seen as a mechanism to generate income as needed and not as a ladder to full-time employment. The men also noted mechanisms to work within the existing constraints, including attempts to find odd jobs in the neighborhood and

activities, such as reclaiming and washing golf balls from Lake Michigan, that provided them with marketable products to sell (Laester, 1997; Venkatesh, 1994).

Tight Labor Markets. One hypothesis for disparity is an uneven demand for the labor of segments of the population. As labor markets tighten and the demand for labor increases, those who have been seen as outside the workforce or as less desirable workers are in demand. As demand for workers slackens, the reverse occurs and the less desirable workers lose employment more rapidly than other workers.

The responsiveness of young Black Americans to increased labor market opportunities in tight labor markets is used to refute a conflicting hypothesis that many young Black American men do not wish to work (Mead, 1992). The recent employment gains have been highest for many who have been typically at high risk for unemployment, such as young, less educated Black American males. Indeed, in areas with sustained low unemployment rates in the late 1990s, their employment rate increased from 52% to 64% (Nasar & Mitchell, 1999).

The recent tight labor markets in some areas mirrored the “Boston Miracle” that occurred during the 1980s. The tight labor markets that developed in Boston stimulated greater work participation and wage gains for young Black American men (Osterman, 1991). Freeman (1991) found that tight labor markets had a strong effect on employment of young Black American men after controlling for age and years of schooling. Blank and Blinder (1986) found evidence of disparate impact when demand for labor slackens, a one percent rise in the baseline unemployment rate of White males results in a two to two and half percent increase in the unemployment of Black American males. This

points to the effects of macro-economic forces in increasing the labor market participation of Black Americans; however, it also demonstrates the persistence of disparity that accompanies both economic expansion and contraction.

More recent research indicates that tight labor markets can decrease discriminatory hiring practices (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2003). An examination of hiring practices in four large metropolitan areas found that employers' demand for minorities, welfare recipients, and individuals with poor education and experience increased during the tight labor markets of the late 1990s. Employers' reluctance to hire people with criminal records was resistant to the effects of a tight labor market, however.

Discrimination. Studies of employers find a perception that Black Americans possess lower basic skills, poorer work attitudes, and less motivation than White Americans or Hispanics (Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Moss & Tilly, 1996). Audit studies in which matched White American and Black American job applicants with comparable employment histories and skills applied for the same jobs demonstrates that Black Americans receive significantly fewer job offers than White Americans, and such discrimination is higher in suburban areas (Bendick, Jackson, & Reinoso, 1994). Residing in a stigmatized neighborhood can also result in fewer job offers; employers expressed a reluctance to hire applicants from neighborhoods perceived to be troubled (Holzer, 1994; Skinner, 1995).

More recent evidence demonstrates that Black American males are not hired in a proportion that might be expected, given their level of application for employment. One study found that the actual number of Black American men hired was only 64% of the

number that might be expected, given their level of application for employment, indicating a high employer refusal rate. There was less disparity for Black American women in urban areas; their rate of employment represented 93% of the figure projected by their rate of application for employment. However, in suburban areas, their rate of employment was only 58% of what their level of application would predict (Russell Sage Foundation, 2000).

A study examining the impact of race on employment among men with criminal records found that not only were Black men with criminal records less likely to be called in for an interview than White men with similar records, but Black men without criminal records were less likely to be interviewed than White men with criminal records (Pager, 2002).

Skills Mismatch. A hypothesis to explain the disparity between groups is the existence of a “mismatch” between the skills inner-city residents possess and those desired by employers. Although early studies of skills mismatch often focused on “hard” technical skills, there is increasing focus on the demand for “soft” communication skills.

There is evidence that Black American workers have been concentrated in some employment sectors, such as manufacturing and service industries. It has been argued that increased unemployment in some employment sectors as opposed to others can explain some disparity between groups. In six examined Northeastern cities, the loss of manufacturing explains up to one-third of the decline in employment among young, less educated Black men in the 1970s. Indeed, a one percent loss of manufacturing raised the unemployment rate .05% to 1.2%, with the strongest effect for younger, less educated

Black American men (Holzer & Vroman, 1992). Johnson and Oliver (1992) found a strong negative correlation between decline in transformative activities, including manufacturing and construction, and Black American joblessness in 43 metropolitan areas nationwide.

A concurrent argument is a declining demand for low-skilled workers, offering fewer entry-level positions that may contribute to differential outcomes between groups. Kasarda (1983) found an increased demand for “knowledge intensive” workers in urban areas with a corresponding decline in entry-level positions. He demonstrated a relationship between the increasing demand for knowledge intensive workers and the unemployment of young Black American men. Further, he found a lower unemployment rate of Black Americans in communities with a comparatively lower demand for high skilled workers and in communities with a higher proportion of more educated Black American men (Skinner, 1995). The argument that entry level positions declined has been refuted by others. Mollenkopf and Castells argue that the loss in manufacturing has been offset by an increase in service positions (Skinner, 1995), though those positions pay less well than manufacturing positions and may be more likely to be part-time (Mishel et al., 2001).

Spatial Mismatch. A spatial mismatch hypothesis suggests that there is a geographic disconnect between where potential workers live and where a demand for their labor exists. The acceptance of this thesis has coincided with policy efforts to facilitate the economic integration of low-income groups into suburban communities and

mobility programs to link inner-city workers with job opportunities in suburbs (Stoll, 1998).

Popkin, Rosenbaum, and Meaden (1993) contrasted the employment outcomes of low-income single head of household women who moved from public housing in concentrated poverty neighborhoods in Chicago to either urban or suburban subsidized housing five years post-move. Despite similarities in education; pre-move education, training, and work experience; age of youngest child and number of children at home; the women who relocated to suburban housing were significantly more likely to be employed post-move. While this supports the thesis of the existence of a spatial mismatch, Popkin et al. (1993) also found that those who were long-term AFDC recipients and those with a “fatalistic” attitude were less likely to be employed in either urban or suburban communities. Follow-up qualitative interviews found that women that moved to the suburbs also attributed greater work participation to the enhanced sense of safety they felt and a greater sense of motivation that accompanied the move.

Stoll (1998) found that residence in suburbs had an effect on the employment of young Black men in the Washington, D.C. area. He concluded that residence alone cannot solve disparity. In one county he analyzed, increasing the presence of young Black American males in an area of regional development would have a positive impact on their employment rate. However, he found a much stronger effect would result from stronger enforcement of fair employment standards.

Further evidence that supports a spatial mismatch thesis is the higher average work travel times for Black Americans, higher pay rates for entry level jobs in suburbs

indicating tighter demand in suburban areas, and the increasing suburbanization of unskilled work opportunities (Holzer, 1994; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2000). A spatial mismatch may be fueled by transportation barriers, a higher cost to engage in job search, and an information mismatch because there may be a lack of information about available job opportunities in the suburbs among inner-city residents.

Social Capital. The social relationships of persons living in poverty and the use of strong and weak social “ties” and networks to create linkages to job opportunities have been hypothesized as contributing to disparity in employment outcomes (Elliott, 1999). Black Americans have not been found to utilize their social ties to access employment. While use of such social networks was thought to facilitate greater employment participation, researchers found that it does not increase the employment rates of inner city Black Americans and may contribute to reproducing racial segregation in the workplace (Russell Sage Foundation, 2000). Because researchers have also found the racial composition of co-workers to have a strong, independent effect on wage rates, increasing the use of formal links to employment opportunities versus the use of informal ties is recommended as one mechanism to combat employment segregation (Elliott, 1999).

Contingent Employment. Dual labor market economists suggest segments of the population are relegated to secondary or tertiary labor markets in which there is little room for advancement, job security, or skills development as contrasted with “primary”

labor markets. The growth in contingent workers and involuntarily part-time workers may reflect barriers to primary full-time employment encountered by some workers.

The temporary growth industry has doubled in size in the United States since 1982 and has been credited by Lawrence Katz and Alan Kreuger as explaining half of the difference in the lower unemployment rate in 1998 than in the last business peak of 1989. They suggest unemployment in 1998 was 0.8% lower than in 1989 because the temporary help industry was able to fill open positions more quickly while keeping wages low (“In praise of temps,” 1999).

While there are no known studies on the role of temporary employment agencies within extremely poor communities, it is known that women, minorities, and young workers comprise a disproportionate number of temporary workers (Hipple, 1998). Some workers at temporary agencies are hired on permanently in the role they fill on a temporary basis and some organizations acknowledge they utilize temporary agencies as a way to screen potential employees (Erickcek, Houseman & Kalleberg, 2002; Levine, 1999).

The potential to use temporary employment agencies as a tool to place low skilled workers in employment has been recognized by nonprofit groups that have developed non-profit temporary agencies (Seavey, 1999). Rather than being a facilitating tool, however, temporary agencies may hinder access to full time employment for many low skilled workers by creating an additional “screening” other workers are not subjected to. While this is recognized by some, it is argued that it provides the worker the opportunity to prove to reluctant employers their employability, particularly for those with histories

that make them less marketable, such as individuals with criminal records. There are considerable advantages to retaining workers on a temporary versus permanent basis because it reduces employer costs (Seavey, 1999). Because temporary agencies transfer only a portion of the earnings of each worker, they also have an advantage in retaining a large pool of temporary workers.

Temporary agencies have also been utilized in some communities as part of a welfare to work strategy. Since there is anecdotal evidence that some welfare recipients have been referred to temporary positions, the role of temporary agencies in mediating the employment of residents in concentrated poverty neighborhoods should be explored.

Economic Development. Efforts to promote employment in urban centers or to revitalize distressed communities have utilized various policy strategies to leverage greater private investment in communities. Such strategies include tax credits that provide financial incentives to businesses to either locate or hire workers from a distressed area, public financing to revitalize housing and attract residents from higher income brackets, and promotion of higher entrepreneurial activities. Community development corporations (CDCs) have also invested substantial private dollars in communities to promote economic development and facilitate the creation of wealth by developing greater opportunities for residents to access capital (Stoesz, 2000) and retain community assets. Michael Porter argues that there are substantial strengths within distressed neighborhoods, including location and availability of human resources, that can provide a strong foundation to build businesses that can meet the larger community's business needs (Hart, 1995). A potential danger to some revitalization efforts requiring

exploration is the potential for facilitating, instead, the gentrification of a community.

The geographic revitalization of a community provides questionable benefits if it results in the displacement of some of its poorest members.

Individual/Cultural “Supply Side”

One of the major prominent theses of the “supply side” explanations for disparity in urban Black American poverty and unemployment is the availability of welfare, which, it is argued, undermines work effort and ultimately perpetuates poverty. Murray (1984) argues that the provision of welfare benefits to non-working poor families undermined the value of work and stigmatized those who maintained employment in urban poor communities. Murray (1984, p. 146) articulated a core premise that “people respond to incentives and disincentives. Sticks and carrots work [and] people are not inherently hard working or moral. In the absence of countervailing forces, people will avoid work and be amoral.”

Mead (1986, 1992) further argued that the availability of social benefits undermined work participation. With access to welfare benefits and criminal wages, young Black American men in particular chose not to work and developed high reservation wages—the wage at which they would enter the workforce. He argues that the provision of aid must be coupled with work requirements in order to ensure work ethics are not undermined.

Kaus (1992) acknowledges the validity of many of William J. Wilson’s (1987) propositions. While recognizing that a spatial mismatch has developed, he argues it was the availability of welfare benefits that allowed families to choose not to follow

employment opportunities as they had in the past. Indeed, he argues it is the deviant behavior of those remaining in inner-cities that spurred economic development to move from the inner metropolitan core. Just as the spatial mismatch is attributed to be the consequence of individual decisions not to follow work from cities to the suburbs, the skills mismatch is also argued to reflect individual decisions not to invest in human capital development.

Availability of Welfare. Attempts to measure the effect welfare benefits have on work effort have utilized benefit levels as a proxy. Greenstein found work participation did not correlate with benefit levels and argued instead that the evidence demonstrates a declining value of benefits occurring in conjunction with increases in welfare rolls (Skinner, 1995).

Edin and Jencks (1992) argued that the cost of transitioning from AFDC to the workforce discouraged work effort as it threatened the availability of other services such as health care. Further, Edin and Levin (1997) found evidence that women on welfare will make a rational choice to remain outside the workforce because the combined benefit package of AFDC, food stamps, and medical assistance is valued above what the recipient can earn in the workforce.

Reservation Wages and Criminal Activity. An existing hypothesis for labor market disparity is that young Black men will not be induced to work at lower wage levels. Their reservation wage is higher than other young men and does not reflect what their skills can command. Mead (1986, 1992) argued that the employment of new immigrants to the United States demonstrated the availability of employment and

potential for social mobility, and that young Black American men choose not to accept the positions that immigrants accept because they find such positions demeaning. Mead (1986, 1992) argues that one reason young Black men refuse such low-paying positions is the higher return from involvement in criminal activity. Holzer (1986) found support for the argument that young Black American men have a self-reported reservation wage beyond what their skills can command. He estimates that if their reservation wage reflected their actual work skills, the disparity in the length of unemployment spells would be reduced by 25% to 40%.

Tienda and Stier (1991) analyzed reservation wages and work attitudes using interview data from the 1987 Urban Poverty and Family Life Survey of Chicago and the National Survey of Families and Households. They found that inner-city Chicago men and women were more likely to be outside the workforce and more likely to have never worked but the majority reported they would like a job. They further found Black American men had wage expectations below that of White American and Hispanic men.

Value of Work One hypothesis is that many people within poor communities have come to disparage work. Newman's (1999) ethnographic study documented a thriving work effort among young disadvantaged workers in Harlem. While she did find peers who attempted to undermine the work effort of young workers, she found a much larger group who unsuccessfully attempted to access the very entry-level positions that Mead (1986, 1992) argued young Black American men disparaged. It is further argued that even those who disparage the work effort of their peers may instead be displaying a

“moral armour,” expressing disdain for the employment that may appear to them to be unachievable (Stoesz, 2000).

Rational Choice

A rational choice perspective honors both the role of structural forces and individual agency and focuses the researcher’s attention on the interaction of a thinking, rational actor in his/her world replete with structural constraints. Such a model provides invaluable insight. The focus on costs associated with entering the workforce rather than remaining on welfare (Edin & Jencks, 1992; Edin & Lein, 1997) have encouraged the development of tools to remove such disincentives as well as strengthened support for those initiatives that provide greater benefits to low income workers.

Edin and Lein (1997) suggest that the social science distinction between low income women who choose work and those women who choose to receive welfare is an inappropriate one. Instead, they note that many of the women they interviewed cycled between work and welfare. They further found that many of the women demonstrate a history of work effort, much of which is simply unreported to their welfare caseworkers. While the authors noted the utility of a rational choice perspective to predict women’s decisions to work or receive welfare, the fluidity of those decisions over time suggests the need for a broader focus.

The rational choice perspective has been utilized by individual/cultural level theorists to explain the origins of welfare dependency. However, by extending it to incorporate moral and cultural consequences of rational choices to work or receive social benefits, they are clearly divorced from a rational choice model. While it is

acknowledged that the rational choice perspective does provide useful insight to understand how people will make decisions between various options, a broader view is desired.

Barriers to Employment of Welfare Recipients

PRWORA resulted in a plethora of research examining the impact of various welfare to work initiatives implemented by states. As a result of this research, much more is known about the barriers to employment that TANF recipients encounter when transitioning into the workplace; barriers such as child care, transportation, physical and mental health disabilities, addiction, poor work history, and criminal records (Zedlewski, 1999; U.S. General Accounting Office, 2001). Many of the TANF recipients face multiple challenges, and research has demonstrated that the more barriers to employment a TANF recipient possesses, the less likely he or she will be to find employment.

Because PRWORA provided state flexibility in the design of welfare to work programs, there has been variation in program design across states and even between localities within the same state. The variation has provided researchers the opportunity to examine the efficacy of various strategies to facilitate the employment of welfare recipients. Concern that PRWORA time-limited cash assistance for the majority of families has also had an effect in stimulating research on the impact of various strategies. As a result, knowledge regarding the challenges that welfare recipients face in transitioning to employment continues to develop and deepen.

A focus of research on PRWORA is on examining what undermines employment retention for welfare recipients. A large study of employers in four metropolitan areas

found that the majority of welfare recipients employed successfully retained their jobs, however, 8% were fired and 14% left voluntarily. The problem behavior that undermined retention according to employers was absenteeism (49%), poor work attitudes (18%), relationships with co-workers (16%), lack of basic skills (12%), lack of job skills (9%), and substance abuse (2%). Absenteeism had many causes according to the employers, including workers' problems with child care (64%), transportation (41%), poor physical health (34%), domestic violence (8%) and mental health disabilities (5%) (Holzer & Wissoker, 2001).

While the research on welfare recipients' transitions into employment is illuminating, the exclusive focus on welfare recipients neglects the likely similar experiences of other poor men, women, and heads of households who may live alongside the recipients who are the target of policy interventions and research. Attending to barriers in a "place-based" context yields opportunities to develop "place-based" solutions that meet the needs of all the residents, not exclusively those who have been on welfare.

Summary

There is a wealth of information on the employment constraints of men and women in extreme poverty neighborhoods. What appears to be missing is a focus on how individuals within those communities respond to those constraints, how such constraints are navigated and, perhaps, challenged. Newman's (1999) focus on the resiliency of young Black American workers in Harlem provide readers with examples of structural and daily constraints successfully navigated by workers. This does not diminish the

experiences of those who are unsuccessful, but rather attending to how such challenges are addressed provides greater appreciation for what must be overcome.

The explanations for labor market disparity outlined in this chapter, informed by structural, rational choice, and individual/cultural level theorists have received numerous tests. The availability of data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (Russell Sage Foundation, 2000) will stimulate further research and extension of knowledge. Yet, the data are limited by the lens that has been used to guide the questions. It is argued that an exploratory study, utilizing a structuration perspective to inform the questions, may provide new insight into how labor market participation is facilitated and constrained and the role of mediating institutions, social policies, programs, and praxis of individual actors.

Structuration Theory

Giddens' structuration theory attempts to overcome the conceptual chasm between the activities of the human actor and structural properties. He argues that structure and agency should be conceptualized as a duality with structures and actions of individuals intertwined and interdependent—the structure is both the medium and outcome of praxis (Munch, 1994).

Giddens (1984) posits that individual actors through daily activities reproduce and recreate social systems that have structural properties. In turn, structural properties of systems including normative (legitimation), economic and political (domination), and cultural (signification) factors shape, enable, and constrain individuals, their actions, and how the social world is understood. Such structural properties are the medium through

which individuals, in their day to day activities, serve to legitimize and thus reproduce the social structure. It is also the medium through which individuals understand the social world and their behavior constrained. Because the structure is constantly being reproduced and recreated through the collective actions of individuals, the potential for transformation is always present.

Giddens (1984) conceptualizes actors as knowledgeable and reflexive agents who are aware of the contexts in which they act and are able to offer explanations of that behavior within that context. The more their actions are informed by reflexivity, critical reflection, on how such behavior reproduces existing social relations, the greater the possibility of transformative action (Munch, 1994). The greater their access to allocative and authoritative resources, the more likely informed action will result in social change.

Giddens (1984) warns theorists to be attentive to the knowledge of actors that remains tacit, existing as practical consciousness. He argues that such knowledge has enormous complexity that informs how actors engage in the social world and is inappropriately left unexplored by conventional sociological research. Such knowledge is also bound by the unconscious and by lack of information of unintended consequences of one's own behavior. Because the understanding of the social world of actors is shaped by historical and structural properties, the interpretation of actors of their own behavior may be constrained or influenced by historical and structural properties. As persons become the subject of research, and as research knowledge is disseminated, they become increasingly exposed to social scientific explanations for their behavior and their experiences in the social world. This leads to the potential to attribute meaning to action

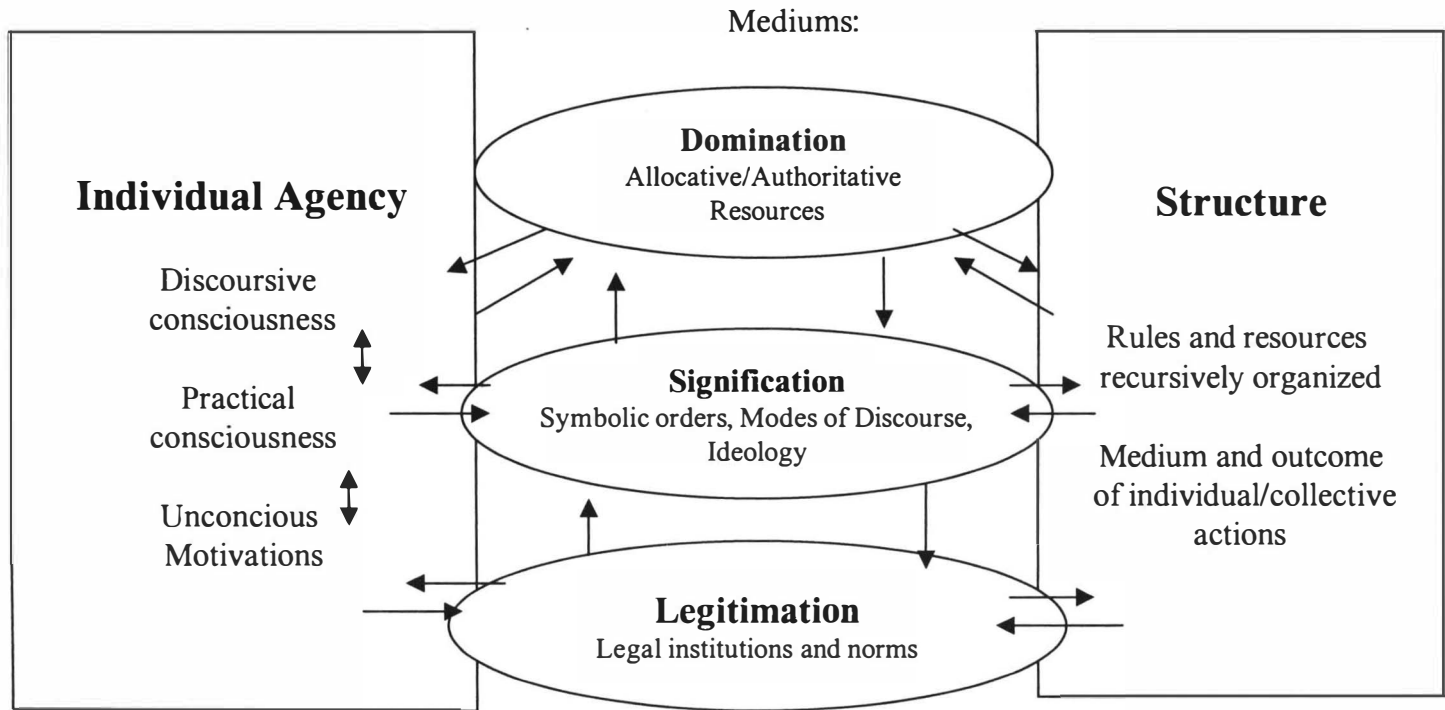
that has been ascribed by powerful others. Thus, there is a need to seek the understanding and personal experience that may underlie a mere re-articulation of common constructions of how persons in extreme poverty areas engage and participate in the labor market.

Although Giddens acknowledges that structures can constrain actors, he proposes that they are both constraining and enabling. He argues that it is a mistake to view structures as “grinding out ‘docile bodies,’” nor can power be understood as flowing merely in one direction, but instead the powerful and less powerful are interdependent. Those with less power possess the capacity to activate resources and influence others, including those who are dominant.

A model of structural is provided in Figure 1. As described above, it is a dynamic model in which social structures are constantly being reproduced and opportunity for transformation is always present.

Peck (1996) utilized a structuration perspective to extend and complement a theory of labor market segmentation. According to Peck, labor market economists often fail to attend to the social-political context in the reproduction of local labor markets. By assuming a neoclassical model of labor markets as mediated only by supply and demand, they neglect the role of social policies, cultural norms, and family needs. Further, he argues local labor markets are “socially constructed and politically mediated structure of conflict and accommodation among contending forces...systematically structured by institutional forces and power relations...[that] vary not only over time, but also between places” (Peck 1996, p. 4-5). Thus, he argues, research should not use an abstract model

Figure 1: Model of Structuration



- Individual actions reproduce or changes existing structural properties
- ← Structural properties enable and constrain individual action/power

of labor markets free from social context, but instead focus on how labor markets are embedded and interdependent upon their local social context.

A structuration perspective guides the researcher to analyze the labor market participation of a stigmatized group with a different lens. It recommends focusing on the individual's perceptions of how labor market engagement is constrained and enabled by structural properties. It further recommends attending to the individual's praxis by examining how people respond to such constraints: how the constraints are navigated, how they are transformed, and how they are reproduced.

Structuration theory does not predict outcomes, instead it provides a lens through which to view the social world. The purpose of this research is not to test structuration theory but to allow it to shape the questions and as such, provide new insight into how labor market marginalization, or disparity, is understood, perpetuated, and challenged in an extreme poverty neighborhood.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand how residents of an extreme poverty neighborhood experience the labor market and perceive the role of social policies and institutions that attempt to facilitate or mediate employment opportunities. A structuration perspective was utilized to inform the study and develop questions. Thus, an overarching focus is how marginalization, or disparity in employment outcomes, is reproduced and transformed through the agency of actors and the enabling and constraining role of institutions, policies, and programs.

Structuration theory is inherently derived from a critical theoretical orientation (Giddens, 1984). There is a lack of agreement about how research methods derived from interpretivist and positivistic traditions can be used by critical researchers (Comstock, 1982; Morrow & Brown, 1994; Skrtic, 1990). There is consensus, however, that a research protocol must incorporate an in-depth understanding of the interpretations and meanings held by the participants, calling for the use of qualitative methods derived from an interpretivist approach.

Inquiry Design

The research design may best be described as an instrumental single case study using qualitative methods (Creswell, 1998). The focus of the study is the experiences of residents in one bounded community; it relies on multiple sources of data and attends to how the phenomenon is embedded within the economic-social-political context. A goal of the research is to develop new understanding that may serve to build or extend theory.

Although it has been suggested that the use of multiple cases in research design better facilitates theory development by allowing the researcher to engage in cross-case analysis (Yin, 1989), Stake (1994, p. 98) argues that the single case study allows users of research to see how the “phenomenon occurs in the circumstances of the particular.” The choice of a single case study does not preclude the potential for future replication and cross case analysis to determine if similar findings can be found across geographical and temporal boundaries.

The strength of qualitative analysis is the potential for new understanding to develop, an understanding that can be used to extend or develop theoretical insight into a phenomenon. Although a theoretical stance may be used to shape interpretive research questions, it must serve only as a starting point. The researcher must not be wed to its use because this would inhibit the development of new understanding. Instead, data must drive the findings. The researcher, therefore, must work to ensure that her theoretical orientation and values do not overshadow what is in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research design also includes mechanisms to check the subjectivity of the researcher.

Qualitative methods provide the best fit for developing indepth understanding of the interpretations and experiences of respondents. Because the beginning analysis and understanding of participants’ interpretations directs the need for further data collection, the design is necessarily emergent, becoming increasingly more focused (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992), with incremental research decisions informed by prior data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Forshadowed Research Questions

The overarching analytic question driving the study is how labor market marginalization is being reproduced and transformed within an extreme poverty neighborhood, including the role of social policies, programs, and the praxis of actors. The foreshadowed questions were designed to more fully explore the analytic question. The foreshadowed research questions were:

1. What are the perceived barriers and opportunities to access employment and how are they perceived to be changing?
2. How do residents of the community respond to perceived barriers? What strategies are used to dismantle, overcome, navigate, or work within constraints?
3. What is the perceived role of social policies, programs, and neighborhood institutions in the reproduction and transformation of labor market disparity?
4. What is the perceived role of temporary help agencies and other agencies that may mediate employment opportunities in the reproduction and transformation of labor market disparity?
5. How do the interpretations of residents contrast with the interpretations of service providers, program administrators, and policy makers?

Selection of Case and Gaining Access

An urban neighborhood with a high rate of poverty and racial segregation subject to multiple interventions to alleviate poverty and facilitate employment was the primary criteria for inclusion in the case study. A neighborhood that had an identifiable group

with an interest in using research findings to inform and create change within the community was considered optimal. Ultimately, however, the researcher recognized that the selection of a neighborhood would be dependent on the researcher's ability to negotiate access and an assessment of her capacity to develop the necessary relationships to build knowledge.

Several unsuccessful overtures were made to public officials and staff of community-based organizations serving residents in a distressed neighborhood near the researcher's home city. The researcher encountered some reluctance on the part of community-based providers to help facilitate access to the target community. One individual, in particular, suggested that residents in her agency's target neighborhood were often subjected to researchers' studies and, while her agency often helped facilitate access to the residents in the community for research purposes, it appeared that the residents rarely benefited.

It was evident that access would require residents and providers within the community to develop trust in the researcher and this, of course, would require a substantial investment of time. An opportunity arose to conduct the study in a distressed neighborhood in a nearby city, with the enthusiastic support of a community-based agency that expressed interest in using the findings to guide program development. This opportunity was gratefully accepted. The benefit of having an agency, and staff, invested in the outcome of the study cannot be overstated. The researcher was able to build on trusting relationships that existed between the staff of the community-based agency and the residents. Likely due to that initial foundation, in successive interviews, the

researcher was “adopted” by a resident community activist who helped her navigate the community and ultimately gain a level of access and acceptance that surprised the host agency staff.

A local community-based, non-profit social service agency serving homeless people and low-income residents of a large public housing development provided the initial gateway into the community. An agency staff person was assigned to provide assistance in identifying key informants and an empty office space was made available for interviews.

The researcher was strongly warned by the staff of the host agency not to move freely through the community or engage the residents without being introduced by the assigned staff person. This initial restriction was accepted reluctantly because of the need to respect the parameters outlined by the host agency. There was some concern that this restriction would inhibit the researcher’s ability to gain full access to community informants and the quality of the data would suffer. Ultimately, however, the assistance of the staff member who had knowledge of key stakeholders assured a more diverse pool of respondents than might have been achieved working independently.

Because the host agency and the assigned staff person had years of experience in the study community, they had an established relationship with many residents who were well placed to serve as key informants. They were inordinately helpful, therefore, in helping the researcher identify and reach out to potential respondents that included working and non-working individuals. With their help and support, trust those individuals had in the agency staff was leveraged on behalf of the researcher and a sense of

confidence in the research process was gained that would have been difficult to attain in the relatively short data collection phase. Following the initial wave of interviews, the researcher was able to move about the community more freely and the tenant council and local housing authority manager jointly granted the researcher permission to conduct interviews in the community center.

Sampling Within the Case

The researcher attempted to achieve maximum variation by ensuring that respondents from various “standpoints” were represented. Among resident respondents, diversity was sought and achieved on gender, employment status, housing status, and use of social programs. Resident respondents were largely nominated by two individuals; a service provider who worked in the homeless program and a resident who is a self-described community activist and organizer. Attempts were made to have resident respondents nominate other potential respondents, but this was largely unsuccessful. This was likely due to the researcher’s reliance on the respondent to refer a friend or neighbor to her following the interview, rather than seeking contact information for potential respondents that the researcher could then follow through with.

Resident respondents were paid \$20 for participating in the study. This was seen as problematic by some respondents who argued that there would be some who would seek to participate in the study merely for the money and would offer little of value to the research.

Indepth interviews were conducted with 25 resident respondents. Of the 25 resident respondents, 12 were employed and 13 were unemployed at the time of the

interview. The respondents varied across age, gender, employment status, and education level as delineated in Table 1 and Table 2. Unemployed respondents include people who are not actively seeking employment, including individuals with a temporary or permanent disability, individuals who have retired, or those who are voluntarily outside the labor market to meet personal or family needs. Eleven respondents have relied on either TANF cash assistance or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) at some point.

Table 1 : Education and Employment Status of Women by Age Group

Age	Education Level	Employed	Unemployed
20-29	Less than High School	0	2
	High School/GED	0	1
	Some College	2	0
30-39	Less than High School		
	High School/GED	1	1
	Some College	1	0
40-49	Less than High School		
	High School/GED	0	1
	Some College	0	1
	College Degree	2	0
50-59	Less than High School	0	1
	High School/GED	0	2
TOTAL		6	9

Table 2: Education and Employment Status of Men by Age Group

Age	Education Level	Employed	Unemployed
30-39	Less than High School	2	1
	High School/GED	0	1
40-49	Less than High School	0	1
	High School/GED	2	0
50-59	Less than High School	1	1
	High School/GED	1	0
TOTAL		6	4

Resident respondents have lived in the community an average of 16 years. The majority of resident respondents are residents of the public housing development that is the primary source of housing in the neighborhood; two residents reside in private market housing, and two others are homeless. Family composition proves to be an awkward descriptor when what is typically sought is household composition. Many of the respondents who are single adults are living in a variety of household compositions that reflect less their definition of “family” and more the economic necessity of shared housing. “Household composition,” of course, assumes there is indeed a “house” and the relationships of the homeless individuals are lost in this construct. Many of the individuals who are described as single adults are indeed parents with children living elsewhere. The household composition of resident respondents is included in Table 3.

Table 3: Household Composition of Resident Respondents

Household Composition of Respondents	
Single Adult	24
Living with Children under 18	9
Living Alone	6
Living with Adult Family Members	5
Living with Adult & Child Family Members	4
Married with Children	1

A purposive sampling strategy was also utilized to identify service providers and program administrators to serve as respondents for the study. Residents nominated community-based service providers. City program administrators were identified as key informants based on the researcher's assessment of the critical role the program they administer plays in mediating employment for community residents. Community-based providers and city program administrators were sent a letter of introduction and a follow up call was made to set up an appointment.

Indepth interviews were conducted with 11 service providers or administrators. The respondents include those who deliver services within the community, those who provide direct services city-wide, and those who have administrative responsibilities for large block-grant funds used to help promote employment opportunities for low-income people in the city. Respondents were evenly distributed between non-profit and public sector agencies and those who are involved in direct service provision and individuals who are involved in program and policy planning. The organizational characteristics of

service providers who served as respondents are included in Table 4. The service providers have expertise in a variety of areas, including working with ex-offenders, substance abusers, people experiencing homelessness, welfare recipients, or more generally, low income individuals, families, and youth. A final respondent was interviewed who is indirectly involved in service delivery; she serves as a liaison to the neighborhood for a publicly-elected official.

Table 4: Organizational Characteristics of Service Providers' Employers

	Community-based	City-wide
Publicly-funded	2	3
Private, non-profit	3	3

Data Collection

The primary source of data collection was indepth interviews. Relevant documents, specifically those detailing the content of local programs, policy goals, and outcomes were gathered during and after the interviews were completed, but have primarily been relied on to provide contextual information. Another intended source of data for this study was participant observation in public forums during the temporal boundaries of the case. The researcher attended only one public event during the course of data collection, a “volunteer community clean up day,” an activity sponsored by one of the city’s large corporations. While this event provided little meaningful insight, prolonged time in the field provided the researcher the opportunity to view events that

vividly brought to life some of the concerns that respondents expressed. These events were recorded in the field log.

Indepth Interviews

Indepth interviews were conducted with 25 resident respondents, 11 community based service providers or program and policy administrators, and 1 staff person of an elected city official. Interviews with residents were conducted in a variety of settings, including an empty office provided by the initial host agency, in the public housing agency's community recreation center, on front stoops and, on one occasion, in the respondent's home. Interviews with service providers and policy and program administrators were all conducted in their office. Interviews averaged about one hour.

The indepth interviews were semi-structured. An interview guide (Appendix D) was utilized as a starting point; however, it served largely as a reference point as the researcher more fully explored and probed the responses of respondents. With one exception, all respondents agreed to have the interview tape-recorded. On two occasions there were problems with the tape-recorder. Notes were taken in those three instances. All interviews were fully transcribed. The researcher transcribed 29 of the audiotapes. Transcription help was sought. Contracts were developed with two individuals who together transcribed four tapes. The final tape was transcribed by a professional transcription service. All audiotapes and transcripts were reviewed a second time to assure accuracy. The researcher either transcribed or double-checked each audiotape with the transcript for every interview. This was a time-consuming process that delayed moving more fully into the analysis phase, however, it helped ensure that the researcher

was minutely familiar with the data. When the audiotapes were no longer needed to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, the audiotapes were destroyed.

Field Notes/Reflexive Journal

A field journal is used to document decisions made in the field and emerging themes and a reflexive journal provides a mechanism to capture the subjective reactions to what is being learned. By drawing out biases and making them overt, a reflexive journal can be particularly useful in identifying areas that will require more stringent “checks” on the findings to ensure all data are presented fairly and in a balanced manner.

The researcher attempted to maintain both a field journal and a reflexive journal; however, the functions quickly blended as logging decisions and “facts observed” were commented upon and reacted to. The researcher audiotaped observations and field notes while journeying back and forth from the study site and these audiotapes were also fully transcribed by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Initial data analysis began in the field. The researcher critically reflected on what was heard in interviews and checked emerging themes and insights out with respondents. Reflection on what is heard in interviews also helped guide future data collection and demonstrated where gaps in knowledge remained (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992).

A qualitative software package, Atlas.ti was utilized to analyze data. Atlas.ti is specifically designed for the use of grounded theory. It includes tools that can allow data units to be easily segmented, labeled and re-labeled, and easily contrasted for those using a constant comparison approach to data analysis. Atlas.ti provides multiple tools to

capture the emerging ideas of the researcher as she or he interacts with the data and to explore and diagram relationships between data units.

Once the transcripts of the resident respondents were complete, the transcripts were loaded into the Atlas.ti software program. The service provider transcripts were loaded into the software after the preliminary coding of the resident transcripts was already underway.

Data elements were segmented and assigned preliminary codes. The software program's "memo function" was used to capture emerging ideas on how to structure the findings and capture insights about possible relationships between concepts. The ease in coding did create one problem for the researcher, however. She did not limit the codes that were assigned as is commonly recommended. As a result, the list of codes quickly grew and some were clearly duplicative.

To address this concern, the researcher collapsed several smaller categories that were clearly related, for example, categories related to substance abuse challenges, into a larger document that became another transcript to analyze. The data segments that had been preliminary coded were then further reduced, concepts differentiated, and all of the data segments were subsequently re-assigned codes.

All data segments within codes were reviewed a second time and were further reduced and re-assigned as appropriate. Codes that represented related but distinct concepts were grouped together within "networks." This made it easier to examine elements within different codes simultaneously and allowed the opportunity to further

compare and contrast concepts, both within data elements, and then relationships between categories of conceptually-related codes.

The final stage of data analysis occurs as the findings were written (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). This stage provided the researcher an additional opportunity to shape and refine the presentation of findings while further processing the data.

Throughout coding and analysis, the researcher took care to ensure that the interpretations of service providers and policymakers could be differentiated from those belonging to the resident respondents. This ensured the capacity to compare and contrast the interpretations of providers with the residents. Ultimately, however, the observations of service providers and policymakers did not markedly differ from those of resident respondents so the findings were not presented separately.

Rigor

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four parallel standards for interpretive qualitative research to ensure that standards of trustworthiness are addressed: confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability. The standards are presented below with a description of how adherence to rigor was addressed in this case study.

Confirmability

Both quantitative and qualitative researchers recognize that full objectivity is not attainable and both attempt to control for the subjectivity of the researcher and prevent personal values and biases to influence the findings (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend the use of an external auditor to meet a standard of confirmability. The external auditor, trained in qualitative methods but unconnected to

the study, examines the field journal and audit trail to ensure that the findings contained in the study are substantiated by the data. This study was reviewed by an auditor who was provided access to transcripts of all interviews, field logs/reflexive journal, as well as the computer program utilized for data analysis from which she was able to trace assertions in the findings back to the original source and trace the researchers' steps from the transcript, through the coding process, merging of categories, to the final document. The audit allows "both the 'raw products' and the 'processes used to compress them'...to be inspected and confirmed by outside reviewers" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). The auditor's report that attests to the confirmability of the study can be found in Appendix F.

Credibility

Internal validity refers to the extent to which a measurement tool accurately reflects what it seeks to capture (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that quality constructivist research must meet a similar standard of credibility to ensure that the findings and interpretations of the researcher accurately reflect the multiple realities of the participants. Although not all qualitative researchers fully accept Lincoln and Guba's (1985) axioms for constructivist research, there is a shared concern that the multiple viewpoints and perspectives of research participants are accurately represented (Creswell, 1998).

The primary mechanism to assure credibility of the interpretive account is through a member check. Member checks are described by Guba and Lincoln as

the process of testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories, and interpretations with members of the stakeholding group from whom the original constructions were collected. ... [T]his process occurs continuously, both during the data collection and analysis stage and again, when... a narrative case study is prepared. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 239)

The researcher noted emerging ideas and constructs within the field journal and tested out developing hypotheses in subsequent interviews. Based on the feedback from respondents to those developing concepts, the researcher either continued to explore or abandoned those ideas. The researcher identified instances in which she explored emerging concepts with respondents and provided that to the auditor of the research study. An early draft of the findings was provided to a service provider who was employed in the agency that served as “host” to the researcher. Though she was not interviewed for the study, she represents a stakeholder perspective and could provide feedback on how the findings “fit” her experience.

Seven respondents were asked, and agreed, to review the findings. This included five resident respondents and two service providers, one representing a community-based organization and the other a city administrator. A summary of findings was sent to six of the respondents, along with a questionnaire that asked if any information seemed incorrect, whether information was missing, and finally whether anything proved to be illuminating—whether they had learned anything from reviewing the material. Four completed questionnaires were returned. The researcher met in person with another resident respondent and reviewed the summary in person.

The researcher spoke in length with a service provider who agreed to, and ultimately did, provide a member check. She was uncertain whether to challenge the interpretations and experiences resident respondents reported that they had with the TANF agency. She pointed to one instance, as an example, and remarked that, while the resident respondents' report may be accurate, what was reported did not represent the agency's policies. She was told that all of her reactions to the material would be helpful. During the phone conversation, the researcher used the opportunity to test out an assertion made in the final chapter that, upon a secondary review of the data, seemed questionable. Not only did she attest to the accuracy of the assertion, she provided another example to support it. This respondent ultimately provided detailed information through the member check process to contrast the perceptions of how the TANF program operates with the actual program policies. Contradictions and clarifications that she noted as part of the member check were incorporated in the findings. A full report on member checks is included in Appendix E.

A secondary mechanism to assure credibility is prolonged engagement in the field. This ensures the researcher has gathered enough data and has built enough trust in the field to allow participants to safely disclose. The researcher spent slightly over three months in the field; that may not be adequate for a study of this kind. She benefited, however, because she was "adopted" or seen to be sponsored by those who had the trust of community residents. The unveiling of a "secret" hidden from the researcher provided one indication that she had been there long enough to build some level of trust among respondents. This appears to be reflected in the frankness of some of the interviews.

How much time in the field is adequate and how much trust has really been developed is, of course, open to interpretation and should be considered suspiciously by the reader. The auditor did, however, find a sufficient standard of credibility has been achieved (Appendix F).

Transferability

Transferability and external validity are both concerned with the readers' ability to use the research findings. External validity is concerned with the generalizability of the findings to others and to the larger sampling frame (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Transferability, a standard proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) argues that the determination of applicability in interpretive research belongs to the research user. To enhance the ability of readers to use the findings, it is suggested that rich contextual information be provided so the reader can determine what findings may be applicable to one's own community. The auditor attested that she found the study to include the thick description necessary for a reader to assess for transferability (Appendix F).

Despite the extent of contextual information provided, however, there is little, if any, ability to generalize and assume that the experiences reported by those in one community have any similarity to individuals in another community. That said, a context rich single case study may have instrumental use to researchers in other settings by providing propositional and experiential knowledge (Stake, 1994) that may be subject to later testing and used to extend and build theory.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose a standard of dependability that interpretive researchers should be expected to meet. Dependability parallels reliability. It is, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 242), “concerned with the stability of the data over time.” A primary concern of the dependability criterion is that any methodological decision made in the field is sound and based on “maturing constructions” rather than external, or personal, factors.

One mechanism to ensure that a standard of dependability is met is through the use of a field log and reflexive journal that captures the researcher’s beginning interpretations of the data, questions raised, and justification for methodological decisions made in the field. The researcher maintained what quickly became a combined field log and reflexive journal where methodological concerns and decisions were recorded. All material was provided to an auditor. The report of the auditor is included in Appendix F.

While an external audit following the preparation of the study can attest to the dependability of the findings, it is done following the analysis of the data. This does not allow the researcher to correct errors until it is too late – well after data collection is finalized. Lincoln and Guba (1985), therefore, recommend the use of a peer debriefer who is trained in qualitative methods who can question the researcher’s methodological decisions and developing interpretations. Serving as a “devil’s advocate” the peer debriefer helps prevent the researcher from leaving data unexplored or being unable to adequately defend a methodological decision made in the field when such an error may be easily corrected.

A colleague served as the official peer debriefer for this study. Contact throughout the data collection and analysis stage with the peer debriefer was somewhat sporadic and only occasionally generated substantive debate. The researcher also informally relied on two other colleagues, both with doctorates in social work and training in qualitative methods, who actively challenged the researcher on methodological questions and her developing conclusions. In addition, the researcher participated in two active qualitative research discussion listservs that served to keep her sensitized to methodological concerns and issues of rigor.

Study Limitations

A weakness of this study is the over-reliance on two key informants for referrals. The staff person assigned by the host agency as well as the self-appointed resident respondent that serves as a community leader and advocate helped the researcher identify respondents who had diverse “standpoints.” For residents, diversity in gender, employment status, use of social programs, and housing status (private, subsidized, public and non-housed) was sought and achieved. It is likely, however, that the resident respondents represent a small network of residents because it did appear that many were congregated in one small area of the housing development.

Although the intended temporal boundaries of this case were to be determined by the exhaustion of new data, when more time in the field did not result in new insight or substantial new information, that was never achieved. Each subsequent interview provided fresh insight. Indeed, the later interviews tended to also provide rich leads that proved to be tempting and may have further enhanced the study if they were followed.

Ultimately, however, the temporal boundaries of the study were decided by mere practicality, including cost, time, and the fear that the data from 37 completed interviews was already becoming unwieldy.

Subjectivity/Bias

This qualitative study incorporates a number of strategies designed to constrain the subjectivity of the researcher and ensure that what is reported in the findings is an accurate representation of what is in the data. The researcher's subjective response to the data and what was learned in the field, or reflexivity, can also be an important tool that may help illuminate the data and potentially offer valuable insight. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the subjective responses are unique to the individual researcher and there is no reason to believe that others encountering the same circumstances and data would have a similar response. The benefit of offering this accounting is that it may provide useful emotional context for some readers while warning others of potential areas of bias in the reporting of the findings.

It was difficult not to be overwhelmed by the way drugs permeated so many aspects of life in the study community. The consequences of drug use and the drug trade impacted individuals, their families, the neighborhood, and the city as a whole. The consequences were not short-term and were described to be multi-generational. It was surprising, frustrating, and disillusioning to see how few people seemed to be free of the effects of drugs in the community.

One respondent reported that young people who are constantly exposed to drug use in the community become hardened to its effects and they question why she would be

disturbed by it as it is “an everyday thing.” This was a feeling that the researcher came to identify with. The commute to the community took the researcher one-hour each way. Reporting in the field journal on the journey back was done with some reluctance as the desire to disengage and leave the issues that often felt so overwhelming behind often overcame the need to be meticulous about reporting. Returning home to a very different urban neighborhood provided a palpable sense of relief.

On arriving at the downtown train station one morning for a meeting, the researcher encountered an event that laid bare one of the more devastating consequences of drugs in the community. In the restroom, a barely conscious woman was attempting to put a jacket on a toddler. As the woman bent over with the jacket in hand, she nodded in and out of awareness barking some orders to the child that were not decipherable. The child would respond only to find the woman nodding back out of awareness and falling once again into a daze. The child would once again wander off. Concerned, the researcher notified the security personnel who she initially believed were police officers. She was told that they knew the woman, that she must have just come from her methadone appointment, and that they would take care of it. Shortly thereafter, the researcher observed the security officers escort the woman, being led by the more competent toddler, to the subway platform.

Writing this nearly a year later it remains difficult to constrain feelings of indignation, shock, and outrage at multiple players. There is fear, of course, for the child. Many adults find large cities and subways difficult to navigate—the idea of a child, a toddler, navigating the city while guiding his mother along seems incomprehensible.

There is outrage at the security officer who evidently believed that simply moving this family along seemed like an acceptable strategy. There is also anger and frustration that this was a woman under the care of social service professionals for her substance abuse problem. She was evidently being seen in an outpatient program and being sent out, with a child, unable to navigate her environment. Even more disturbing, this was one woman receiving treatment in a city with untold numbers of parents with addictions and sole custody of their children who are not receiving help.

Two events occurred in the city during data collection that contributed to a sense of hopelessness for the future of the city and the capacity of the public sector to make a meaningful contribution toward change. In a community not far from the neighborhood that served as the case study site, a family's home was fire-bombed and all seven occupants, including five children, were killed. The murder of the family was reportedly in retribution for the family's repeated calls to the police to complain about the drug trafficking in the neighborhood. Also in the news during data collection was the report that a police officer who testified against a drug dealer was killed in retribution for offering testimony. He was out with his girlfriend and the murderer evidently had laid in wait for him to exit the bar. While resident respondents did not discuss a personal fear of drug dealers within their own community, one service provider reported that residents reported to her that drug dealers have informants in community meetings and they will report to the drug dealers who complains about drug trafficking. The importance of this research, exploring employment opportunities and barriers, occasionally seemed negligible and secondary to the challenges of daily life. It also led the researcher to

question how public authority figures can be viewed as really offering the capacity to create change against such odds.

Finally, it is important to recognize the stance taken upon entry to the community. The researcher's interest in the study question was motivated in part because of her previous direct practice experience with extremely poor individuals and the belief that the challenges people encounter accessing employment, and how they can be overcome, was underestimated by federal policymakers. Discovering that residents of extreme poverty neighborhoods face considerable barriers to employment was both anticipated and found.

Chapter Four: Findings Related to Community and Community Life

The purpose of this case study is to examine the perceptions of employment barriers and opportunities in one distressed neighborhood and the role of social policies and programs. The focus of the case study is the experiences of residents in one bounded community. Twenty-five residents of the community, representing diverse standpoints and experiences, serve as informants for the study. Twelve community-based service providers and/or city administrators, including a staff person of a publicly elected official, also agreed to be interviewed for this study.

The purpose of conducting a case study with informants representing diverse perspectives is to capture an enriched and detailed picture of employment barriers and opportunities in one community. While the findings are bounded not only to place, but to time, it is hoped that the community might serve as a microcosm, a snapshot in time and place, that may inform how challenges, opportunities, policies, programs, and the agency of actors interact to create change and/or reproduce disadvantage.

City Context

The study community is situated in a large mid-Atlantic city. The city itself is predominately African American. According to the 2002 American Community Survey Profile, in the city overall, 28% of related children in households live in families with incomes below the poverty level as do 26% of all female-headed households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). In the city, overall, the proportion of poor Black individuals residing in extreme poverty decreased from 35% in 1990 to 22% in 2000 (Jargowsky, 2003).

Nearly a third of adults age 25 and over, (31%), have less than a high school diploma and 30% have a high school diploma or an equivalency. According to the American Community Survey Profile, 10% percent of youth age 16 to 19 years were not enrolled in school and had not graduated. The American Community Survey identifies this population as “dropouts.” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). There are indications that this may vastly under-represent the extent to which young people are failing to complete school. Swanson (2004) devised a measurement to analyze the rate at which young people enrolled in school in the 9th grade left high school with a diploma four years later. He found that only 49% of the city’s Black youth graduate within four years, as do 37% of the city’s White youth.

Between 1970 and 2000, the city lost 80,000 jobs (The Job Opportunities Task Force, 2003) and between 1980 and 2000 lost 17% of its population (Brookings Institution, 2003). By 1997, the city contained 33% of the metropolitan region’s jobs. Two-thirds of jobs available to low-skilled workers were in the suburbs and half of those were in the outer ring suburbs (Abell Foundation, 1997). In the early 1990s, the city lost 25% of its manufacturing positions, typically well-paying jobs for low skilled workers (Abell Foundation, 1997). Education, health, and social services is now the primary employment sector for workers in the city, as nearly one third of employed residents in the city work in those fields (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

A “jobs gaps” analysis found that in 1997 there were 2.9 low skilled job seekers per low skilled job in the city. However, by 2000 the rate had declined to 1.8 job seekers per low skilled job opening. This may reflect the effect of a tightening labor market (The

Job Opportunities Task Force, 2003). In 2001, 61% of city employers reported having difficulty finding workers and 37% reported having difficulty filling low skilled jobs (The Job Opportunities Task Force, 2003).

In 2001, the city's unemployment rate was 7.5%, considerably higher than the unemployment rate of 4.5% for the metropolitan area (The Job Opportunities Task Force, 2003). By 2002 the city's unemployment rate reached 8%. A labor market participation rate of only 57%, however, indicates a much higher rate of joblessness (Brookings Institution, 2003).

The city appears to have a concentration of social problems that challenge many urban areas. It has a high rate of heroin use and addiction among residents. The state substance abuse agency reports that 9% of city residents are in need of substance abuse treatment (LaVigne & Kachnowksi, 2003). Like many other urban areas, the city is preparing for a large number of ex-felons returning to the city in the next few years. Recent research indicates that many of the currently incarcerated men and women in the state will disproportionately return to already badly stressed neighborhoods in the city. At the time of their arrest, the majority of people tested positive for heroin and cocaine use (LaVigne & Kachnowksi, 2003).

Community Context

The study community is made up almost entirely of low level public housing units stretching several blocks north and approximately 10 blocks across from east to west. It is situated not far from the prospering downtown, with the city skyline easily visible in the distance, and just up the street from a trendy gentrifying neighborhood with a new

outgrowth of restaurants and bars to accommodate new tenants and occasional tourists. Immediately surrounding the public housing units are a number of vacant and dilapidated homes to the north. To the east there is a busy road with a number of stores with signs in Spanish to attract the growing Hispanic community near the study community. A number of large industrial buildings to the south and the west with a scattering of private homes for people of moderate incomes serve to separate the study community from the more prosperous area only a few blocks away.

Anchored at the edge of the neighborhood of the public housing units is a day shelter for homeless people and a transitional shelter for men in recovery. The sidewalk in front of the day shelter program, across the street from the public housing complex, becomes an area for homeless men and some community residents to congregate on cooler days during the summer months. It is the staff of this program that offered the researcher a gateway into the study community.

The study community site is situated within a census tract that does not have a high poverty rate. Analysis of block groups offer more neighborhood specific information within census tracts. The block group, which consists primarily of the public housing units and the immediately surrounding housing units, has a poverty rate of 50% (Maryland Department of Planning, 2002).

According to most recent data for this study community, the majority of adults are not considered to be in the labor force; 56.5% are neither employed nor are seeking employment. One-third of residents age 16 and older are employed and an additional 10% are seeking employment. The median annual family income in the study

community is \$14,145 and 34% of families have incomes below \$10,000 a year (Maryland Department of Planning, 2002).

The households that reported earnings from work had mean earnings of \$21,818. Nearly a quarter of households (24%) reported income from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) that provided a mean income of \$4,712 a year. Nearly a quarter (23%) of households reported receipt of public assistance that provided a mean income of \$2,044 annually, and 22% reported income from Social Security that provided a mean income of \$5,076. Nearly one half, 48%, of adult residents have less than a high school diploma and 14% have less than a 9th grade education. The vast majority of residents, 81%, are Black, indicating high racial as well as economic segregation (Maryland Department of Planning, 2002).

A number of factors have likely contributed to the economic revitalization and gentrification of the area surrounding the study community. Due to a lawsuit ordering the deconcentration of public housing in the surrounding area, several large public housing high rise buildings were destroyed, residents were relocated, and new mixed income housing units are being built. (26:25, 26:30, 34:35). A large university in the surrounding area continues to expand toward the study community. (34:55) The area, including the study community, are part of an empowerment zone. The city receives federal resources to stimulate economic development and help existing residents transition into the workforce. The gentrification of the area might be a sign of the rebounding health of some urban centers, a process likely facilitated by the loss of the public housing developments. (34:35)

Consequences of Economic Revitalization

The expansion of the university, the gentrification of the surrounding community, and the development of new mixed income housing with costs that are seen as unattainable to many current and former residents provide for some the message that the focus of economic revitalization is solely for the improvement of the land. (31:26, 25:27, 31:8)

Some current residents of the study community, therefore, see their housing as under threat due to the economic revitalization of the area (25:27) and a service provider confirms that the expansion of the university will displace homeowners in the surrounding area. (35:30)

When you look down in the future there will be no economically disadvantaged people here. Gone. They want the land. ...They don't give a damn where they go...they want this piece of land. (31:4)

A respondent expresses the hope that the new mixed income housing, along with the expansion of the university, will result in more jobs through the city. (36:27) In the interim, however, another reports that the gentrification of the surrounding townhomes near the study community may have resulted in the loss of some small business that provided jobs to study community residents in the past because the new tenants return to the suburbs for their shopping needs. (25:35)

The large public housing developments that were torn down in the mid-1990s were reported by respondents to be deplorable places to live and needed to be torn down. (33:58, 26:33) There is concern, however, over the net loss of affordable housing units

(31:7, 33:58) and cynicism over the early claims that the new mixed income housing units would serve the tenants of the destroyed public housing developments. In particular, the cost of the mixed income housing units are perceived to be well beyond what those who were displaced will be able to afford. (31:2, 29:55, 26:30) Further, one respondent reports, the housing agency didn't bother to track where people were relocated. How then, she argues, could they have ever intended to help them return to the area. (31:7)

They don't want them back! You have \$200,000 homes coming back....mixed income communities. Give me a break! They don't want them back! It's another piece of land that's prime property! Where's the affordable houses? Where's that? You took down all of this development, you coming back with 130 units? (31:7)

The relocation of families from the public housing units that were destroyed was also a source of concern. The relocation of families with portable housing subsidies to low poverty neighborhoods was not seen as an adequate intervention to help ensure that the relocation would be successful. (35:30, 31:15) In particular, the differing community norms were seen to present a challenge for families that were relocated. (31:15, 28:10)

When you take a family out of a community of poverty, you need to link them up with a service to prepare them ... because some of the habits [from] ...the old community doesn't do well for the new community. ... They need to be prepared for different viewpoints, how things should be done, things should not be done,

what is acceptable, what is not acceptable behavior...there's a culture shock for the community...[and] for the people who were moving. (28:10)

Further, displaced families who are relocated to low-poverty neighborhoods may encounter resistance from neighbors (28:10, 37:9) that may increase the stress of the move.

One respondent notes that the public housing that was lost was rife with drugs and people with problematic behavior, including involvement in crime and the drug trade. He argues that efforts should have been made to help curtail some of the problem behaviors within the community and that the new mixed income housing should have been dedicated to those displaced residents. He argues that they should have received intensive services so that the transition could be a successful one, "treatment, police, ...case management....the whole nine yards." (29:57) Instead, relocating people from a housing development without intervening simply served to disperse those with significant challenges and problematic behaviors throughout the city. It also, he argues, served to disperse the thriving drug trade from a centralized location. (29:3)

One respondent reports that the public housing agency housed some displaced families from the public housing developments that were destroyed in the study community, including some with "bad records" or suspected of being involved in the drug trade. As a result, the relocation strategy designed to de-concentrate poverty and segregation may be increasing the concentration of those with problematic behavior in her development.

Finally, some respondents had questions about the large scale effort to relocate public housing residents from the destroyed developments.

Where are they? What are they doing today? I mean they were displaced. You heard earlier they were sending them to the counties...that was a dismal failure... The situation they were in was very deplorable....the drugs and the concentration and all that. [Relocating families] was good for them, but you still dislocated these folks and you need to just touch base with them and see how they are making out.Some agency should be tracking them ... you should be able to ... get statistical data to see what [worked and] what didn't work (26:33)

Job Market

There are job opportunities available to study community residents. (1 :4, 2:8, 12:6, 20:24, 33:48, 33:46, 26:21, 32:15) Some are “off the books,” (1:20) some are hard to attain because of transportation or educational requirements, (2:8) and they may simply be jobs that are of little interest to some residents. (20:26) Job opportunities are not perceived to be equal.

Some people have [job] opportunities and some people don't. Some people don't look for opportunities to get to work. Some people do. It's an attitude and, like, situation wise...because everybody's different, everybody goes down different paths. (5:34)

There was no consensus whether job opportunities were increasing or declining. A demand for low skilled workers was perceived even with an increasing unemployment rate, (37:12, 33:46) while another respondent offered a directly contradictory view. “We

were in this booming economic period and so the job market was just expansive and now it's contracting...these are the people, the first people to lose their jobs in a downturn in this kind of market.” (35:35) Perhaps serving as an indicator of a loosening labor market in which employers can be more selective, a respondent reports it has become markedly more difficult to find employment without a GED than in prior years. (2:33, 2:7, 2:2)

Older respondents offer a longer-term perspective when good paying jobs and workers in the study community were plentiful. (25:21, 45:8/18:35) “When I was coming up here, you would see people, actually out at 6:00 in the morning...getting ready to go to work to the waterfront...construction jobs. You don't see that any more.” (45:8/18:35)

Businesses have left the study community, (25:35, 2:89, 12:12) which may be a result of economic growth outside of the city, the gentrification of the community, or being “pushed out” due to crime. (12:12) The loss of jobs in some employment sectors in the city leave workers to turn to other, less lucrative, employment. One respondent who worked for a manufacturer in the city that had closed their factory now works as a cook in a fast food restaurant in the suburbs. The commute takes approximately one hour each way. (4:12)

I was a technician. And see...that's a big jump from doing what I was doing back down to, now I'm cooking, right? But I'm alright. I've been [at the fast food restaurant] like nine years. [Now] I'm making the money I was making there.

After nine years you understand. (4:22)

Another found his trade no longer viable when his employer of over 8 years, and many other employers in similar businesses, moved to the suburbs. "Then I left. They left me really." (12:29) He is now employed in food preparation for an area restaurant.

(12:27)

Disparate Job Growth

Employment opportunities are more plentiful outside the city than inside. (2:9, 4:12, 33:29, 19:16) One respondent reports that "You might [find] some [jobs] in the city, but most of the jobs in the city are full." (19:6) In addition to fewer job openings, the perceived reluctance of nearby employers to hire study community residents further constricts employment opportunities within the city. (10:3,10:8,10:12, 13:20, 19:6,16:5) The stigma employers attach to residence in the study community is perceived to lessen with distance. "[I]f I go out of the community, somewhere else, I'm sure that I could get a job...because they don't know where I live at...they don't know where I came from."

(13:8)

In contrast, one respondent who commutes an hour to work each way reports significant job opportunities in the suburbs. "Where I work, right there's jobs, it's... 'help wanted,' help wanted' help wanted' 'help wanted' 'help wanted' But how you supposed to get out there?" (4:12) An enticement to seeking employment in the suburbs is that wages are reportedly higher, (20:19) even for similar entry-level positions (33:29).

Transportation is commonly cited as a barrier to employment, among study community residents and in evaluations of welfare to work programs. This may largely be a product of the job growth in the outlying counties compared to the city.

"[Transportation is] definitely a barrier and a challenge. Because so many of the jobs are moving away from the city and...I would say the majority of the people that we work with are transit dependent. They depend on public transportation." (34:15)

The failure of a public transportation infrastructure to develop in pace with job growth creates a challenge to those seeking employment (4:2, 5:42, 8:29, 20:19, 27:5, 36:1) and to employers. (32:28) Strategies to navigate this challenge include a reverse commute program with emergency rides home. (33:29, 34:15) Resolving the transportation problems alone does not solve the challenges that the disparate job growth creates for study community residents. The additional commuting time to get to and from jobs in the county means that parents have less time with their children and less time to manage a second job. (36:1) There is also discomfort about traveling such a far distance from home, an issue that has become apparent among some TANF recipients in the city.

People are very reluctant to go that far [outside the city], some of it is the time factor...[because with commuting and time to and from day care they don't have time with their children],...but I think it's more of a barrier in the sense that people are not comfortable leaving the city, there are definitely people who have never left the city or if they have, they haven't gone far. (33:29)

The lack of transportation also means that some workers whose jobs move from the city cannot follow their employer. One respondent reports he would have followed his employer of over 8 years out to the suburbs if public transportation were available. (12:29) Instead he switched careers. (12:27) "[E]verybody moved out of town and I didn't

have no car so I had to do what I had to do...they moved further out and I had to deal with the consequences and try and work around it." (12:27)

Drugs and Violence

The city and study community are described by respondents to be inundated by drugs (35:23, 8:4, 24:30, 21:15) and violence (28:6, 39:4) "[Drugs] are very big in our world. And that's a fact. Drugs are taking over everything, even the younger kids" (21:15) "It's one of the underlying causes of all the stuff that goes on. It's the underlying thing...drugs are rampant...you got open air drug markets all over the place." (24:30)

It's hard, around here in these projects, it's hard. A lot of people on drugs. A lot of people sell drugs on the corners, it's hard down here, as far as drugs go. There's a lot of drugs in this community. They're trying to clean it up as much as they can, but it's ...a lot of drugs, ...and they be shooting, basically you looking every which way to make sure you don't get hit or somebody coming to you trying to sell you drugs, or something like that. (17:30)

Drugs prevalent in the neighborhood are cocaine, heroin, and "ready rock," a cheaper version of crack cocaine. (43:14/1:44) The impact of drugs are readily apparent in the neighborhood according to one respondent. He notes, in particular, that "ready rock" has people with addictions "running around here like chickens with their head cut off." He connects their addiction to ready rock to prostitution and high levels of sexually transmitted diseases in the study community.

Look out that window and just look and you'll see...you'll see the

same ones running across there ...they're moving fast to get back to the house to get that high...if you don't get the picture, look out of that window and just sit right here, just watch! And you will see! (43:14/1:44)

A by-product of the drugs in the community is violence. One respondent noted that violence has escalated in recent years. "One time you could live around here ...you didn't have to worry about nobody fighting, shooting, getting stabbed. Nothing. Now you have to keep looking behind your back ... it's bad during the day and night. They shoot during the day and night around here." (2:84) Another respondent notes that the violence that accompanies the drug trade throughout the city has gotten worse as youth have taken on a bigger role.

You're talking about a guy who's been out of the game ten years, who can go right back to the same neighborhood and nothing's changed. The war on drugs, there is no war on drugs. I can go anywhere in the city and still buy whatever I want. The same drug dealers are still there. The same conditions, no, no, I'm not even going to say the same conditions, the conditions are worse than when I left...because of the insurgence of crack. The insurgence of younger drug dealers. When I sold drugs you wouldn't get a kid out there selling drugs. Kids weren't allowed to come out there and sell drugs; now you have kids all over the streets selling drugs...because of the deterioration of the drug game...with those younger drug addicts and drug dealers..it [became] a lot more [disrespectful] and violent, senseless violence, compared to when it was an adult game. (29:53)

Among the sources of violence due to drugs in the community is the presence of “stick-up” boys. A service provider in recovery reports that these are often individuals with addictions who, desperate for drugs, will engage in seriously risky behavior including robbing those involved in the drug trade. (29:12, 29:14, 29:16) He describes his own behavior when he was using drugs.

I didn't give a damn...I actually lived in one area, walked out my front door, would rob you and go right back in the house because of the drug, the urge, didn't give a damn, I'm gonna rob you. They know I live right here, ...they know I walk this way, I don't care...I mean, I'm gonna rob you and rob you is what I did. You're a drug dealer on the corner, I know you, I know you got money; I know where the stash is, I'm gonna take it!....The average drug addict that's a stick up guy don't give a damn, 'I'll deal with it when it comes.' (29:45)

Drug Trade

Respondents report that involvement in the drug trade in the study community is not uncommon. (43:43/15:12, 7:7) While those involved in, or operating, the drug trade may live elsewhere, (1:66, 2:84) young residents of the study community are actively recruited to participate.

They done turned 12 or 13 and then the guy he say 'Well looky here, you don't have to go to school. All you have to do is stand right here...Police get you? Your father can come get you'...That's the biggest problem, they recruit these young...boys that they see hooking school because they don't want to school cause

maybe their parents ain't right...So they fall right in the crack right there...they fall right into it. (1:62)

Peers may reinforce young people's involvement in the drug trade. (43:38/1:62, 27:9) "[T]hat makes them look big in front of the other young girls and then they can get gold watches, ...nice pair of tennis shoes, don't go to school, wear shit, don't know jack."

(43:38/1:62) The money may also serve as an enticement, as it did for one respondent who always anticipated as a young man that his duration in the drug trade would be short-term and largely recreational. (29:46)

I loved it because of the money...I could wake up in the morning and have a box of money, a shoebox full of money...if I want something I go buy it, yeah, I can work to get it, but right now you know I can have it right now...I'm 20 years old, I have \$10,000 under my mattress, I don't owe nobody shit...I have a job. I mean shit, what else can a young man ask for who decides to go that route? (29:47)

Another respondent adamantly refutes the idea that the lure of money or the reputation that may come from involvement in the drug trade serves as an enticement for most young men in the study community. Indeed, he argues that when young men are incarcerated "they find hundreds of thousands of dollars because they are scared to spend it. They don't really know what to spend it on...they're taking the risk, saving the money and basically still living enslaved with the money there." (43:35/7:7)

Rather than being enticed by a "glamorous" drug trade or easy money, he believes the drug trade has simply become a part of the fabric of life in the study community. "There's no glamour to it. They see the deep down and the murders and the doors being

kicked in and the people being addicted because of it. But again they adapted."

(43:35/7:7) There are those who have been exposed early in life to drugs and the drug trade by their families. (43:35/7:7, 37:29)

You have to think about the fact that you have households where it's the parents [that] are the drug users, that a child was the person that held their stash. Because the child couldn't go to jail. ...So you grow up thinking this is okay...this is a way of life, this is how I feed my family. (37:29)

Young boys are also reportedly introduced to the drug trade by their older siblings.

Just like you have these welfare generations you have the drug trade generations. So what you see happening is the 19 year old is grooming the 13 year old who is informing the 7 year old. So once the 19 year old is taken down, the 13 year old [can] easily by the age of 16 step into his feet, his space. And it's a way of life. (43:35/7:7)

It was argued by one respondent that family involvement in the drug trade is not unique to inner-city residents but it occurs throughout different economic brackets, "[u]p one side and down the other, [it's] economics." (37:29)

There are a number of risks that correspond with involvement in the drug trade, including being victimized by violence, killed, or incarcerated and an increased likelihood of acquiring an addiction. (1:62/43:37, 6:32/43:5, 29:49) Indeed, respondents report involvement in the drug trade preceded their use of drugs, (6:32/43:5) a risk perceived to accompany drug trade involvement is that "eventually...you [can] become a connoisseur of your own product." (29:49)

The perception that children are at less risk from the juvenile justice system (1:62, 43:38/43:38, 37:29) than adults in the criminal justice system should they be caught with drugs may have fueled the shift of the drug trade from an “adult game” the respondent above notes. Thus, an unintended consequence of punitive policies for adults found with drugs and more lenient ones for juveniles is that children are at heightened risk for involvement in the drug trade and all its accompanying dangers. When one weighs the costs and benefits of the criminalization of drugs in our country, the well-being of children swept into the drug trade must be taken into account.

Weakening Families, Public, and Social Institutions

Another consequence of the drugs in the city is the destruction or erosion of public social institutions and families. The violence that can erupt by challenging an active drug trade would certainly appear to the researcher to reinforce a message to city residents that one must learn how to co-exist with it rather than challenge it.

Two extremely violent incidents that occurred in the city during the data collection phase conveyed this message sharply to the researcher. In the first, the home of a family of seven was fire-bombed in an adjacent community, reportedly because the mother repeatedly called the police to complain about the active drug trade on her street. All occupants, including five children were killed (Gettleman, 2003). Another incident underscored the audacity of drug dealers while leading the researcher to question the power of authority figures to make a difference. After testifying in a criminal trial against a young man accused of being involved in the drug trade, a police officer was

murdered in what was described as an execution, reportedly in retribution for his court testimony (Wilber, 2002).

A city administrator speaking more generally of distressed neighborhoods throughout the city reports that in many neighborhoods people do live in fear and under the threat of violence associated with the drug trade.

One of the major issues in [our city] is the drugs. ...[People] fear for their kids and...they don't want to do anything about it because they're afraid the drug dealers will burn their homes. ... People are afraid to speak up [at neighborhood association meetings] because the dealers have their people [there]. (32:30)

Respondents note several factors that may make it difficult to dislodge drugs from public housing. There is a reported rumor that a housing authority staff person had provided a drug dealer a master key to all the housing units and those that complain about the drug trade are at risk of having their unit vandalized. (36:17) There has been a reduction in housing authority police and the “regular” city police are less familiar with the communities. (36:20)

Those involved in the drug trade reportedly will intervene to help a family in a financial crisis that cannot pay their rent. In exchange, they will store, or sell, drugs directly from the family’s housing unit. (27:11) Individuals with addictions may also invite those involved in the drug trade to use their housing unit as a “stash house” in exchange for drugs and/or financial support. (29:43) Those who “invite” drugs into their home and those who are forced to do so because of an economic crisis will be at heightened risk for arrest, violence, and eviction.

Respondents report that drug use and addiction have taken a toll on their family, weakening the resources that would otherwise be available to help support adult family members and children. One respondent reports that he is a single parent because of his wife's use of drugs (43:44/1:47) and two respondents report the consequences of their fathers' drug use. "My father he got hooked on drugs staying down here. Now he's sitting over in jail." (2:105/45:11) "I seen my father start at the top and go down to the bottom and he had nothing." (13:38/43:44) A community-based service provider notes that some of the young people she serves have few family members that can offer a refuge. She reports "when I was young, your grandparents were who you could go to for advice, love or whatever, but I'm finding out now that grandparents are substance abusers also." (28:6)

Among the greatest challenges a parent's addiction may place on the family is ensuring the safety and well-being of their children. In an incident observed by the researcher in another part of the city, a woman who had reportedly just left a methadone treatment center was attempting to dress her toddler in the restroom of the downtown train station. She evidently lapsed in and out of consciousness as her toddler wandered away and returned occasionally to see how she fared. Concerned, the researcher notified security only to discover their response was to help usher the woman and child toward the subway—the child clearly more competent and taking the lead by directing his mother. Presumably, the well-being of both child and mother was dependent on the goodwill of strangers who hopefully helped navigate them from that point onward, or simply depended on fate. What brought great pause, concern, anger, frustration, and even hopelessness to the researcher was the realization that this was a woman with a child in

treatment for a substance abuse disorder. How much more precarious must be the lives of children and families be for those without access to treatment for an addiction.

A parent who reports that he manages his own drug use so that it doesn't interfere with his ability to parent his two teenage sons (43:110/1:48) states that it is critical to intervene with parents who are using drugs before it takes a serious toll on their children and families.

When they get despondent, when they be like almost ready to give up, them the ones you got to reach, before they give up. Because then the child is getting bigger, the next thing you know your boy is on the corner selling drugs. Talking to you like you a damn child. And then if you got a problem, you're trying to get drugs from your children. (43:104/1:61)

The combination of a parent with an addiction and a child involved in the drug trade can result in the shredding of what is likely an already fragile family structure.

You got parents now, the kids is actually taking care of them. ...They figure they have the right to be in charge because they are taking care of things...they even got to the point where the kids runs the house. He's the head of the household...they take orders from him. ... Some kids don't really have no parents at all. ... A kid ain't knowing to do nothing right...if he don't learn nothing right, he can't do right. ... You got so many of them out here that really, really want somebody to talk to, somebody to lean on, somebody to look up to. (43:69/18:40)

Community Life

The prevalence of drugs in the community makes it more likely that people will become involved in either the drug trade or drug use. (18:44, 24:30) One respondent reports that he believes a majority of public housing tenants are now in some way involved with drugs, "it wasn't always like that, but if you live around something long enough, eventually you become part of it." (18:44) A parent further reports that the close proximity to drug use and the drug trade puts children in the study neighborhood at heightened risk. "Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely....Kids by nature are curious,...they're adventure seeking,...alot of them say, 'Well I'm going to try this because I see everyone else doing it...blah, blah, blah.'" (24:30)

Study community residents do report an ability to intervene to effect change, however. One respondent reports that her area remains largely free of the drug trade. She reports, "They tried to bring it down in this court but we wouldn't let them. Whenever we see anyone down here, somebody call the police." (2:105) Another respondent reports that he simply politely asks them to move along.

I go to my door and say 'Excuse me, could you all please leave from my front to go over there from where you all came because I'm not having it in front of my door. I appreciate it.' And they go...'No problem sir.' I'm like, 'Thank you. Appreciate it.' I ask them in a very respectable way...I have my son and my daughter over some time on the weekend and I don't want..that around them.
(11:37/45:28)

One respondent reports the prevalence of drugs doesn't really impact her, though "It's kind of depressing sometimes, every day all I see is drug addicts walking up and down the [street]...that's kind of depressing for anybody to see." (24:30) She does note, however, that her children have simply become accustomed to it.

The more they're out here, the more they see it....[for] my generation [it] was a rare thing to see someone who is a drug addict and now they be like 'Mom, why you so upset about that...I mean it's every day' So they become hard, they become hardened to it...just an accepted way of life. And it's sad. (24:30)

Despite the challenges that living in the community may present, several respondents report a desire to remain in the community, though they each also report being challenged by their neighbors or others for that decision. (45:22/7:31, 9:42/45:25, 45:36/16:23) One respondent reports trying, unsuccessfully, to live in the suburbs.

I missed the communication, the involvement, the community cookouts, all of that, talking to neighbors...just passing the day by. [In the suburbs]...nobody talks to nobody... nobody speaks..it was horrible. The only communication I had was with the squirrels and they didn't care for me either. So I came back.....Everybody had nice houses and everything...and you never seen people. I never seen anyone. (45:22/7:31)

Another respondent also reports that this is a community where people can and will look after one another.

People watch your back here... people come visit...[and] they be like 'my car going to be safe right there?' What do you think is going to happen to your car? I

tell a lot of people, your car is safer being parked right there than it would on any other street in [this] city...if it's stolen right here, somebody around here is going to tell it....I tell a lot of them, you can't live in no community no better than that. Come on now!... There ain't nothing wrong with this community, you got people watching your back 24/7. Cause somebody's always outside you got people watching your back. (45:36/16:23)

Another respondent reports she wants to stay in the community and be a part of making it better.

You don't have to run, you can stay right here and build. And you can build a good community.... My apartment is big enough for me...I like the people. They upset you alot of times because of what they do...[but] you have to know it's that drug and alcohol that's causing them to do that. (9:42/45:25)

Other respondents express discomfort living in the community and a desire to leave. One reports that he doesn't leave his house when the sun comes down due to the threat of being robbed and the constant harassment of homeless people seeking money. (4:6/45:20) Another reports frustration that he is unable to sit on his own front step or watch television due to the constant noise of the drug traffic outside his own door. (11:37/45:28)

Respondents also report wanting to leave for the sake of the children in their family. One reports "I'm ready to go...[I would leave] in a heartbeat. I wouldn't want my daughter to bring my grandson up here, no way." (13:42/45:1) Another respondent also reports she doesn't want her son raised in this environment, while she fears that she may

never be able to find a community untouched by drugs, she hopes she can find an environment with less violence. (22:14/45:17)

Stigma

Respondents report that the community is stigmatized. (45:35/16:6, 10:3,10:8, 10:12, 13:20, 19:6, 16:5) One respondent reports that the bad reputation of the community is unfair.

You can't say because of where somebody lives, what's overall. ...You might have caught them on a bad day...There's a fight that day and gun shots rang out or something...That was that day. But it's not here every day...You just happened to show up on that day and that's what happened.... People classify it as a bad neighborhood, but it's not. (16:5)

Isolation

The city is reported to be very neighborhood-oriented. “[The city] is kind of cliquish in a way. People that live on the East Side, stay on the East Side...People that stay on the West Side, stay on the West Side. They don't meet often.” (34:34) The respondent reports, therefore, that she would have been surprised then, had the families displaced due to the loss of public housing units located far from the original community.

Respondents report that many of the residents in the study community are largely isolated from other parts of the city and rarely leave the neighborhood. (4:14, 21:54, 32:29) A service provider reports that research his organization commissioned found that residents "probably [do] not venture more than 8 to 10 blocks from their community.

So as the face of employment changes in terms of location, they can't get there, they're afraid to get there and they don't know how to get there.” (37:2)

The consequence of the isolation is that some residents, particularly young people, have limited information and thus limited opportunities. “Their surroundings [are just] around here...That's all they know.” (4:14) As a result, some may not be aware of what’s possible. (28:4)

Neighborhood Interaction & Help

Respondents report that they help other people in their neighborhood. They do this by helping their homeless neighbors (2:92, 4:29) and by watching out for the neighborhood children. (24:48, 19:29)

Respondents express a commitment to helping adolescents they perceive to be at risk. One respondent reports that she tries to take time with them because “if you don't talk to the young kids these days you're going to lose them. And I don't believe they can be lost.” (16:18) Another respondent serving on the resident council reports they want to reach out to the children because “without any positive role models, they're going to be lost. They're already halfway there.” (45:10/21:12) A respondent notes that there are many people in the community trying to make a difference with the children.

[They] get up every day to come over [to the community center] and be bothered with other people's children every day...Alot of these young ladies and men just need somebody to talk to them...There's a lot of people round here, they try to make sure that they maintain the young people in the neighborhood, because ...if you lose them, there's another crisis starting all over again. (16:18)

She reports reaching out to young people to ask about their day, their plans, to advise them about sex, how to prevent pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. While she has encountered at least one parent that objects to her frank conversations with her teenager, she believes it is essential to prevent the further reproduction of disadvantage.

Neighbors may help one another with child care, (8:38), refer others to jobs, (24:47, 16:10, 8:38) bring home applications for neighbors when they see job openings (10:48), and provide assistance filling out or reviewing job applications or resumes. (24:27)

Respondents also report that residents inform one another about resources and services that they might be eligible for. (21:25, 7:5) A respondent in recovery reports he reaches out to people with addictions and tries to help them get into treatment. (18:53)

There are occasional events that bring people within the community together, (5:43/45:23, 7:8/45:2) including a community-wide gathering that old residents travel from other states to attend and catch up with old neighbors and friends. (7:8/45:2)

Despite some community events and residents who do help one another, some respondents report that a sense of community is lacking or is weaker than they would like. (4:37/45:1, 23:23/45:16, 26:37, 8:38, 2:97, 26:34)

You just do what you can. But it's hard ... in this type neighborhood because it's more of a every man for himself mentality. Which is very widespread...But they were raised to believe neighbors should act and treat one another [well, but]...It's not very neighborly around here. (8:38)

One respondent highlighted the benefits of not being very neighborly. "It's best to stay to yourself, because if you deal with people, get involved with people, you get rolled up in junk." (15:19)

One informal helping effort was a victim of the increasing problems with drugs within the study community according to one respondent. He reports that in early years people would work together to help a family that, because of a financial crisis, was being threatened with eviction. He notes that more recently the housing authority has become aggressive in trying to prevent people from "intervening with an eviction." He has since discovered that the housing authority sometimes has information that he doesn't have, for example, they may have been involved in the drug trade and, therefore, "they needed to go." As a result, there are no longer neighborhood efforts to help prevent evictions.

(7:13)

Strengthening the bonds of the community is seen by one community based service provider as providing an opportunity for residents to reclaim their neighborhood.

you need to start with a sense... [that] you are somewhat your brother's keeper.

... If we live in this community and something is going awry, we need to talk to each other about it and if my child is involved in something devious, you should be able to talk to me about it and I shouldn't get defensive about it. ... We should take ownership....go to city hall ...and get things done. There could be a lot of initiatives that we as neighbors do on our own, there ought to be a lot of creative energy in this community and we can solve our own problems. As I always say, selling drugs is hard but it's easy to solve because it's somebody's child. It's

somebody's child that is doing it. You know who's child that is. Now that problem of it is that parent, he or she has lost control of that child....the community might be able to help her, to help them with that child in another kind of setting. (26:34)

Chapter 5: Findings Related to Employment Challenges and Response

Employment Barriers and Challenges

Respondents report that residents of the study community face a wide variety of challenges that make it difficult to access, or sustain, employment. Residents and service providers also describe a variety of efforts to address, or dismantle, many of those barriers for themselves or for others in the community. Tackling those barriers, however, can prove challenging for residents and service providers alike.

Drug Related Barriers

Drug related barriers were frequently mentioned as a significant challenge for residents within the study community. This includes challenges related to drug abuse and drug screening. Individuals enrolled in drug treatment programs may be forbidden to work in the early stages of their recovery and those in latter stages also report that returning to work too early may “trigger” urges to use and stimulate relapse. Finally, some respondents report that the thriving drug trade in the community offers an alternative to work for some young men.

Drug Use and Addiction. Substance abuse is a barrier to employment for some residents in the study community. (24:16/43:23, 31:9, 34:7) “[S]ubstance abuse is a big, big, big, big factor.” (31:9) Some have addictions that make it difficult to sustain employment.

If you get caught on that treadmill of drugs you won't be able to go to work, your main focus will be on how to get drugs everyday, all day...The disease that come with drugs, the illnesses that come with drugs, the crime that comes along with

drugs, you won't have time to work....eventually one of the two will have to go.

It's drugs or the job. (29:28)

Another respondent reports "you can't do a productive job, you can't be productive with alcohol or drugs that center in your life, that core. That takes away from your work habits, your work skills, and everything else. You can't do it." (43:96/9:47) Some are able to maintain employment for an extended period of time while using drugs, however.

(29:29, 43:11/7:27, 43:6/6:46) "They called me a maintenance user. ... I used for 7 years, never lost weight, never lost a day from work." (43:11/7:27) It is, however, a progressive disease that may ultimately undermine capacity to work. (29:29, 8:19)

Maintaining employment with an addiction can be seen as self-destructive when the steady income provides little other than the ability to maintain or increase their use of drugs. (43:6/6:46) One respondent reports he made \$700 to \$800 a week while living on the streets.

I worked to use and I used to work. If I didn't work, I couldn't use. If I didn't use I wasn't able to work...whenever I did something I did it to the best of my abilities. And the people that [I] was working for, they knew my problem, but they liked my work...I was dependable as long as I could use. And they knew I used. I never hid it from them...but one day I got tired of that. I said, 'I'm working all, all the time, I never have nothing to show for it' And one day I went and told them, 'Well I appreciate what you did,' I said, 'but this job is enabling me and I quit.' (18:/43:57)

Temporary labor pools can serve as a “low-threshold” employer for people with addictions and those whose drug use is escalating. The casual nature of the work, with few penalties for a failure to show up and minimal screening requirements, is manageable for them. While some may see this as an opportunity for people to get their immediate needs met, others view the low threshold temporary labor pool’s reliance on people with addictions as exploitive.

Drug Screening. Drug screening tests imposed by some employers can impede employment for residents. (32:37, 24:30/43:21, 21:38/43:65, 9:34) Awareness of drug screening tests can also prevent people from applying for jobs and participating in job training and placement programs when they know a positive drug test will inevitably derail them. Drug screening may not be imposed just to acquire a job, but also to get rid of a problematic employee or for an employer to avoid worker’s compensation liability if an employee is hurt. (1:43) A respondent reports that the ability to deflect liability for accidents to people under the influence of drugs and alcohol can remove the disincentive for hiring people with addictions through temporary labor pools. (29:20)

Drug Treatment and Recovery. In drug treatment programs, people in early stages of drug recovery are discouraged from working. One respondent reported turning down several job opportunities because he hadn’t reached the point where the treatment provider allowed him to return to work. (6:56, 6:57)

Returning to work too early can undermine recovery. One respondent reports that he went back to work after completing a drug treatment program; however, because his work patterns were associated with his prior drug use, he found that the work setting

often “triggered” urges to use that he was unsure he could successfully navigate. He quit his job when he decided that it was undermining his efforts to remain drug-free. (18:24)

This is something he recommends other people in early recovery also do.

I really do think an addict should sit still for at least a year before they even try to get in the work world, see cause you can easily get fooled out there, you go out there and you think that you're ready until you get some money. (18:36)

Reliance on methadone is looked down on as a treatment modality. (37:19, 43:92/7:26, 43:94/9:47) The reluctance of employers to hire people on methadone reportedly disproportionately impacts low-skilled workers.

The truth of the matter is that I've had employers say, 'no methadone period.' ... You have doctors, lawyers, executives who ...get their treatment every morning, go to work, work all day long, go home, come back the next morning...but there is a disparity in those folks that don't have the high skill level, that don't have the education, that don't have a specific skill that they can market. (37:19)

Drug Trade. Involvement in the drug trade does not necessarily dampen participation in the workforce. (6:11/43:34, 29:33) Indeed, for one respondent it was his well-paid job as a young man that financed his ventures into the drug trade.

I was doing construction work, getting paid real good money but because I was hard headed and didn't listen, I sold drugs too. And I didn't have to. It was that, being around all my friends and all of my friends sold drugs so I wanted to be like them. But I wasn't completely stupid. I had a job too. Because I couldn't stay in my mother's house and not have a job. (43:42/6:31)

A service provider working with people in recovery, who has his own history of drug use and involvement in the drug trade, reports he maintained employment because he wanted to establish himself.

To legally go and do things you need a job, you need a bank account, you need to establish yourself on paper. ...[Also], I like to work. I have a working background.. I always had a working background. (29:33)

Other respondents report that the ability to earn money from the drug trade does deter some people from working. (43:32/1:66, 22:15/43:24)

They don't want to work because they figure they can make so much money selling drugs. Why do you want to work 40 hours a week make \$200 and something when they could make that a day? (22:15/43:24)

One respondent describes an argument one might have with a young man over the merits of work versus involvement in the drug trade.

'Why should I go and talk to this white man and bite his ass?' That's the way he talk. 'Well bite his ass and get a job.' 'Ah shit, I made \$800 last night!' 'Yeah you made \$800, but how much of that yours? What \$150? And here this guy don't live down here, but you're going around here selling his shit and if you got a problem with your client...you all are bickering, he's all the way out in [outlying counties] and shit but your dumb ass down here about to get shot. Over somebody else's shit.' That's the way I see it. That's the way I put it. (43:32/1:66)

Another respondent indicates that the hopelessness of young people facilitate their disenfranchisement from education and their involvement in the drug trade.

They see their parents struggle, work, go to school and stuff and they still don't get anywhere. So they say, 'Why should I do that when I can be out here in the street and I can make, you know, money selling drugs or doing whatever.' ...it's a lot of hopelessness. (24:5/43:68)

Criminal History

Criminal records among the women expected to transition from welfare to work has emerged as a challenge for city administrators. Because of mandatory minimum sentences for some drug convictions, many of those criminal charges are felonies.

Felony convictions are all over the place. A lot of these women, if they hadn't been caught with the drugs themselves...if it's in your house and somebody is on drugs, you're convicted...that's huge and it's definitely keeping people from work. (33:14)

Five of the respondents who report a criminal record also report having a history of substance abuse. (6, 8:30, 18:25, 21, 29:74). It appears that for several of the respondents the criminal history was a product of their addiction. (8:30, 29:74) "My biggest [challenge] was my active addiction and ... it caused me to have a record, a criminal record as a juvenile and as an adult." (8:30, 29:74) For these individuals, then, the barriers that must be surmounted are compounded. Once the challenges of overcoming a drug addiction are undertaken, the wariness of employers must be confronted.

Respondents report that employers are reluctant to hire people with criminal records, (6:4, 20:16, 21:17, 5:5) particularly in jobs that offer higher wages. (6:12)

"I have a felony. Even though it's 20 years old, over 20 years old, it makes a difference. People can't see past that. And a lot of people don't want to see past it." (8:30) The long-lasting consequence of a criminal history was confirmed by one service provider who also notes it impedes people's capacity to find secure jobs, something he acknowledges are in short-supply for all populations of workers. "You could've been involved in something 20 years ago or 10 years ago...And depending on the offense, it follows you and it prohibits you from getting any kinds of, what we used to call secure jobs." (26:16)

Respondents report that while a criminal history can make it hard to find employment, the outcome can depend somewhat on the charges. (6:12, 26:16, 37:25/37:26) One service provider who helps people with criminal records access employment reports that he finds it more difficult to place a person with a theft charge than an individual with a record for murder or drug involvement (37:25, 37:26).

Criminal records can also limit the fields people can work in. (8:30, 22:7) One respondent, for example, successfully completed a training program to become a certified nursing assistant and finished at the top of her class. She did not follow through with sitting for the state licensing exam when a background check found an old warrant that would make her unable to find employment in that field. (22:7) Some employment sectors are more "forgiving" than other fields. Some of those forgiving employment sectors, however, may offer few opportunities for women.

Criminal backgrounds...knocks [women] out of quote unquote traditional female positions....so now you have this small petite lady, who, there's no way she's going to make it in construction, there's no way she's going to make it in a

warehouse for a long period of time. Where do I put her to work? Do I train her in something that's going to lead to a dead end? Which has happened a lot. (37:42)

Challenges finding employment with a criminal history were less difficult in earlier years, according to one respondent. He reports that when he was released from prison in the 1970s, he had little difficulty finding a job, perhaps because “jobs ... were so plentiful [then]. You could quit a job four times and get another job.” (21:17) There were also more resources in previous years to help people while they were incarcerated.

Back in the 70s, early 80s...you had the programs in jail that ... would help you get into an internship and a city job...Now you have ...too many inmates. ... You have people that ask for it...but resources are limited...you got a jail that holds 3,000 people [with]...7,000 people. (29:80)

A respondent reports that the intervention of social service programs that work to help ex-offenders after their release can help facilitate employment for people with criminal records. Those without such assistance, he reports, may face greater impediments.

If you are working with an agency that helps those doors open for you...that can go in there and represent ..you...[that might work]. But if you are dealing with ... just a straight up [employer that] does a criminal background check, you're done. They're not going to deal with you. (29:35)

The city has embraced a plan to help ex-offenders returning to the city find employment. (32:27, 34:8, 36:3) It has become a city initiative, according to one respondent, [because] “what they're finding is that once a person is released, they're

coming back into the city...so they are recognizing that we've got to do something to find employment for them.” (34:8) As part of the effort, city officials are encouraging businesses to hire ex-offenders (36:3) and the city is financing a transitional jobs program (32:27). A service provider reports that intervening with potential employers must be part of a successful effort to improve employment outcomes and prevent recidivism.

They need to go to work. Whether they have completed their time or whether they are on probation...the employer community ...[needs] to decide 'what am I going to do with all these bodies' that they are now refusing to give jobs to. Forcing them back to their old element. ... And if you keep closing doors on me, than I don't have much choice. I have to go back to where I was. (37:18)

The challenges finding employment with a criminal history can be frustrating, particularly for those who report trying to break from involvement in drug use and/or the drug trade.

It's like kinda of, real disappointing, especially after you go through a whole lot of stuff...in your life and ...you finally get to the point in your life where, you're like... 'I got to try and turn my life around.' And then when you finally decide, decide to stick with turning your life around...it's real hard...you got the record of your past haunt you. (6:4)

Beyond the challenges of finding, and preparing for employment, there is the potential to return to what might be seen as an easier path. One service provider describes working with a young man who faces the temptation to abandon his efforts to return to school and prepare for work.

[I]t's taken constant working with this young man to keep him on the straight and narrow. Keep him going to school, keep him doing things...and not going back out to hang with his peers who [ask him], 'Why are you doing all of this? Why are you working so hard? Why are you going to school, when we can make \$1,500 over the weekend?' (37:43)

Interventions while an individual is incarcerated to smooth the transition back into the community can also prevent people from acquiring another barrier to employment upon their release, homelessness. A respondent that provides transitional housing for homeless people notes that incarcerated people frequently call them seeking assistance for their release.

We get inmates calling us from jail...'I'm getting out.' I have letters in there now, 'I'm getting out'...And the first thing [we ask] is 'Well can't they help you in jail?' [But] jail is not an agency that helps you find housing....they [are] not ...[going to go] out and advocate and look for housing for you. You have to do all that...on your own. (29:81)

If resources were available, a period of incarceration could also offer an opportunity to intervene or provide support to individuals struggling with a substance abuse disorder. In an incident also observed by the researcher, a woman in the study community who was released after a 30-60 day jail sentence quickly overdosed on drugs. While she was incarcerated her tolerance ebbed. As a result, her drug use upon her release had greater consequences than it normally did. A service provider also observed the incident.

[She] didn't get the help she needed in those 2 months, came right out, shot some drugs, then she's spinning in the street like a damn top...running into the walls, and then lays in the puddle of water. She didn't get any help in jail for her drug addiction. Or treatment. Or ...methadone. Or anything to keep her from coming out here the next day shooting up...It's a good opportunity [to intervene], but if you don't have the supportive services to help you, you just come out clean [and with a lower tolerance level]. (29:83)

The researcher is uncertain whether the incident described above resulted in a second period of incarceration or medical treatment for the woman. When last observed by the researcher she was, as described, laying face down in a puddle of water with police officers standing above her.

While some intensive assistance is made available to incarcerated individuals doing a lengthier sentence, (29:82) it seems misguided, even with limited resources, to wait until criminal behavior has reached a high enough threshold before an intervention is made available that might actually reduce future recidivism.

Education

Poor reading skills, illiteracy, and lack of a high school diploma are barriers to employment for residents of the study community and for others throughout the city (8:6, 12:31, 32:3, 28:12, 25:26, 24:3, 20:16, 19:19). One respondent sums it up neatly, "the job market has no mercy on you when you don't have any education or skills. It just doesn't." (24:6)

The lack of education is, according to one respondent, the biggest barrier in the study community "because a lot of people, as well as myself at one point, had dropped out of school." (14:2) Indeed, many of the respondents in the study community did report dropping out of high school (6:41, 11:29, 18:14, 19:13, 21:19) including those who later went back to complete degree requirements or get a GED (8:14, 14:42), and another who was expelled (20:5). One respondent reports that some who have dropped out did so before they had very basic skills in place. "Some people drop out in eighth grade. Before they get a sixth grade reading level." (12:31)

Respondents report that it seems more difficult to get a job without a high school diploma or GED than it has in previous years because employers have increased the educational requirements they are seeking. (2:15, 25:26, 27:20, 31:30, 36:14) This is particularly true, according to one respondent, in jobs that are located in the city, indicating that a potential skills mismatch may also exist. "It's alot of [jobs] out there, ...some of them far and some of them are here. And it's like the one's here in town, [you] got to have a GED, got to have a degree, it seems like the diploma is everything." (2:9)

Another respondent reports that few opportunities exist for people without a high school diploma or GED and that people should not be pushed into the labor market before they complete their education.

Ain't no need to send them out there because most of the jobs require high school diplomas. ... most of [the employers] ain't even going to let you in the door if you don't have a high school diploma. Some of them will. But you ain't got that many. (19:19)

Several respondents argue that employers should not be increasing the education requirements for many jobs as this has served to exclude many capable workers. (8:6, 9:38, 14:40)

A lot of these jobs that we do ... it don't take no rocket science to do it. It truly don't. ... You don't need a degree to do a whole bunch of these jobs out here. They just require it....and when you do that you have people who are very good and appropriate for the job ...fail to be able to access that job. (8:6)

Respondents also report that individuals with less education are at higher risk for losing jobs (8:6, 28:12, 12:31), remaining in low wage positions, (24:3) and having little chance of advancement. (28:12)

It's...much more difficult to get a kid without a high school diploma something beyond ...a 'survival' kind of job...I try to put them in jobs that can lead them to careers...But it's a lot more difficult to place kids, in what I would say, decent, forward moving jobs instead of just manual labor kind of jobs that ...[that] makes them think 'well all I'm good for is assembly line jobs or just labor jobs. I can't see myself beyond this, so this is what I'm going to do.' (30:23)

Another respondent reports that even though she has a high school diploma and a well-paying position, she feels her lack of a college education has kept her from accessing a job she would enjoy. (23:8)

If I could do it all over again I think I would have went straight to college instead of taking any work because now I find it harder...And now I'm in a field I really

don't care for too much but I know it will keep me off [welfare] for one and it pays my bills for now, so that's how I feel. I'm not really happy with it. (23:10)

One consequence of the perceived increased demand for education is an increase in the number of people seeking help to get their GED (34:3, 12:31, 32:21) though one neighborhood-based provider reported fewer people seeking GED assistance from her agency than she had anticipated. (31:10) A respondent that oversees many of the community based organizations that provide services to residents in empowerment zones also reports that they have not seen the demand in those organizations for the literacy help that they had anticipated.

Everyone is saying that education is a barrier to people getting jobs, but for some reason, we haven't had the participation in it. We can all give different reasons...[maybe] folks are embarrassed to come in and say they can't read and write. (34:3)

As employers' demand for a high school diploma or a GED has reportedly increased over recent years, achieving either is becoming more difficult. The GED test has gotten harder in recent years. (34:3, 14:40) And employers have become concerned that a high school diploma offers them little assurance that an individual will have basic skills in place. (32:3) Perhaps in part related to this concern, the city school system has undertaken steps to prevent social promotion; this may result in fewer young people graduating. (32:3)

Access to higher education is available to people in recovery from a substance abuse disorder or those with other disabilities through the state rehabilitative services

agency. (8:45, 18:54) One respondent completed her college degree with assistance from that agency and another respondent plans to do so. (18:45) In both instances the degree is being used, or is planned to be used, to help other individuals achieve recovery from drugs and alcohol abuse. (18:54). Notwithstanding the personal and social value of providing assistance to those who have made the difficult journey from addiction to recovery, and the help they then may offer to others, it is unfortunate that such assistance is restricted to those who must undergo a harrowing journey before they are eligible to receive it.

Discrimination Based on Residence

Employers near the study community are reluctant to hire neighborhood residents. (10:3,10:8, 10:12, 13:7, 13:8, 19:6, 16:5) One respondent reports that when employers see certain addresses on an application, it is likely to end up in the trash. (16:5) One respondent reports that this is likely due to the bad reputation of the neighborhood. “You don't get no respect when you tell [employers] 'Oh, I live down in the projects.’” (13:4)

She further states that employers closer to the study community “think everyone that's in the projects are doing drugs or stealing....” (13:7) A city administrator reports that she would not be surprised if employers discriminated against applicants based on their street address, noting that some people may bear some grudges toward those who are living in public or subsidized housing. (36:7)

The reluctance to hire study community residents may have been earned according to one respondent, but he argues that what was true of one resident of the community cannot be applied to all.

You can't just say 'Come on, you can work for me,' and then you turn your back and your shit gone. So you got to screen the people but everybody is not a crook...you got some legitimate brothers [here] that want to work, that will work, but maybe their hair ain't cut or their appearance ain't [right]. 'Nah. I don't want them working for me.' But you may be surprised, them the ones that will look out for you. (1:31)

Respondents report that because employers' are reluctant to hire residents from their neighborhood, their choices are to seek employment further from the study community (13:8) or lie on job applications by providing a different mailing address. (16:13)

Two respondents report challenging one local employer for their perceived reluctance to hire residents of the study community. (9:63, 10:8) One respondent who applied for a job with the employer numerous times over the years decided to conduct an experiment. She submitted a job application, providing a family member's address instead of her own. She was interviewed and offered a position. She reports that she knew she would be unable to accept the job because she had lied on her application and that would provide them with grounds for firing her. She did, however, use the opportunity to confront them.

I said 'Why did I have to lie to you on an application when I'm living right here in this area where your company is? It's convenient for me, it's convenient for you. (10:3)...I told them I feel [as] though I was being discriminated [against]. ...And once I was in there...[and] they wanted me to take [the job], and I told them, I

said no. This is unfair. ...And nobody, when I ask them why, nobody could explain it to me. (10:8)

One respondent reports that a transitional housing program for men in recovery from substance abuse prohibits the men in the program from spending time in the public housing development (25:12). She argues that is unfair of them to assume that because people spend time in the development or even take a shortcut through the development, that they are seeking drugs. It appears that this prohibition is seen as reinforcing the stigma of the community.

Family Demands

Among the challenges that many residents face in transitioning, or sustaining, employment is ensuring that their family needs are also met. Among the challenges identified by respondents are child care, caring for ill and disabled family members, and managing environmental and family stress.

Child Care. Individuals with children must struggle with accessing child care in order to find and retain employment. Parents that are TANF recipients or exiting TANF cash assistance are eligible for child care vouchers. Child care was described to be a “short-term barrier” by one city administrator as it is an issue more readily solved than other barriers to employment that welfare recipients must overcome. (33:7) Even with access to a voucher, however, some respondents report problems. (19:2, 3:16, 21:36)

One respondent reports experiencing challenges finding child care when his children were very young (19:4) and finding providers who were willing to provide care very early in the morning or until late in the evening though he feels it is easier now than

it was in the early years of welfare reform. (19:2) Another respondent reports that some children in the study community may have special needs, including Attention Deficit Disorder or disabilities related to high levels of lead exposure, that may make finding an appropriate provider challenging. (3:16)

Respondents also report that the local TANF agency can be slow to reimburse some day care providers and that this has caused problems. (3:5, 3:13, 19:4, 20:38) Child care providers who are not being reimbursed by the TANF agency in a timely fashion may refuse services, disrupting participation in job training or work. (19:4, 20:28) One respondent reports that she had provided day care to TANF recipients but stopped because reimbursement took too long.

It's not worth it. You be waiting four or five months to get paid and you done watched their children. But you still have bills to pay and that don't make sense. (20:13)

Respondents also report that residents are concerned over the quality of care their child will receive (5:12, 33:7, 17:4). A service provider notes that many of the women who are leaving welfare for work in the city have never left their child with a stranger before. (33:7) One respondent reports that there is some reluctance to leave their child with a provider because "you don't know them, or you don't know them from whatever, what their life was or is or how it is and all that and how their personality is, [their] attitude, everything." (5:13) Residents, therefore, may be more confident with center-based care. (17:4)

Respondents also report that the cost of child care, even when it is subsidized, creates challenges for residents, particularly those just beginning to stabilize in the workforce. (3:5, 23:4, 9:23)

As soon as they get a job and they make a certain amount of money, it's like, ...right away before they even establish anything they have to come right out of their pocket with like 50% of their expensesit's just hard, they just make it hard....it's like the money that they give you while you're on welfare...that's poverty and then when you get a job or whatever [and] they deduct a percentage from you to help with child care, it's [still]...poverty. (23:4)

Respondents suggest that residents could benefit if child care were more universally available for unemployed people, including for TANF recipients who are not enrolled in a job training program or work. (9:5, 44:96/16:12)

As far as day care for your children is about the hardest thing ever with Social Service. You got to be in something in order to get day care. When I think, 'What if you gave me day care? I can get up off my fat butt everyday and go look for me a job.' (44:96/16:12)

Beyond the question of having child care available for “non-traditional” work hours is the appropriateness of accepting some jobs given the stress to children and the questionable gains to the family. One single father of five young children with limited education and, thus, limited marketability in the labor market, identified jobs that would have required him to have his children in care by 4:30 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. The care

arrangements would only become increasingly complex as the older children reached school age.

You know, I want to work but I mean, you know, I got the children too. So I have to think about them just as well as I think about myself when I'm gonna get up in the morning and I gotta have time to get them ready and myself. (19:4)

The challenges he experienced finding care for his young children very early in the morning may be exacerbated if he is seeking, or feels restricted to, low skilled employment in traditionally male-dominated jobs that typically do not have family-friendly hours. If the only employment he is able to find requires putting five young children in day care by 4:30 to 5:00 in the morning (and up and getting dressed much earlier) for wages that are likely well under the cost of providing the child care, one would wonder if his family might be better off if he did not work and his time was spent instead in activities that would help him to transition to a job with better wages and family friendly hours as his children reach school age.

Two respondents questioned the extent to which child care is a large challenge for residents in the study community. One notes that her friend complains she can't work because she lacks child care, yet she has participated in a number of job training programs while her mother provides care for her children. (16:52) Another reports that while she believes child care is one of the main barriers to employment for some (23:4), she believes that many don't have to worry about it because they live with extended family. (23:13)

Finally, one respondent who reports that he struggled to find day care reports that he has found at least one of his caseworkers to be dismissive of his difficulties finding care. His caseworker has argued that he knows there are resources in the community.

I ...had one [welfare worker tell] me, 'Well I know you know some people in the neighborhood.' I said, 'Well people in the neighborhood trying to do the same thing I'm doing. They got children, they're trying to work, they're trying to get jobs, they're trying to do things too, they have to take care of their children too.'

(19:2)

Ill and Disabled Family Members. Respondents report that caring for ill family members can also impede employment for some residents of the study community.

(17:16, 16:34, 33:10) One respondent notes that some people in the neighborhood have children with handicaps and "it's kind of hard to deal with them, you know, get them settled every day." (17:16) Another respondent reports that she remained unemployed for a period of time to provide care to her great aunt. (16:34)

Providing care to a disabled family member has emerged as an issue for the administrators charged with helping TANF recipients move into the workforce. They have further discovered the need for more resources to help support those families so the parent can enter the workforce.

We have a lot of clients who have children that have major illnesses, health problems where [the client] really needs to be home with the children and we don't have the resources or we're trying to identify them, but so far we're having a

lot of trouble identifying...places that are going to be able to take care of their children. (33:10)

The State has elected to allow parents on TANF cash assistance that are providing care to a disabled family member to count the provision of care as a “work activity” so they remain eligible to receive TANF benefits. (33:10) Allowing such care to count as a work activity, however, simply allows them to retain access to benefits, it does not address whether they will also be exempted from the five year limit on receipt of federal TANF assistance. As it was observed that a large proportion of the city’s welfare recipients who are reaching the five year federal time limit are either in poor health or are taking care of an ill child or an extended family member, (33:10) this is a looming issue. There is, however, some skepticism that the five year time limits imposed for the use of federal resources to benefits will result in termination of assistance to families in the state.

Environmental and Family Stress. Two respondents report that environmental or family stress may present a barrier to employment for some study community residents. One respondent reports that the behavioral problems of children can exacerbate a parent’s stress and the parent’s stress can result in the behavioral problems of children. She notes this dynamic that fuels the problems of children can prevent the parent from maintaining employment. (27:23) Another respondent reports that many of the new entrants into the city’s workforce live in distressed neighborhoods and will need employers to be understanding of the strains families face including community and school violence.

A lot of men and women [who are] going to work with young children...have a lot of issues with the young children...there is community violence, schools are violent, you have things that come up andfamilies [need to] come first...[the employers are] going to feel a lot of it because there is a parent that has to do it all. (32:23)

Poor Health and Disabilities

Some people report that they are in poor health or have not worked for a period of time because of health problems (3:6, 3:24, 3:34, 3:25, 7:46, 13:45, 13:15, 18:45, 20:15) As examples, one respondent left her job temporarily for gall-bladder surgery (3:24) and another respondent reports he lost a number of jobs because of epileptic seizures (18:17)

Substance abuse and the recovery process can also take a toll on the physical health of people and make it difficult to work in the short or long-term according to respondents. (18:45, 21:42, 37:44)

After the first year went by, I went through a lot of changes. I wore Depends. ...It messed the bowels up, messed everything up....If you've been using 30 years, it'll take you 3 or 4 years to get your body straight...[depending on] how much deterioration you've got going through your body. (21:42)

A service provider noted that some people who have had substance abuse problems and others who have never had proper health care may be unable to manage some of the labor-intensive work that are more readily available to those with low skills.

Some of the good jobs, with benefits, pension plans, etc....they can't retain those jobs because some of the men are in poor health because [they] never had health

insurance, [they're] already sick, [and] can't do long physical days.. Their bodies have been through hell. And the most forgiving industry [for people with criminal records], warehouse work, construction, a 45 year old man can't do construction on a regular basis...[particularly someone] who has probably been a substance abuser, I don't know, close to 20 years. He's doing it, and he's made up his mind to do that. But those are the kinds of things that work against them, their bodies will not allow them to [do it] (37:44)

As noted by the respondent above, poor access to health care can result in poor health. One respondent points out that the poor access to health care for workers in the low-wage labor market will take a toll on their ability to be productive workers.

It's inadequate health care, jobs don't want to pay benefits. ...You used to access those services free. Not anymore. You have to be homeless now [to get free care]...to me it's not fair....if you're working a job and let's just say you make \$22,000 a year and then...you have a rent or a mortgage or something that takes one weeks pay, utilities....you got children you got to feed each day, you know. Where is the money left for doctor care, medical, to keep people healthy enough to be able to hold the jobs? (8:46)

The lack of benefits, including health care coverage and sick leave, offered in the low wage labor market may mean that some workers will turn to public assistance to manage a health crisis or even for care that which should be routine. A respondent who took a temporary, unpaid leave of absence for surgery and bed-rest (3:25) and a resident on unpaid maternity leave (13:25/44:112) both turned to TANF cash assistance. This

appears to highlight a mechanism by which the TANF program is meeting the needs not only of some low wage workers, but also their employers.

Mental Health and Learning Disabilities. A city administrator reports that mental health problems (33:8) and learning disabilities (33:44) are among the challenges they have begun to identify among TANF recipients who are expected to transition from welfare to work.

There is a concern that the TANF office lacks a vehicle to identify people with learning disabilities though they embark in some efforts to try and tease it out.

We don't have the capability, we have impressions and our assessments, but we don't test for learning disabilities. We ask questions, try to...pull it out, but even then... I don't think we really have the programs to deal with it. (33:44)

The respondent notes, however, they can refer to the state rehabilitative service agencies and will do so. Ensuring people access to this resource is entirely dependent on the workers' ability to identify this need. Mental health counselors have also been dispatched to work in some offices in the city and are being actively utilized to help people access mental health treatment services. (33:8) In other sites, mental health counselors are not available.

Transportation Problems

Transportation is a barrier to employment for some residents of the study community. (4:2, 20:19, 19:37 17:5, 14:60, 10:22, 10:9, 8:29, 5:42, 5:9) One respondent reports that "transportation is a big, big issue around here..it's jobs out there, ... but they don't [have] the transportation to get there." (4:2) One challenge is that many jobs are

located in areas where there is no public transportation. (4:2, 5:42, 8:29). The long commute to get to jobs in the county may be overly burdensome to some residents (10:9), lots of transfers that may make them late to work, (19:37) and the cost of transportation may be problematic for others (20:19). Some jobs may also require that workers have cars. (5:9)

Respondents indicate that the lack of transportation means that some can't access better jobs in the outlying counties. “[B]usinesses moved out [of the city and you] can't get to better paying jobs because you need a car or have to have money every day to get out there.” (20:19)

A city administrator reports that transportation is a major problem for all residents of the city; for those who commute into the city, there are parking problems and for those with fewer skills, demand is concentrated outside of the city. (36:1) She notes, however, that transportation to bridge the disconnect between where people live and where there are jobs is not the only solution needed. The demand for such transportation bridges is exacerbated, she notes, by the dearth of housing in those areas that low-wage workers can afford.

Investment in public transportation and affordable housing appears to have significantly lagged behind the economic growth of the outlying counties. It would appear, therefore, that the strategies employed to help people access jobs in the county through temporary transportation assistance as part of a welfare-to-work strategy only serves to temporarily mask a rupture that will require a more substantive investment in the public infrastructure.

Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination remains a barrier to employment. (24:32, 9:52) As one respondent reports, "this nation is not color blind, so we got racism, we got a whole lot of things going on here." (24:10) Another respondent has noted that barriers to employment appear to impact White and Black women differently. In particular, she found that White women leaving a drug treatment program encountered far fewer difficulties than Black women.

[There] could be 5 of us that come out of a drug program...and you can be clean for 10 years [and] I can be clean for 10 years and I'm still going to have to go do labor. But the Caucasian can come out and they'll get a job downtown in an office and they'll never know they had a drug problem...And that's a double standard...And the thing about it is you both could have the same qualifications. (9:13)

One respondent who appears to be African-American (though this is not how he describes himself) reports that employers have challenged him when he tells them that he has no recent criminal record. ["They ask] 'Come on now. You haven't been convicted of any felonies, any crimes in the last 7 years?' And to me that's really offensive, that's like trying to call me dishonest. And I'm like, 'I'm not lying. Do a background check and find out.'" (6:38)

One respondent reports that she observed an attractive, light-skinned Black woman receive preferential treatment based on her appearance.

She was just lighter, you know, and I guess that's what they wanted in the office.

...the lady had really told me ...that I was qualified and they wanted to hire me for the position...she didn't actually come out and say the other stuff, but I knew.

(14:32)

One respondent denies that racial discrimination remains an issue. "[P]eople use the race thing...'well I'm Black and I...' you know, give it up because that isn't [it], it's who you know and it's not what color you are anymore, it's past that. It's beyond that. It really is." (23:38)

Two respondents indicate that while discrimination may be inherent in our society, there is one way to navigate it: improving one's education. (24:32, 9:52).

"The only thing I can say that would make it better is for them to educate themselves. ... [The way to deal with discrimination is to] get a good education and do the best you can...that's the key." (24:32) This seems to imply that that the respondents perceive that racial discrimination has a different impact at higher educational levels.

Gender & Age Discrimination

Two respondents report that employers may also be reluctant to hire older workers and (22:4, 4:23) one respondent reports that finding employment may be more difficult for women. (24:32) Gender discrimination may be due, in part, to employers' concern that women who primarily have child care responsibilities will be absent more often. (24:32, 20:6) If employers have encountered women transitioning off of welfare who had problems with child care because of slow reimbursement payments, this perception may have been affirmed.

Competition for Jobs

Respondents report that the increase in the number of Hispanic immigrants in the community has increased competition for jobs. One respondent indicates that he believes that the recent Hispanic immigrants may be better placed to access employment. This is because they appear to have a stronger job referral network than the local Black community (1:18) and because he believes some local politicians may be trying to signal to the Hispanic community that they are responsive to their concerns. (1:18)

One social scientist (Mead, 1986, 1992) argues that disparity in employment outcomes between recent immigrants and young Black men in particular is because recent immigrants are willing to take jobs with lower-wages. A respondent confirmed this assessment, with one important caveat. It is not that recent immigrants are accepting available jobs that study community residents have declined; instead employers responded to the influx of new workers by depressing wages and scaling back benefits. Residents are being “under-bid” for jobs and are essentially being asked to accept less wages and benefits than they have in previous years.

You’re taking less of this and less of that. And the places [that would] give you good health insurance and medical insurance and every daggone thing else at one time, they get someone else that comes through the door [stated with a mimicked Hispanic accent] ‘Well I need a job, I’ve got 5, 6 kids to take care [of], a wife, an aunt, a grandmother....’ When [the employer says] ‘Well we can’t give you the whole benefit, we can only do that’ [They say] ‘I’ll take it!’ Okay...that knocks a person down that was there for the full thing. (25:37)

Housing Problems

A city administrator reports that unstable housing has emerged as a barrier to employment for many of the welfare recipients in the city that are expected to transition to employment. Some TANF recipients move frequently, live in dangerous environments, or are in over-crowded living situations. (33:1) As a result, some are unable to successfully participate in welfare-to-work activities or transition into the workforce because of the inherent lack of stability in their homes. (33:2)

On the extreme end of the continuum of housing problems is homelessness. A service provider working in a transitional housing program for homeless men reports that people experiencing homelessness require a stable foundation before they are able to transition into employment even if they have no other barriers to employment.

[They] need to get8 hours of sleep. They need to shower. They need to eat. They need to rest. ..it's difficult to sustain a job for 8 hours a day and not have a place to lay your head...even if you live in a shelter [or] work from a shelter, you're living on their time. I mean, the shelters, some of them would have you out there at 6 in the morning and won't let you in until 6 in the evening...if you're working a night time job, you won't be able to get in, you won't have a place to stay...and if your [job] schedule change but the schedules of the shelter don't change...that can throw you off. ...You need a constant, steady, sheltered environment...that allows you to adjust your hours as you need to. (29:22)

Unfortunately, homelessness is not easily solved according to a city administrator who reports a shortage of subsidized housing that can offer a stable foundation.

When someone comes in and says they're homeless it's very difficult for us to find the resources, certainly the shelters, but then to actually get them into long term housing...you can't necessarily get [them] into Section 8 [subsidized housing] you have to go through a lot of steps and it could be a long period of time...it's not like you can just stick them into subsidized housing quickly. (33:2)

While the lack of affordable housing, or any housing, can be de-stabilizing and impede people's ability to seek or sustain employment, two respondents posit that the public housing development may deter some from working. Certainly not unique to public housing residents or low-income families, one respondent's concern is that too many residents allow non-working adults and family members to reside with them without contributing to the rent. He reports "[t]hat's an enabler. I mean if I could go over there and live with my mother, why would I go out and try to find somewhere to live? Or [get] a job?" (18:23)

Another respondent observes that the rental policies that require residents to pay 30% of their income for rent may mean that some are less motivated to work, however, she argues, the benefits outweigh any disincentive.

If it weren't for subsidized housing they wouldn't be able to make it all, it's a real help, otherwise they'd be paying a lot of money they couldn't afford, then they'd be overcrowded and that would be a whole other can of worms. (24:35)

Disinterest in Work

Respondents indicate that some residents in the study community simply don't want to work (22:2, 20:2, 18:61, 18:31, 17:13, 13:33, 1:2, 1:24, 12:4) Other respondents

indicate that there is a mix of those who want to work along with those who don't. (3:20, 13:33) "[S]ome of them don't want to work if somebody brung a job and carried it right there on the corner....then you got some men that, you know, want to work and some that don't." (13:33) One reason, according to one respondent, is that they can meet their needs without working, appearing to refer in particular to those with addictions. "[B]asically ... the jobs right there and they don't want to work. That's what I'm looking at. They can always scrape up \$10 and do what they want to do...or they not trying, they want someone to do it for them." (12:4)

Some respondents indicate that some study community residents prefer not to work because they are lazy. (2:27, 24:27, 20:25) "I'm not going to lie, I'm going to be point out blank. It's some lazy ass people around here. Instead of them wanting to get out and try and get a job...[and] they can get a job because they got their high school diploma and stuff, they would rather sit back and wait for welfare." (2:27)

Another respondent indicates that people may become lazy as a result of experiences of frustration and discouragement. (24:27) As the respondent described how "laziness" might set in, it occurred to the researcher that the manifestation of "laziness" might look very much like "depression." The researcher thus attempted to probe to determine if what might be occurring with some women who are "becoming lazy" and the possibility that there may be some depression. It may also be a manifestation of learned helplessness as the respondent reported that some may feel that "no matter what I do nothing is going to [work] for me." (24:27) It was clear, however, that this perception

was suggested by the researcher through interaction and did not emerge without being solicited.

Fear

Respondents report that some people who are expected to transition from TANF cash assistance are afraid to do so. There is a concern that the benefits expire too quickly (20:7) and that they will not be able to manage the transition. (20:7, 20:2, 9:19)

They don't feel safe, so their security is lying on Social Services because they know they got food stamps, they know they got money to pay the rent and they know the kids are going to be able to go to the doctor. ...I think their insecurity comes in when you don't know how [their] family is going to fare. (9:8)

She also reports that some people are afraid of being rejected when they try to enter the workforce and they can become easily intimidated. (9:24) Another respondent also reports that some are actually afraid of a successful transition to work and what will be required of them in the workplace. (7:32) "They're afraid of the challenges or even the struggles that going out every day to work [will entail]." (7:5) As a result, he reports, some are attempting to remain in the world that is known to them and are trying to transition not from TANF to work but from TANF to SSI.

Inadequate Jobs

Among the issues that may undermine work participation are dissatisfaction with available job opportunities. This includes the perception that the jobs that are available to residents are low-paying, offer little chance of advancement, and are not fulfilling.

Low Wages. Respondents report that some jobs residents are moving into offer inadequate wages. (9:5, 7:6, 8:11, 27:18, 34:13) One respondent reports that the minimum wage needs to be changed, because it's "unrealistic to support families...when it's so low it makes it more appealing to stay on welfare." (27:18) Another respondent reports that it appears that wages for workers have not advanced over recent years.

You basically almost working on the same scale as you did 20 years ago, but they talk about inflation. It's inflation for them, but it's [not] inflation when it comes down to you asking for more pay. (9:5)

One respondent indicates that many of the women who are transitioning off welfare and into the workforce aren't earning a wage sufficient to allow them to care for their family, however, it's typically all their skills will command. "It's a catch 22. Very often they have very limited work experience. ...They need a job, we get them a job, but they're not high paying jobs because they don't have experience." (34:13)

One administrator respondent reported that she believed efforts to increase the minimum wage or demanding living wage salaries will mean that low-skilled and unskilled workers will be unable to find employment.

You have grassroots organizations that sometimes baffle me because they keep pushing for upping the minimum wage and creating you know livable wage jobs and that's all well but you can't put low skilled or unskilled people, you can't expect employers, I don't think, to employ them....there has to be a [middle road] between the two...you have to be realistic about what the market is going to

bear...And we can't burden employers with the whole educational system. You have to find where we can help employers and make a difference. (32:21)

A service provider argued, however, that low-skilled and unskilled positions should also pay living wages as those workers are fulfilling necessary jobs in our society.

[People need to earn] a livable wage that allows them to take care of themselves and their family. People deserve that. The country needs low skilled workers too and it doesn't make sense to have that kind of disparity. (27:26)

Respondents argue that when people receive inadequate wages, they may be more likely to remain on welfare, steal from their employer, (9:5) supplement their income from involvement in the drug trade, (7:6) or take on a second job that may mean less time with their children. "Something is going to be lacking, you can't be everywhere all at once...and usually it's within the family system." (8:11)

Limited Opportunities for Advancement. One respondent indicated that people are transitioning into jobs that they aren't necessarily interested in and, she notes, with little opportunity for advancement. (9:20) However, two respondents did report receiving promotions, offering evidence of social mobility. One moved into a supervisory role (16:55) and another from a welfare placement to a permanent position. (17:33) One respondent argues that entry level positions can eventually lead to better jobs and if people could look at the long term they might see how those jobs might ultimately benefit them (24:37, 27:10)

Another respondent reports that the reason some people aren't able to advance in their job is there is no fluidity—older people aren't able to retire because they lack the

means, so newer workers are essentially stuck in entry-level positions with no opportunity for advancement. (9:27) A city administrator noted that generating fluidity among low-skilled, low-wage workers is one of the goals for the WIA program. They are focusing on building career ladders from entry level positions, creating trajectories to better jobs that also have the benefit of opening up entry level positions (32:19, 32:5)

Unsatisfying Jobs. Respondents report a desire for jobs that are personally satisfying. One respondent reports that people want jobs to be challenging and interesting, they are tired of working in what amounts to a dead end position. She states, in the “average job, there's no advancement, so there's no challenge, you go in you do your job.” (9:15) This can dampen interest in employment.

That's a lot of reasons why they won't come out and won't do nothing. Because they're tired of working in warehouses.[They] want to go downtown, if there's work in the mail room, I want to go downtown and work in that mailroom. (9:15)

Another respondent reports his greatest job satisfaction came from a job in which he felt he was making a contribution beyond physical labor.

It wasn't like just manual labor...It was worthwhile to me, like, I'm not just using muscle. I'm thinking about what I'm doing. And I got somebody that's going to come behind me and check it. That, a fulfilling job makes you feel good. You ain't just moving this box to here. That's like, shit an animal can move that. [I prefer] something that you feel, within yourself, you know what I mean? (1:79)

Job Retention

Some of the same challenges that make it difficult for people to find jobs make it difficult for people to maintain them. There are, however, challenges that respondents mentioned that seemed particular to undermining job retention. One of the issues that arise on the job is interpersonal conflict.

Interpersonal Conflicts. Several respondents reported that they left jobs due to a conflict with their boss. (2:37, 2:77, 20:11, 20:12, 1311, 21:23) One respondent reported losing two jobs because she got frustrated with her employers. In one instance, she reports, she liked her job "but me and my boss had a conflict. Not a fight or nothing, but some words. ... He said something I didn't like so I just walked out." (2:37)

One respondent noted that he observed a number of people losing employment because they weren't able to manage their frustration with their supervisor.

Some of them have their ways where their supervisor says something to them and they want to get smart with them or 'You can't tell me what to do,' or something like that...And like the supervisor say 'Well hey, if you don't want to do your job, leave now' 'Well, hey no problem. I'll go!' And they just leave, you know...instead of them trying to agree or trying to work things out with them, they just take it upon themselves to leave. (11:19)

Two respondents reported attempting to intervene with co-workers to help them maintain employment.

There's a lot of people that have a ...strong head...lose their temper, have a very quick temper and can't take anything like that. They don't think or react on those

situations the way that I would...I have seen some people and I'm like, 'Nah man don't do that. Go down and talk to the man's supervisor. You don't have to get smart...it's not worth you losing your job just for a confrontation.'...'Nah man I do this, I mean hey because I don't got to have this job' 'Hey that's on you. I want mine..If that 's what you want to do, go ahead.' (11:21)

Another respondent worked in a managerial position. She too had intervened to try and improve a worker's ability to work with others. This required intervening with the problem employee and the employee's co-workers. She was successful but she noted, it required a lot of effort.

I used to talk to her all the time, 'change your attitude.' ...And now ... she still got an attitude, she [just] doesn't show it. And like I told her, it's a chance. ... I talked to her every day. ... Her attitude didn't go anywhere..... She learned to hide it more. (16:41)

In another instance, she didn't make the investment to try and retain a worker who had a poor attitude toward customers. She allowed the employee to remain only during a crunch period, then she let her go. "I don't know, they just don't be thinking I guess half the time that they can't be fired, or this person really need me, so they're not going to let that go. You can't think like that." (16:45)

One respondent who is often accused of having a "confrontational personality" explains that it is not that she wants to create problems but that she wants to understand what she is doing.

In the professional world people want to say the cup is red and that is what the cup is going to be. But you looking at that cup and you see that cup is purple...that cup is not going to be red for me, it's going to be purple because my eyeball says it's purple. So ... you need to make me [understand] why I need to have this cup red and that presents problems and people say that's confrontational. (8:33)

External Stressors. Other respondents report that the personal lives of workers can undermine retention. One respondent indicated that even though the job training program she operates may have intervened to help build job skills, the young people her organization serves still have unstable lives that can undermine their capacity to work.

They still don't know where they're going to sleep that night...I can't tell you how many kids have gone home and their paychecks are gone, food is out of the fridge, girlfriend is still trouble...It's almost never can they do the job, it's one in a million kids that I've seen unwilling to work, unwilling to try, unwilling to learn new things. It's how to you manage your life from the time you leave your supervisor to the time you meet your supervisor the next morning. (30:15)

Other stressors that can undermine retention include the demands placed on new workers by their partners, wives, girlfriends, and husbands, who may complain about their long hours. (37:41).

Fear and Unaddressed Issues. One respondent indicated that fear can undermine job retention because of the uncertainty that arises when individuals are adjusting to employment, new environments, and expectations.

You will get them employed and then they have an attack. Panic or it might be fear or whatever, because they just went to work. They real happy initially...and then all of a sudden it's 'I can't stand this job.' It's not even the job...It's not even them. It's you. Because they don't know what's next. (7:32)

He further noted that unresolved issues that were not caught by a helping agent could arise that will ultimately undermine employment. By failing to address underlying issues even good jobs that offer decent wages will be lost.

[A person] can't be out there smoking blunts for 4 years, ...be beat up by her boyfriend, ... have some rape in her history, ...[no] GED and ... [read] at a 3rd grade level [and retain employment]. You [can] get them a job making \$9.88 an hour...[and] then ... wonder why the retention is not there. [It's because] there are other issues. (7:32)

Poor Problem-Solving. One respondent indicated that poor problem-solving skills are among the issues that new workers have to overcome in order to retain employment.

Their kids gets sick and these tend not to be people with good problem solving skills...so very often the response to problems they encounter isn't to try to unravel the problem and see what can be done or anticipate the problem..It's just do nothing in a sense, they become very passive and ... stay [at] home with the kid but they don't call the employer or they don't try to arrange alternative child care or they don't problem solve in a job appropriate way...And they lose positions or they mouth off to their supervisor who says something to them in an effort to correct them...there's just so many ways cause they just don't have those kinds of

problem solving skills and interpersonal skills sometimes to negotiate the workplace successfully. (35:4)

Individual Responsibility. Other respondents blamed those who are unable to hold on to jobs. One respondent indicates that people may start to call in sick because they're lazy, stating that "it's up to them to hold on to the jobs." (12:30) He did indicate, however, that some with poor skills, for example, those who lack a high school diploma or have lower reading skills than newer workers, may get pushed out of jobs. (12:32) Another respondent reports that only those who are laid off from work are blameless. "They're stupid if they can't keep jobs. Unless they get laid off, that's the only way." (15:29)

One respondent reports that people may have trouble retaining employment because they have a poor work ethic and they call in sick frequently. However, she also recognizes that the same challenges that make it hard for people to find employment, such as a lack of child care or transportation, also make it hard for them to maintain jobs. (24:38)

Another respondent counters that residents are not sabotaging their employment but are instead striving to hang on to them because they know they are difficult to come by.

When they get [jobs], they hold on to them...you got a lot of McDonalds and Burger King workers here. And they hold on to them cause they know times be hard. They know it's hard. And they're trying to find a little better,

but they're holding...on to what they got until they can get a little bit better.

(10:19).

Improving Retention. Respondents report that helping people retain jobs should be a primary focus of job training and preparation programs and is a more difficult task than placing people in employment. One factor is ensuring that they have the skills to retain employment before they access a job and that needed supports are in place that can help them resolve problems.

I can get anybody a job, it's having the skills to keep the job is key, and part of that key is the literacy, part of the key is making sure that the person that I put through substance abuse treatment have continued treatment...remains in recovery and continues. (37:3)

A service provider reports that one employer who has hired many entry-level workers off the TANF rolls has really embraced the need to do more to promote retention and to build the skill set of new workers. This effort is rooted in two observations; first, that they were losing a good number of workers after only thirty days and second, that it was the entry-level workers that had the greatest contact with their customers. A customer's positive or negative assessment of how they were treated by those entry-level workers had consequences for repeat business. (32:18) This same respondent noted that she sees the function of WIA funds to begin to build the bridge, meeting the needs of both the employers and customers.

One respondent reports that it is important that job preparation and training for young adults not be visualized as a "one time" intervention, but as a beginning. There

will be issues that will arise on and off the worksite and many new job entrants will need support that will help them resolve those issues and retain employment. (30:26)

She further notes that it is the employers that begin to offer the supports that will help their workers succeed and retain employment that will reap benefits. "The employer who...starts providing that kind of support are the ones that they're going to have a healthy, long, productive lasting workforce in 2010." (30:31)

Compound Barriers

It is important to note that most of the challenges that impede employment do not exist in isolation. Instead many people have multiple barriers to employment. As one respondent notes, "when I say someone has a housing barrier, they probably don't just have a housing barrier, they have housing, substance abuse, and mental health [barrier]." (33:18) She further notes a concentration of people with multiple barriers among TANF recipients who are nearing a 24 month stay on TANF cash assistance. (33:17)

A service provider serving TANF recipients in recovery from substance abuse reports that the women she serves have an array of challenges beyond their addiction, including the absence of marketable skills, criminal records due to their drug habit, and "very few...are in a housing situation that would be conducive to work." (35:2).

There are multiple barriers and substance abuse, while it gets identified as the primary barrier for many of these families, you can deal with that but you still don't have an employable individual. (35:3)

She notes that many of these women experienced significant challenges in their transition to work even with the rare intensive and service-rich interventions they were able to provide as part of a demonstration project. (35:9)

Respondents providing services to residents of the study community and disadvantaged people in the city report that the challenges faced by the people they are serving appear to have increased in recent years. One respondent reports that several years ago, they were serving a population that was more prepared to enter the workforce.

We were getting the cream of the crops....folks were coming in that were displaced...had some skills, ...were hungry for ...work..., we're now getting ...folks that have to be coached into coming in...or they have finally reached the point where 'I guess I better do something' And it takes longer to condition them for work. It takes...longer to do the education piece. It takes longer with the social skills piece. So you're spending more time with that individual to get a result that you may have gotten very fast from some others. (37:35)

Responding to Challenges and Opportunities

Respondents are actively engaged in attempting to address the employment challenges that impede their participation in the labor market. There are a number of resources and sources of motivation that compel residents to continue to strive despite those challenges. Residents do have social networks that are strongly relied on to find employment. Temporary employment agencies provide opportunities to residents, particularly those with significant barriers to employment, however, temporary employment can also be constraining.

Addressing Barriers

Respondents report various ways that residents can address barriers to employment. Respondents suggest that residents can navigate around some barriers, for example, residents facing discrimination based on residence can use a different address on applications (16:39) and some drug users can stop using long enough to pass drug screening tests. (9:2) Residents can also build other assets to improve employability. For example, improving one's education was suggested as an avenue to overcome racial discrimination. (24:39, 9:52)

Residents may also try to remediate obstacles to employment, for example, by participating in job training or trying to get their GED. This can be challenging in and of itself. One respondent, for example, describes her response to the GED test. "I looked at the test, shoosh....240 questions plus an essay which you have to have 500 words in it. It's going to be a kicker. But I'm going to try to deal with it though." (2:100)

Some report they just keep persevering and keeping up hope. "I ride my bike, fill out applications, chain my bike up outside. Fill out applications, then go to the next place, then go to the next one. I say someone is bound to call me." (11:33)

Other respondents indicated that some people respond to barriers to employment by giving up. (5:10, 17:25, 6:8) "[E]verybody's not strong. ...Cause you got some that don't let, don't let no obstacle stop them. Then you got them that wants obstacles to stop them." (21:33) Another respondent also describes how a friend with a lengthy criminal history managed to persevere and finally find work, though he notes many others would have given up. "They let that barrier stop them. Instead of trying to go ...through

different...avenues to find jobs somewhere else, they just let that little barrier [stop them].

(6:8)

The consequence of being overwhelmed by the challenges that must be overcome before accessing employment can also lead to backsliding, according to some respondents. Specifically, concern was expressed for those in early stages of recovery from drug or alcohol abuse. Unprepared for the stress of looking for work, or for encountering multiple rejections when they try and find work, they are susceptible to relapse and potentially returning to drug use or participation in the drug trade (10:30, 6:6). Similarly, for those with a criminal history, the challenge of moving into employment may lead them to return to old patterns.

It depends on the individual, because a lot of people let that barrier be a setback to them, and they be like 'Oh, well I tried.' So they go back to doing the wrong thing that they was doing, instead of, instead of keeping at, keeping at that decision to do good, and to do better, and go forward, go forward instead of going backward. They let that barrier hinder them, and they just ...go backwards and start doing wrong again. (6:6)

Respondents report that addressing barriers to employment, taking advantage of opportunities, and succeeding depends on the individual, not the sources of assistance that are provided. "See it's up to them. They're going to have to help themselves out first....I would say opportunity or not you got to try" (12:9) Referrals can be made to treatment, but following up depends on them (32:39). A service provider reports that some may be motivated when they enter a crisis situation (27:4) or may come to realize

their current path is not working for them –though she still thinks it depends on their motivation. (27:8).

Finally, respondents report efforts to dismantle barriers for the residents of the community as a whole. This includes efforts to challenge the stigma of relying on methadone as a treatment modality and outreach to employers to encourage them to employ residents of the study community.

Strengthening Resolve and Sources of Resilience

Respondents who report that they are working to persevere and overcome barriers despite encountering challenges along the way report various resources and sources of motivation that they draw upon.

Dreams, Goals and Aspirations. For some, their motivation is rooted in their personal aspirations. One respondent indicated that her aspirations are for her children. “I’m ...just trying to maintain...[s]o my children get to college and move on.” (16:47) An individual in recovery reported that his goal is to help others in his community achieve sobriety by becoming a substance abuse counselor.

I got a whole lot of plans...I know if I try hard enough, I could make a difference, I know I can. I just believe that I can and I know I can. ...I don't have the slightest idea right now [how] but I'm going to keep working on it, and it's going to come. (18:56)

Respondents also expressed aspirations to complete or improve their education (19:31, 2:12, 2:83, 2:61), moving into new careers, including computer science, (23:11) nursing, (22:21) opening a day care center, (16:38) or opening one’s own business. “One

day I want to own my business....the way I look at it, ...not too many people keep [hard copies] anymore, everything [is] on the computer and sometimes computers break down and I want to be that guy that comes fix it.” (6:6)

Wanting more was a source of resolve for other respondents. Prior to changes in welfare that required work participation, one respondent volunteered to participate in community work experience because “I wanted to do something beside sitting home...waiting for a check every month.” (14:26) Changes in welfare rules that required work participation required another respondent to periodically stop working toward her college degree, she continued, however, slowly and deliberately until she graduated.

I went through all of the barriers I mean, I went, like when I was going to school [full time], they said, ‘Well now you have to work so many hours...and if you don't work so many hours we're going to cut your benefits.’ So that means I went to school off and on for years until I finally finished. ... But I didn't give up and I knew that you had to keep on going. Because if you don't, you get stuck. You just get stuck in that way of life and that's how your life will be. (24:49)

Another respondent reported that once he got sober, he wanted what others had. “Once you get clean and sober, you're going to want a job, you're going to want nice things, you're going to want to go and do things. You want a house, you want furnishings, you want things that people normally want.” (18:11)

Faith. Faith is described as a source of strength and motivation for several respondents. Three respondents indicated their faith has been instrumental in their recovery from addiction (21:42, 6:21, 9:45)

I even went to one of those programs that offered this and that, but that didn't touch it. What touched me was God touched me. When I was in the hospital in the ICU. And I asked him, 'Show me and give me strength and show me the way.' (21:42)

Another respondent indicates that all challenges are navigable with faith. (6:8, 6:21) He reports, "there's nothing you can't do with Jesus Christ." (6:21)

[F]ollowing God's will, makes me want to be a productive member of society and get a job and pay taxes and take care of my daughter and help out in the community...if you study the word the way you should, the way you're supposed to, yeah, it makes you want to do all that. (6:37)

Seeing Progress. Respondents also report the reinforcing benefit of "small successes" that demonstrates they are making progress. (7:32, 14:42, 7:34, 14:2, 30:33) As an example, one respondent reports that she tried several times before finally passing the GED exam, though she failed, each time she saw progress.

Each time I took it, I did score higher and higher ... I could see there was a progress, ... I guess if I had stayed the same or lost a couple of points I think I probably would have got discouraged. (14:42)

Defined Hurdles. Being told that she could not access employment without a GED has strengthened the resolve of one respondent to complete her education and, indeed, she expressed a belief that the requirement helps promote further education among people. "Every time they tell me that [I need a GED]...gives me an urge to go out there and do what I got to do." (2:68).

Avoiding Negative Consequences. Avoiding incarceration was reportedly a source of resolve for two respondents. (1:42, 6:5) “It was for a misdemeanor drug charge, and when I came home, I said, I would never, I didn’t want nobody ever to tell me when to eat, when to sleep, when to turn the lights out and when to open the door for me again.” (6:5)

Another respondent reports he manages conflict in the workplace because he knows there are no alternatives should he lose his job. “I know there’s no way for me to make money if I don’t work. I can’t get what I need if I don’t get out there and get it myself.” (11:23)

Families and Friends. Another source of resolve for respondents was being able to do more for their families. Two respondents noted that the birth of their children represented an important shift in their life, orienting them to try and do more or do better. (6:33, 21:9) “I really didn’t find nothing permanent in my life until my daughter came. And when she came, it changed my view on life...I wanted to make sure she had things, that she would be able to go to school.” [21:9] One respondent reported that he needs to be a role model for his teen-age sons. “I’m not giving up, I can’t give up. I got to set an example for these two boys that’s men. And I ain’t, no, I can’t give up, I wouldn’t handle it like that. ...if [this job] don’t work, go somewhere else.” (1:37)

The support of family can serve as a resource for people who are overcoming barriers to employment. “I ran into the barriers ... but I found a way, I found a way, [and] I had a lot of help from my family.” (24:49)

Realizing that he lacked other people in his life, spurred one respondent on to make a change.

I was a drug addict for 34 years and never, ever quit. Until now. ... I just got tired. ...I decided I got to do something. It was on Valentines day, I had money, I didn't have no girlfriend, I couldn't buy no Valentine's candy for nobody, because of my using. Nobody wanted to be around me. ...Not even my family. I mean, I was like a bum but I worked all the time. ... And I said, now something's wrong here. This picture just ain't right, you know. I said, well today I'm going to get me some help... I went into recovery and I've been there ever since [18 months]. (18:51)

Opportunities: Social Networks/Referrals

Respondents report that referrals and social networks are the most effective way to find employment. (6:24, 1:12, 4:20). One respondent asked her mother to inquire about a job with her employer and the respondent had an interview the next day; (3:23) two other respondents report finding jobs through family members (1:12, 4:20) and another through her next door neighbor. (22:19). One respondent speculates that half of the employed residents probably got a job through a social network. (23:8) Another suggests that word of mouth or referrals was the predominant way people in the study community got jobs.

Either word of mouth or they might have known somebody who was working here and got the job. It's like you gotta know somebody enough to get something. And it shouldn't be like that. It should be...a sign or something in the newspaper saying 'We're now hiring, ...inquire within.' (2:65)

One respondent reports that he was beginning a job that night that he got through his cousin, (1:12) at a place he unsuccessfully applied to for employment before. (1:19) He reports that his cousin “put me down. Now I can go work tonight...that's how you do it.” (1:19) He further noted that he, in turn, will try and get one of his friends employed. “Because he do got something on the ball...I ain't going to...take somebody that...Make me look bad. Find your own buddy to get you in.” (1:30) He notes that one of the risks of helping people in your social network find jobs is that it could reflect poorly on him if he refers someone who does not work out. “If I'm working and I feel like I can get you where I'm at, I'm not going to take you if I don't think you're going to stay, don't get one paycheck and roll out. Cause then that's going to make me look bad.” (1:58)

Because employees are reluctant to refer someone who will not do a good job to an employer, the “referral network” might also serve as a screening tool for employers, providing greater assurance than relying on a “cold call” from someone off the street. Further, if a worker is performing well there may be greater confidence that the people he recommends will also perform well. A respondent reports that having a referral from an employee of the work site works better than filling out applications.

Basically, in my area it's word of mouth and who you know. If they already work there and the employer thinks they're nice workers, [then they can say] 'Well, look, I got a friend, he'll be here every day.' Bam! You in. ...This works better than going, filling out [an] application. (1:50)

Another respondent working in a fast food restaurant noted that it wasn't difficult to get his job [that he's now held for nine years] because he had "inside help." "I knew somebody on the inside, which was my niece. And that's how I got in through her." (4:24) He indicates, however, that it might not have been possible without this connection. Because of this he's trying to hold on to the job.

See that's the only way that I got in there...And my brother also, that's how we got in there...I say to myself 'hold on to this,' because it's really hard out there, it's hard, it really is hard. (4:20)

There are those who lack the social networks who may feel they are locked out of jobs, as old pathways to employment seem less effective. (10:39, 2:65)

It seems like it's all on who you know. It's like a little game. When I was working, I would go out, fill out an application and I'd find a job. And now you go out, you want a job, you can't just go and fill out an application to get a job. You got to know somebody that's in that place that is in there, has some seniority and that goes through a lot of red tape to get you where you want to go...I think one out of 50 may go in and fill out an application and get on a job. (10:39)

The job search and job placement agency may fulfill the role of a social network in helping those without such connections to find employment. A potential perverse outcome of service agencies functioning in this role is that it may weaken the existing networks that already exist. It may further distance the applicant from a potential employer if referrals for employment become the exclusive domain of job search and job placement agencies.

Enabling and Constraining: Temporary Employment

Temporary jobs can lead to permanent positions (23:36, 24:42, 27:13, 8:27, 29:17, 5:32, 20:19, 16:19, 25:18, 6:45, 11:3) One respondent notes that "I know a lot of people that go through it to get their job. It's pretty good. It's good." (16:19) In one incident described to the researcher, a respondent who performed very well on a temporary employment assignment was not only offered a permanent position but significant support, including the provision of a car he would be expected to pay off, so he could get back and forth to job sites. (6:45)

Respondents note that it appears that some employers are actually using temporary employment agencies to screen potential workers. (29:17, 32:36)

It's testing the milk before you get the whole cow. If the milk is good, I'm gonna buy the cow...A lot of your big agencies and companies now don't hire but through services. ...that's how they pick their people. They invest thousands of dollars into hiring someone with benefits and so on and everything and getting them in the union. [Using temps] ...is a little bit of money compared to what you're going to lose if the employee gets there, start using drugs, gets hurt, he sues...time off, miss[ed] work, productivity and so forth. [By hiring him as a temporary first]...I could watch his attentiveness, ...see if he comes to work,...if he misses days, [if] he is going to be a problem. I can find out in that time. (29:17)

One respondent indicated that using temporary agencies to screen potential workers makes sense for employers.

You got to understand, you got to get work done on the job too. You can't have the person come in 2 or 3 days and gone 2 days....yeah, some people don't have extra hoops [to get into the job by being tested first as a temporary worker] and some people do. But some people need it, cause some people go one or two days then they're gone. And then employers' got to go all out and try to hire somebody else again ... Sometimes it makes sense. (19:15)

Another respondent also indicates that taking on temporary employees might be a step that employers take before making a commitment to bringing permanent staff on board during a tenuous economic recovery. The temporary staff may become permanent employees should they, and the business, perform well.

They will bring in people through a staffing agency on a part time or can even be a full time contractual basis just because you have the need, the business is there, it's growing, you're not sure if you [can] support a full time employee and benefits, so you don't have to pay the benefits, you pay a little more to get this person in and they have a three month contract and at that time you're assessing the individual and you are also looking at [whether] we can support this and often they will convert to a full time position...they are intermediaries, they are one of the intermediaries. (32:36)

Because employers are not committed to workers hired on through temporary agencies they may be more willing to take a chance on people with more significant barriers to employment, for example, those with a criminal history. It can, therefore, serve as low-threshold employment.

[When you] come home from jail, a lot of jobs not going to hire you. If you got a reading problem, a lot of jobs not gonna to hire you....you can go to a temp agency, they just want you to work that day and if they get certain information from you when you go file for the application...it's just different then a regular job. (20:14)

It appears that some temporary employment agencies are part of efforts to help people work toward accessing permanent positions. One respondent reports that one temporary employment agency “look(s) for the jobs for you and that makes you a temp for that set period and if you're a good worker and all that, then that job would accept you to be permanent.” (5:32) A service provider described her organization’s partnership with a temporary employment agency as part of a stepping stone to help people move into permanent employment.

They're letting them do their 90 day probationary period...as a temp through the temp agency. And after they've satisfied that 90 days in good standing then usually they can move them into the same position with that a company for full time employment as a permanent employee. ...They've been pretty supportive of our efforts...and have been kind of understanding about some of the challenges that our graduates are facing. (30:3)

Respondents also report that some people may be content to remain a temporary employee. Among the benefits is the ability to choose on a daily basis whether or not to go to work. "I guess they feel as they need the money, they can get up and go to work for that day. And if they don't feel like doing it, they won't....that might work for some

folks." (20:14) Another benefit, this respondent further notes, is that it helps some people overcome the transportation problem in addition to providing daily pay. "What I like about it is that you work the same day, and someone pay you the same day...And then they have transportation, pick you up in a certain spot and drop you off. I think that's nice." (20:14)

One respondent reports he worked for many years as a single man through temporary employment agencies and it worked for him. Now, as a single father, it is a decision he regrets.

It's not that much work to get into a temp agency to work. As long as you get there everyday and do your work you're okay. But then you get things like as far as getting older, you need benefits and different things....I went through the temp agencies but now if I had been thinking about it a little bit more, I would have tried to get me into a permanent job and maybe I'd been built up by now. Maybe I'd have a nice pay and have benefits and everything by now. But through the temp agencies, you not going to get it like that. So that's just years that you, doing temporary jobs that's not really moving you nowhere. You're not moving up, you're not moving nowhere. I mean some people don't think about that when they're young. (19:15)

One respondent indicates that while temporary employment can lead to employment for some, some agencies actively function to prevent temporary assignments from becoming permanent positions, while making a substantial profit from the workers' labor.

[Businesses] use the temporary agency for a job that's [typically] \$9/hour ... plus ... benefits, 40 work week. The employer goes through the temporary agency, no more benefits being paid out, that's less money out of the employers' pockets. Then the temporary agency hires you, but they hire you at minimum wage. So they're taking half of that salary that's supposed to be for their services. And you still making minimum wage, yet you have to sign a contract that states you can't accept full time employment in six months, a year, usually it's six months or a year. ...Whether that employer wants you or not...So there's an issue of control there.. It's not like it's bridging for this person to get full time employment, secure it and keep it. It's not doing it. (8:27)

Respondents express other concerns about temporary employment. It reportedly leads to a loss of permanent positions community-wide, (8:27) doesn't lead to careers or provide room for employment growth, (7:29) and is exploitive. (9:62, 18:57)

Respondents also express concern that some temporary employment agencies take advantage of and enable those with addictions (29:18, 18:57).

They take advantage of the situation because they usually hire people that are on drugs or people on alcohol and they give them just enough money to get that...that's who they take advantage of because those people who don't have an addiction don't work for them, see....they pay them on a daily basis...to a dope fiend, that's heaven....You don't make enough to use and have a place to live, they don't pay you like that. (18:57)

One respondent notes that employers using temporary labor have no attachment to the workers. He describes one incident in which the supervisor bought all the men alcohol during a break on their last night of working together. The respondent did not interpret this as a “thank you” but instead an indication that the supervisor cared little for their well-being.

All the guys were drinking, got drunk and went back to work. No big deal, they're agency, they're expendable, they're disposable...they're no liability to me'...he's not going to see these guys again; there's no attachment...just a number. (29:20)

It is clear, however, that temporary employment agencies are fulfilling a role for both workers and employers. There may be lessons from the temporary employment industry that non-profit agencies can utilize that would promote, rather than discourage, a transition to permanent employment.

Chapter 6: Findings Related to Sources of Assistance

Help Sought

As noted above, residents in the study community face an array of challenges that can impede employment. Respondents report that there are some services or opportunities that could be provided or expanded to help residents overcome those challenges. This includes help addressing substance abuse disorders; improving the employability of residents; and the provision of support, encouragement, and mentoring. Improving the well-being of residents can also include providing activities for the neighborhood children and adults and generating opportunities for those that do have barriers to employment to access jobs.

Substance Abuse

Addressing drug use in the community is imperative according to respondents. This includes ensuring that people with addictions have access to drug treatment programs, after-care services, and preparation for work.

There's no point to anything else if you don't address [drug use]...it's a progressive illness...it's just going to get worse as it progress. So if you don't arrest it, what good is it to try and find a job or to work? What good is it to put this person in school? Are they really going to be functioning at their highest ability? (8:19)

Drug Treatment Programs. Respondents report a need to ensure that people have access to appropriate substance abuse treatment opportunities. (3:8, 4:17, 4:27, 8:19, 13:37, 43:49/15:20, 28:8, 10:31/43:114, 29:60) Drug treatment programs should also be accessible to residents. Programs should be close to the neighborhood to increase the

likelihood residents will utilize them (43:72/4:26, 43:41/39) and access to programs should not be limited by insurance coverage. (43:49/15:20) One respondent reports a need for drug treatment programs that can accommodate families with children so that families can remain intact. (8:19) Another respondent argues that the supply of treatment is woefully inadequate given the number of people with addictions in the city. (27:6)

There's not enough treatment. Not enough...this is supposed to be a government for the people of the people. Government ain't doing what we want. If the government was doing what we want, we'd have free ...treatment slots 24 hours a day, 7 days and nights a week for every and any one who wants to get clean and sober. So they're not doing what we want. They're doing what they want...if you don't have money, if you don't have insurance you don't get shit. You wait in that line. (29:59)

Respondents report a need for longer-term programs than some are being offered. (29:86, 43:41/3:9) "If you've been abusing drugs and stuff...for a long time, you need longer than [the 15 or 30 days they're getting]." (43:41/3:9) Another respondent reports that longer treatment can provide residents with better tools to help sustain recovery.

It would be so beautiful [if]...[they went] away for at least 6 months to a year. And during that time you're getting your job skills together, you're getting your education together and when you come back to the community you have something to fight with, you know a lot of time they come back and they don't have anything to fight with and that's how they lose [and relapse]. Each and every time. (28:8)

Treatment on demand is a critical resource for service providers to allow them to intervene when an individual is prepared for change. (37:39) The lack of this resource may result in the loss of an opportunity to intervene to create change.

The problem a lot of time is not with the individual. Because the individual has made that decision...if I made that decision today and you can't get me a bed until two weeks from now, then you're telling me to go out there and use until I can get you a place. ...If I can get him in right then when he's made that decision, then that keeps him on the straight and narrow. (37:60)

Address Underlying Issues. People with drug addictions often have other issues that underlie their addiction (43:12/7:27) that will need to be addressed during and after treatment for their addiction in order for them to be successful. (43:86/43:87/7:26, 43:12/7:27 7:28/43:9) If underlying issues are not resolved, the individual will be less likely to sustain employment or recovery.

No matter how good the job is, no matter how high your education is, if ... my only escape is to abuse substances, that's my escape. Until I deal with that issue, I'm always going to be a substance abuser, I'm always going to have the skills and the talent to go to work, but I'm going to work for a while until that issue comes up. (37:34)

One respondent reports that "drug abuse, for our community, is something that really needs to be addressed in it's entirety in terms of 'why.' Because that's just the symptom of what's going on." (43:82/7:26) He notes his own history of addiction had roots in a childhood rape that he and his family had never come to terms with. (7:26) While not

linking it to his own addiction, another respondent in early recovery from substance abuse also reports being a victim of sexual abuse as a child. (6:52)

After-Care. Respondents also note that people will require assistance after they've completed a substance abuse program. This can include a place to live such as sober housing or transitional housing situated in an environment where drugs are not so evident and easily accessible or that is removed from the individuals' old environment. (43:49/15:20, 31:13) The break with old environments and distance from drug use is seen as strengthening the likelihood of a successful recovery. (37:4, 29:63)

Such housing may come with supports attached, including help to remain sober and services to begin to enhance education and develop skills. (18:36, 8:19) While such housing options may exist there may not be enough (18:9) or they are unaffordable. (29:63)

A service provider reports that some people can leave treatment and move immediately into the workforce; for such individuals, "work is part of their therapy." However, there are others who won't be ready. "It varies, and sometimes you have to meet folks where they are." (37:23) People in early recovery may simply need some time to continue to strengthen their coping resources and increase the likelihood their recovery will be successful. (18:36, 29:70) This will be paramount, one respondent argues, to helping people build the coping skills that will help when stressors arise that may trigger a relapse. "[They need to] give him the resources that he needs...it's like sending him into a gunfight with one bullet. You gotta hold that bullet...until you get a clear shot,

compared to 'I have a box of ammunition I can fight this fight'...give him the ammunition he needs to go out here and fight this fight." (29:70)

Preparing for Work. Often people in recovery have other barriers to employment that must be resolved before they are prepared to enter the workforce. "I think there's a niavetee that substance abuse is somehow an isolated problem. If you could just fix that, then everything else is going to fall into place." (35:17) Instead, there are a number of challenges that may make the transition to employment difficult, particularly for women with substance abuse disorders who are TANF recipients.

Most of them didn't graduate high school...never had any kind of vocational training ...or work skills development. So it's not like you're dealing with somebody where it's an issue of rehabilitation, I mean you're really dealing with someone who you have got to basically start from scratch with and get them up to work readiness. ... There wasn't much of a base on which to build. (35:17)

The challenges that people in recovery must address in order to transition to work successfully include managing child care, developing work skills, learning about the work world, and exploring careers versus jobs. (37:4). Beyond this, of course, is struggling to remain clean throughout. "It's a daily battle to stay clean and ...what most workforce folks that make the policies think is that, if I give them a job, they can go to work and that's it. ...There's a whole lot of other things that keep them from staying at work." (37:4) There also has to be room for failure before a person successfully finds a job he can retain. This often means finding a job that meets more than immediate needs that the individual is interested in retaining.

Workforce folks don't understand that it sometimes takes two or three jobs to find a job that that person can stay in...They come in to our offices and say, 'I want a job.' 'What are you interested in? What kind of job would you like?' 'Anything.'...We know that 'anything job' is only going to last until you satisfy those immediate financial needs. (37:4)

What respondents in recovery from a substance abuse disorder report they did not need was encouragement to transition to employment. On the contrary, becoming clean fueled a desire to work. (43:118/18:12, 43:99/43:94/9:47)

I found that...the first thing you want to do...[is] go get a job....they don't advise that. Because you need to know about you, you need to find out about your addiction, you need to...come out of denial. After you come out of denial, then you'll know....A lot of times they fail. I didn't...I tried to fill up that emptiness with something....your first barrier is the addiction. When you clear up your addiction, the barriers lessened. (9:47/43:94)

Attend to Elements that Foster Drug Use. Respondents report that activities for children can reduce the likelihood they will get caught up in the drug trade or drug use; minimally it will reduce their exposure to both. Occupations for adults may also reduce the risk of acquiring or accelerating drug use. One respondent reports that his drug use escalated when he left work because he had little to do. "By me not working at all, I didn't have nothing to do, so I just started getting high, getting high, getting high." (21:42) Another reports he believes training programs may reduce people's involvement in the drug trade. (43:48/11:38)

People in recovery, and those who are not, are exposed daily to drugs and, often, enticed to use. "Once they get in the door...as far as getting home from work and [relaxing, it's] 'Come and smoke this and yada, yada, yada.'" (43:93/5:45) Helping people navigate the drug use and the drug trade, therefore, may also be helpful. Finally, one respondent reports a need to address the hopelessness and the stress that may facilitate drug use in the study community.

[People] give up hope [and] that's where the drugs come in. The drugs is always available...24/7....if you fight with your husband today and you don't want to deal with him, you go get you some drugs. That'll get rid of it for an hour or two, but the problem is still there....[the withdrawal of assistance to poor people can also facilitate stress, because if you are] economically cutting back, socially cutting back, that's really going to affect the low income people...that [still] do have ... hope. After a while they'll become like the ones that [are hopeless and are] telling them nothing can be done....they'll start believing it [too]. (21:65/43:59)

Improve Employability

Respondents report there is a need for programs that provide education, training, and job preparation skills. This includes efforts to help people get their GED (3:8, 8:24, 5:38, 18:59), preferably, according to one respondent, a program that will link to jobs or further education. (3:8) There is also a need for programs that help people improve their literacy as, one respondent reports, "a lot of people can't read or write down here." (4:41).

Improving education was seen as the primary step for two respondents who argue that helping people complete their high school diploma or get a GED should come before

finding employment. "I wouldn't even concentrate on the job part of it right then until I got them together with their day care and their education...Basically now you would need at least a high school diploma....The first hurdle...for me would be education." (19:9)

Another respondent echoed his argument. "You are supposed to have [a GED or diploma] it's like a comfort zone...that's the main thing there...As far as money and work-wise that's like a good step up, work is the second thing you do." (5:38)

Preparation for Job Search. Respondents also note that people need help to learn how to prepare for job search (4:41, 14:58). Building these skills is helpful, according to one respondent,

because it's so hard when you go on an interview, you be nervous and you have to know what to say, how to say things, you know, to present yourself in a way that the person will want to hire you. And I think that they could probably do some of those things...Especially [for] people that haven't been on a lot of job interviews, you know, or haven't had a job. (14:58)

Another respondent notes that some young people in the study community don't understand the importance of how they present themselves to employers.

I feel they need to have someplace..like you can have a charm school? Well, I believe it'd be the same. Because you need to be prepared for wherever...you have a resume, your resume is looking good but you're looking like dirt. It's not going to work. You got to present yourself, you got to look the part. You got to look like you really want to work for that company...I feel that's one of the greatest barriers that we have of young adults now. (21:4)

Job Training. Respondents also report the need for training programs for residents in the study community that helps link people to work. (18:22, 11:44, 14:27)

One respondent notes that the training provided should be diverse, to meet the different interests and needs of the study community residents. "I think they need more training programs. For all people, not just for one certain thing, because people are so diversified. So I think they need training programs to retrain people, even me. I could be retrained. I'm never too old to learn...that's ... the main thing...retraining. (21:72)

Respondents note it is important that the job training be actually connected to jobs. (11:44, 14:27, 10:29)

I [feel] as though they should have ...programs where, if you finish a program and then they send you out on a job, they should have placements where they should automatically hire you. Not necessarily automatic, but, say you have [done] good work, ... come to school every day or something good that they could show that you might be a good employee. (14:27)

One respondent reported a preference for a job training program that pays participants.

There is plenty of job places they train you and you're not going to get paid for it. I think you should be training while you're working, ...okay, if you or somebody had [a] housekeeping job, I do know how to clean, okay, but train me to do it your way, and if I'm getting paid for it, there shouldn't be no problem. ... I'm doing it the way you want it, I'm getting paid and plus I have a job. ...You can't ask for more than that. (20:29)

One respondent also reports that some study community residents need to become better acquainted with work expectations, learning the “world of work” so they will be prepared to be successful. She notes that transitional jobs or internships can help fulfill this role.

They don't understand the world of work, what the expectations are, and they have to be taught that, they have to learn that, and that has to be an environment that's hopefully work based but with staff and understanding that this individual may need some [support]. (32:17)

One respondent notes that some people in the community have little to no experience working and they will need substantial help to get there. Some also have limited skills and patience.

You got so many kids out here who don't know how to do anything. Nothing.... I mean nothing. Some of them never had no training, never did no work, some of them came straight out of the house and the only thing they know is drugs, selling drugs.... And you got so many of them that's so slow. They're uneducated and catch on real slow...They act normal, but when it comes time for them to do something, they can't comprehend, I don't know what it is, but you got a lot of them like that...a lot of them don't have patience...if you give them something to do, if you look around, they walk away from it...I mean they don't have no patience. (18:59)

Another respondent suggests that there is a need to provide job training that emphasizes the attainment of hard skills and recognizes that some people may not be able to advance far, but could move slightly further ahead with help.

Not everybody is going to be a computer whiz. ... Everybody's not going to be a doctor, everybody is not going to be a rocket scientist, but they can...teach them to be a cook so ...they could still make a good living...they could learn [not just] to be a housekeeper ... they could learn to be an executive housekeeper... upgrade it...teach them some management skills. (24:29)

Jobs and Job Placement Help. Respondents report that they would like to see efforts focused on helping people actually find jobs. (13:20,11:44, 10:42) “[I]t'd be better if you can go somewhere and ...they can try and hook you up and find out what you can do and put you out there, you know, so you can get a job...because it's rough, it's rough out here. It's no joke.” (13:20) This may be preferable, according to one respondent, than providing job training that may offer little other than a certificate after completion.

Give them an opportunity to come in [and get a job]. Instead of sending them [to a job training program] somewhere where they have to sit for ten weeks and get a piece of paper. Showing what? You think that piece of paper saying...'I have skills in this and that?' (10:42)

Support, Encouragement, Mentoring

A need was identified for a supportive person or program within the neighborhood that study community residents could turn to. (5:46, 20:33) "I think they should have a program here, someone in this community, someone where you really do

feel they care, someone who's here to help, with whatever problems you have." (20:33)

Supportive helpers might also allow people to see alternatives. "Just in my experience from talking through their situations with them and letting them see a different perspective helps them to realize they actually can do something that seems so far beyond their reach." (30:43) Mentors might fulfill a similar role. "I think [it would be helpful, ...beginning with the young, if they have mentors, if they had places to go that instill in them that you can do anything that you wanna do." (28:4)

People within the study community should also be encouraged, not coerced, according to one respondent. "You got to help and guide people. You just can't be like, 'Well you got to do this, you got to do that.' People got to guide people nowadays, because there's not no guidance going on around here." (15:23)

If people are encouraged along a path and not coerced, they are more likely to be successful and have ownership over the process according to one respondent. "They're going to respect it, they're going to nurture it and they're going to benefit...but you just got to show them the road to do it." (7:34)

Passing benchmarks and achieving smaller goals can build on one another and help foster further growth. (7:34, 30:44). "Achievement is a pretty marvelous experience and no one can take it away from you because you know what you did. No one gave it to you...you achieved it." (30:44) This respondent further observes that the most important thing to address with the young people she works with is developing their capacity to believe in themselves. "[T]he most undercutting, undermining poverty [is] if I can't see myself any other way." (30:20)

Activities for Children and Youth

Activities are needed to keep children in the study community occupied. (22:5, 22:9, 19:10, 15:13, 21:12/45:10, 23:23/45:16). Such activities could help ensure that the children are safe (19:10, 22:9) and potentially free the parent up for employment. (22:5) As noted above, this can also prevent children from becoming involved in the drug trade. It can also help counter some lack of supervision and indicate when further intervention is warranted to support parents.

You have to have something for them to do...they don't have a lot of things to do in the community. So they hangs out on the corner...then they get strayed away. ...It's worser than when we were smaller, now. Cause you see so much guns, drugs. ... We'd be in the house when it got dark. Some of these kids now they be out later than me...little small kids. ...You got to have the parents to keep up on their kids...if it don't work that way, then you have to go get help. (19:10)

Preventing youth involvement in the drug trade can also help ensure that the young people will not acquire the same characteristics, including a substance abuse disorder, a criminal record, or lack of a high school diploma, which greatly impede the ability of adults in their community to access jobs.

A Chance to Prove Themselves

Some respondents suggest that what many residents need most of all is simply a chance to prove themselves despite the barriers to employment that they possess. (16:40, 14:28, 4:32, 1:70). Specifically, the existence of barriers to employment should not function to keep people permanently locked out of the labor market.

There's a lot of people, who are very, very smart, got caught up, might of got pregnant...anything might have happened, they just didn't get [their high school diploma]. ...A lot of smart, smart people.... they just don't have the paper. If you give them a chance, you might see it. You might see something in them that they didn't even know they had their self, and you might pay for them to go back to school! Just to get a piece of paper. (16:40)

Another respondent reports that if people were offered a chance, many would prove to be valuable workers.

In all reality it's, some people I know, if they could just get in there, get their foot in there, in the door, just get in the door, right 'just give me a chance, just give me a chance let me prove myself or put me on a 30 day probation' [they would be fine]. ... But it doesn't happen like that. (4:32)

Respondents note that there are wider social benefits to providing people opportunities, including decreasing the likelihood they will be involved in drug use or crime. (1:70, 4:32). One respondent recommended a young man from the study community to her supervisor. When he showed up for the interview inappropriately dressed, her supervisor asked her why she recommended him. She did, she reported, because of the consequences of failing to offer him a chance.

He said he wanted to stay in school, didn't want to wind up a statistic on the corner because of where he lived at. I thought if we gave him a chance we'd be helping the cause, if not, then we're just throwing them back out there in the waters and he's a fish, the sharks will eat him up. (16:10)

People may be more likely to work toward addressing barriers to employment if they know they will have employment opportunities on the other side. Respondents note, for example, that it's important that people know that there is hope that they can find employment if, and when, they complete a substance abuse program. (21:74, 21:72, 8:19)

They need to know there's not going to be payback for you being on drugs...They need to know they're not being punished...For being a user. So they'll get a better job and not a mediocre job...Once they leave recovery. (21:74)

Welfare Reform

Under the TANF block grant program, created by PRWORA, the provision of cash assistance to low income families with children is fundamentally altered. Some TANF cash recipients are required to participate in approved work activities, including job search or job training, to sustain their benefits. States are required to sanction, reduce, or suspend cash assistance for families that do not comply with program requirements. Federal TANF resources cannot be used by states to provide cash assistance to families beyond five years, though 20% of the caseload can be exempted.

The provision of cash assistance to low-income families under TANF represents a fundamental shift from how cash assistance was distributed under AFDC. In general, however, respondents report that the reform of welfare was needed and that welfare reform has succeeded in moving many people into employment. Respondents blame other welfare recipients for the changes in how cash assistance is provided and note that some are still able to get around welfare rules. Some view reform efforts as "not real." Respondents also report that some eligible residents are avoiding accessing cash

assistance and others report difficulties accessing benefits. Some view cash assistance as conferring more security, and resources, to families than employment.

It is asserted that some people remaining on welfare have greater challenges than those who have exited off in the earlier years of welfare reform, however, it was countered that many who were long-term welfare recipients are among those who moved off the welfare rolls and into employment. TANF administrators are viewed as being responsive to people with substance abuse disorders among their caseload. There are service delivery challenges and eligibility restrictions that impede the capacity to help low-income families. It also appears that TANF reauthorization may create further challenges for TANF administrators.

Reform Needed

Some respondents report that welfare reform needed to happen, (44:59/14:35/24:33, 44:64/18:60, 36:15) some indicating that when welfare is too easily accessible people are less likely to work and as a result will be worse off (36:15).

They [needed] to reform [it] because people need to be motivated to get up there and do something. I'm glad of that, because I mean you have generations of people on welfare, from grandmother, mother, to daughter...it has to stop somewhere. (24:33/44:61)

One respondent reports that one woman he knows was cut off of welfare in the 1980s. She returned to school and moved up the career ladder. He reports "I do believe strongly, had that not happened, she would still be waiting on a check today." (44:13/7:38)

Some service providers report that for some people, forcing them into programs is necessary. (26:20) "I think [welfare reform] is forcing them to be responsible, and I have to agree with the feds on this, if they're capable of working, work. I think a lot of them rely on Social Services too much. Too much." (31:20)

Respondents report that even though some people who rely on TANF cash assistance were reluctant to participate in work activities or seek employment, some found it was ultimately beneficial. (33:41, 33:38, 26:20)

After they have kinda gone through it [they] realize that it was necessary. ...

Obviously there were still some people that left kicking and screaming, but

...there have been some changes in attitude [among some] people [who]

were...very resistant and ...they're going to realize there was actually something

that was helpful in the end. (33:41)

Among the benefits reported by a service provider is that TANF recipients have reported to her that their younger children are proud of them and that their children's school work has improved. (33:38) Another benefit noted by one respondent is that it provides structure to one's day and removes people from the danger of idle time, that may involve substance abuse.

You got to do something with that idle time. So why not go and get drunk with your buddies...Or go get high with them. ... Ain't nobody going to sit around and do nothing all day....That's why a lot of them get drunk because the day be boring. (44:149/18:60)

Welfare policies did derail some people. A service provider reports that some teen parents have run into difficulty when their own parent is a substance abuser and are placed in charge of the TANF cash assistance grant for the teen and her child. (28:24)

One respondent found that the new work requirements impeded her ability to finish college because she was forced to take time out to meet work participation requirements (44:60/24:49) and may have lengthened the time she remained on welfare. A city administrator countered that though some TANF recipients attending college may have had to revert to part-time, there were other benefits. Income from work-study positions held by TANF recipients enrolled in college was disregarded, so their check was not adjusted to account for that income. Further, she argues, there were no imposed time limits. As long as TANF recipients engaged in work for a minimum of 20 hours a week, they could continue to remain in college and on TANF cash assistance indefinitely.

(MC3)

One respondent expressed concern that it appears that the TANF agency is shirking from what she perceives to be their role to provide a last resort resource for people who have no other options. She reports that a pregnant woman she knows who lost her job faced challenges when she re-applied for cash assistance.

What they told her was 'Well if you're pregnant there must be a man somewhere. So you and your other children and your new baby is his responsibility.'... They ain't supposed to do that, they supposed to be there to help you when you're in a crisis, that's what they're there for.... You ain't got no where else to go. And that's what they're supposed to be there for. To help! (16:12/44:97)

A city administrator confirmed this resident's perspective, arguing that caseworkers should not discourage or otherwise divert people from applying for assistance. She does note, however, that all TANF recipients, including those who are pregnant, must meet program requirements or lose access to cash assistance. (MC4) Such requirements may serve to discourage some applicants.

Time Limited and Transitional Assistance. States can exempt up to 20% of the caseload from the five year time limit on the provision of assistance with the use of federal TANF resources. In addition, states can elect to use state matching funds to provide support to families who have received assistance beyond five years. According to a city administrator, no one has been terminated from cash assistance due to time limits and she strongly doubts that time limits will ever be imposed in the state. (MC5) Some respondents, including residents and service providers, believe time limits are in place and will be enforced. Others share the city administrator's perspective.

Respondents report that they believe welfare reform should be used as a transitional support (5:17/44:85, 44:77/20:37, (44:19/8:26, 2:29/44:94) and this is consistent with their own experience.

We were taught in our family that [its] a bridge, it's a support, it's not something you live on. ... But people have looked on it for so long as an income until they have forgotten that you're supposed to work and take care of your family.

(44:19/8:26)

Some respondents, therefore, report that they approve of time limits for cash assistance. (2:57/44:12, 22:18/44:24, 44:66/23:35) "That's good enough! Five years you should be able to do it...you should be able to get off the money like me...5 years is long enough to find a job." (22:18/44:24) Others express concern that a safety net may be needed beyond five years particularly when employment can be so insecure. (27:25, 44:56/5:14, (25:51/44:134, 16:12/44:97)

Okay, you got a job, you working ... one or two weeks...and then all of a sudden the job is getting ready to phase out... [then] what are you going to do? Where are you going to get help from? ... What seems to be the problem is DSS is closing their doors...when people...a lot of people don't got it yet. And if they can get [it], how long will they keep it? How long is the job going to be there? They need the back up and they don't have it. (25:51/44:134)

Some who believe time limits are appropriate express concern that the TANF agency is not engaging people in work activities in a timely way and that some people will be unprepared when they are no longer eligible for assistance because of time limits.

They should get people ahead of time or let them do their training or go to school or whatever it is they want to do, that way when they go out in the workforce they can keep their jobs, so they will be able to work and keep their jobs and they won't have to resort back to welfare unless it's an emergency...they shouldn't wait until your time is almost up before they tell you... I think it's like they're rushed and they should get people earlier. (44:6/3:37)

Another respondent reports that it is welfare recipients who are waiting until the last minute and not taking time limits seriously who will be taken by surprise (27:17) and their failure to prepare may result in evictions and homelessness.

Requiring Work Activities. Respondents report that they believe cash assistance should not be unconditional and that TANF (and other cash assistance) recipients should be expected to do something in exchange for benefits. (29:92, 36:15) Among the activities respondents report welfare recipients should be involved in include job training, vocational education, or improving one's education. (18:60/44:70, 23:35/44:66, 44:63/18:3) One respondent reports the actual activities don't matter "as long as they're doing something to better themselves instead of sitting [at] home." (3:30/44:1) One respondent reports that if she were designing a cash assistance program, training or education and time limits would be included.

It would be mandatory that you go to school, some kind of trade...[but] you better do something...after a certain amount of time, like maybe after 2 years...you just don't get any more Social Services at all. You would just not get it. And how you would survive that would be [on] you. (44:66/23:35)

Respondents note that required work activities should meet people's needs and make sense. One respondent, for example, notes that one woman she knows is being required to look for a job, yet she can't read or write. (31:20) She reports there should be enough flexibility that people can be engaged in an activity that makes sense to them and that they want to do. Another respondent further asserts that welfare recipients should be helped to either access jobs that they are comfortable with because that will also help

ensure that they will remain stably employed or receive help to achieve other goals, such as completing their GED. (20:48/44:148) A city administrator argues, however, that programs have been able to place TANF recipients with minimal reading and writing skills into jobs—while encouraging them to develop those skills. (MC6)

Sanctions. One respondent who reports she was inappropriately sanctioned and temporarily lost cash assistance believes that sanctions make sense as a tool to ensure that people are doing what they need to do. “It would give people initiative 'Okay, well I'm not getting my check, I'm not getting my food stamps, or my medical assistance. I need to get up and go, I have to do something to get the benefits, the benefits is the only way to take care of my family.'” (3:37/44:6) A city administrator clarifies, however, that when individuals are sanctioned, they lose only their cash assistance. Thus, they should continue to receive food stamps and medical assistance, contrary to the perception of the above respondent. (MC7)

Another respondent objects to the implementation of sanctions. “They make the children suffer because of the mistake a parent might have did or not a mistake. Why should the children suffer? They're the ones that need that help.” (21:52/44:116)

People who get frustrated with job training programs and drop out are among those who are sanctioned. They are then required to re-enter a program before they are able to re-access benefits. One respondent reports that they should take more care before they sanction people.

Some people [get]...frustrated....they're saying that things wasn't working for them [so] ...some people just drop out, quit. ... [Then they lose their benefits].

They don't understand ...some of the problems people have. ... Some people have lots of problems. (19:20/44:109)

Welfare Reform is Working

Some respondents report that welfare reform is working to move people into employment. (44:98/16:20, 44:83/13:32) One reason it has been successful, according to one respondent, is because many welfare recipients were already working.

There was that other employment...they were fortunate I guess for a while to be able to do that and collect the cash assistance...[but then] they had to make a choice because they couldn't do both because they were required to do something for the money. (32:25)

One respondent expressed surprise that her sister was among those who were able to transition to employment successfully. "I was scared that she was going to fail...I was so used to her being home and she was used to being home, she didn't know how to stick to anything." (44:151/23:26) A city administrator reports that the caseload declines were not just among new applicants, long-term welfare recipients were among those that successfully transitioned off of cash assistance. (33:16) Another service provider warns, however, that declines in the welfare caseload can only be considered a success if people's needs are met and they have been given the tools they need to be retain employment.

Bringing down the welfare rolls is fine and dandy but if you're not addressing all of their needs then after a while they're going to be right back at your door.
...Putting time limits on folks, fine. But if you're not using that time to help them

grow, then it becomes a real crisis when they get to the fifth year and you say, 'well you gotta do something, cause we're going to cut you off.' (37:31)

One respondent points out that some of the women who are expected to transition off of welfare are in a catch-22 situation, being pushed in different directions. They face challenges accessing jobs, and when they do so, are vulnerable to being criticized for not being there for their children.

It's just a mixed bag of things...they lack education, they try to get education, 'well no, you have to work so many hours' ...And then they say, 'oh...you're working too many hours, so now you're not with the kids and [are] neglecting [them]...' You know, there are just so many things being thrown at them, they're frustrated and it's a lot of discouragement. So they get settled into their way of life and then laziness sets in...'I don't feel like doing this.' So it's a whole lot of things going on. (24:26/44:145)

One respondent indicates that while welfare reform may be making a difference nationally, she questions the impact locally, (44:153/21:34) while another reports it has made a difference in the neighborhood but certainly not for all of the residents.

I'm seeing more people working around here now than I had when I first moved here. ...They had to do it, so they did it....[it worked] but not for all because I know a lot of people around here they've been in a million programs they still on Social Services...Some kind of way, it's not working for them. ...Welfare reform works for some people but not everybody. (16:20/44:98)

Taking Advantage and Getting Over

Respondents report that reforms to welfare were due in part to the people who have taken advantage of cash assistance programs and as a result have made it harder on everyone else. (23:42, 5:15, 6:18, 13:22, 13:24, 14:36) One respondent reports that her daughter's intent is to use the program as a source of income while she's on unpaid maternity leave but she is having trouble accessing assistance because others have abused the program.

People used [TANF] so bad that you got to catch hell before they even help you.

You got to find out what happened to your great grandmother before they give you some help and then when the help comes, it's almost time to go back to work.

(13:22)

Welfare Reform Not Real

As noted above, some people don't believe time limits will be imposed on cash assistance. (33:11, 37:32, 27:12, 1:52) One respondent, for example, reports that he doesn't believe the time limit will be imposed on him because he has already been on TANF for over five years. (1:52) Another respondent reports that the TANF program simply absorbs and expels recipients periodically to make it look like they're making a difference and to balance their budget. (44:65/25:7)

One city administrator reports that some populations on TANF cash assistance are now receiving state-only dollars, thus they won't be subjected to the federal five year time limit. Despite this, however, she reports that she remains concerned because the city has a disproportionate number of people who will reach the federal time limit and the

20% exemption to the time limit the statute allows is expected to be full by 2004. (33:11)

This will have the effect, then, of straining state resources.

One respondent reports that some people get around sanctions by simply transferring custody of their children to a family member. The shift is on paper only; the child continues to reside with his/her mother and the family member simply signs over the check to the child's mother. (23:29, 23:1, 23:29/44:87) She reports that "you sign the check over right to the mom...It is a game, it's an enabler...for some people. For some people that's already lazy and not doing anything." (23:1)

Another respondent reports that residents in the study community are attempting to transition not into employment but onto SSI rolls.

Everybody is trying to get SSI ...they're all running to psych doctors or whatever ...[where] I live in alone, 5 people that were welfare recipients are now [on] SSI ...they could not understand or embrace 'I'm off welfare, I need to re-educate myself' whatever that involves.(7:4)

A city administrator argues that the perceptions that it is easy to "get over" are inaccurate. A relative cannot simply re-apply for TANF cash assistance for children who are part of a sanctioned household unless there is verification that the child has been removed from the home and placed into the relative's home for causes such as neglect or abuse. She further notes that the SSI application process requires substantiating documents from medical doctors of the existence of a severe and disabling medical condition. Even with strong documentation, the application process can take years.

(MC8/MC9)

Avoiding Welfare Receipt

Respondents report that some eligible people are choosing not to seek assistance from TANF. (21:52/44:116, 23:5/44:9, 23:31/44:119) "You got people who won't go and apply...because they don't feel like going through all that. They feel it's not worth it. (21:52/44:116) Another respondent reports "even if I had an opportunity, I wouldn't take it because they put you through so much for so little...they don't offer enough."

(44:10/23:5)

One respondent reports that she stopped receiving TANF cash assistance because they were seeking too much information, including her bank account number, and that was not worth the \$20 a month she was receiving in assistance at that point. (8:26/44:18) Another respondent reports that she left the TANF program as soon as she was employed, losing the transitional benefits she remained eligible to receive. She reports she did eventually have to return to seek food stamps.

I figured I could hardly feed myself. I wasn't making enough money to feed my kids and I was worried they weren't eating, so I went back and applied for food stamps...I wanted to get off of it completely but I don't make enough money to feed [my family]. I barely make enough money to pay my bills. (44:27/22:20)

Respondent reports that other people's negative experiences with the local welfare office may deter others from seeking assistance. "A lot of people talk about their problems and their situations and...another person feel as though they're going to be in the same situation, so boom, they don't even be bothered with it." (20:39/44:131)

Challenges Getting Assistance

Some respondents report it is harder to get TANF cash assistance. (13:25/44:112, 44:108/16:12) Because those with a substantial work history are required to complete a job search program before receiving benefits, it may actually be harder to access for those who are most likely to rely on cash assistance for the short term. (44:108/16:12) During the member check phase, a city administrator notes that policies have since changed and now all TANF applicants are required to participate in a three week job preparation and job search program before receiving benefits. She views this as a helpful process as the programs support job search efforts and identify potential barriers to work during this time. (MC10) Since other respondents viewed the upfront requirements as a hurdle to getting assistance, they would likely argue that extending the requirements to all applicants simply makes it harder for more people to get the cash assistance they need.

One respondent reports that in addition to greater challenges accessing assistance, it is difficult to make sense of why some families get the benefits they do and others do not. She reports that it appears as if applicants are getting fewer benefits than in previous years. Some are able to get cash assistance but not food stamps, some food stamps but no medical assistance.

It's a help, but it's not like it used to [be]. It's like a half thing now. They help you, half way....And it seems like there is no reason....no real, real, real, reason why they do this to these people like that...I know...some families may get full benefits and you have some families that don't get full benefits. It's just, I don't know.

(10:18/44:73)

Cash Assistance Versus Work

Respondents report that some residents would prefer to remain on welfare than to go to work (2:27, 1:23) and another reported a preference to retain benefits and work under the table. (1:27) Some report they believe work is preferable to welfare and that people who are offered help to make that transition should take them up on it (2:91/44:146, 2:90) "I would love to be off Social Service cause the run around they give you, it's not really worth it. And...I think you can get more if you does have a job." (44:136/20:8)

Among the reasons some residents may be reluctant to leave welfare is that they perceive no net gain from working. The minimum wage is too low to support families, particularly when benefits are not provided. (27:18, 26:22, 23:14)

In a real sense the minimum wage at the lower scales makes it almost very difficult for some individuals to actually afford to take a job like that. They would have to balance out taking a job...[with] all the benefits they get from not having a job...things like welfare...or disability. (26:22)

This respondent further reports that people do actually calculate the costs of work versus welfare and in some situations, it makes more sense to remain on cash assistance.

By you going to taking a job you disqualify yourself for certain things, maybe health care...so when you add it all up...you're barely making it. Whereas if you weren't working, there might be more of an advantage...at least you could provide more material things for your child. ...There really is a choice. And people are survivors....particularly Black folks here, we all are definitely survivors. (26:22)

Families that include several children receive higher cash benefits so they require higher wages before work pays more than welfare. Parents with multiple children and limited skills may have a harder time finding employment that will provide greater benefits to their family than remaining on cash assistance. (24:9)

Under an old welfare to work program, one respondent reports she was sent far out to the suburbs for a job interview. The potential employer interviewed her and, upon discovering where she lived, calculated the costs that she would incur if she accepted the job. The potential employer sent her back to the welfare office, telling the respondent to inform them it wasn't worth her time. (25:43)

Others are afraid of leaving the security of a guaranteed income behind to rely on the labor market. (44:136/20:8) "Some people...they are kinda scared because...they feel like they might can't make it. And that's all they know." (44:21/9:22) This is exacerbated by the quick withdrawal of cash assistance for those who do work.

A lot of people are afraid to get a job because they take your benefits from you all at once and they don't like help you...get up on your feet. They just get you a job and then they take everything from you...they give you like ten days and then they take your medical assistance, your food stamps, and the little bit of money that they give you...they take everything right away, they give you certain time which is not enough time for you to save and get up on your feet when you is just getting a job. (20:8/44:25)

Also welfare recipients are unlikely to transition into jobs where they will receive medical assistance and this provides a disincentive for moving off of welfare. (9:4/44:20, 20:7, 9:8)

The difference between welfare and...working is when you get...help from social services, you'll get more...Cause they [are] getting medical assistance. You can't get medical assistance when you're working. And a lot of people want social service only for the medical assistance because they can't have their children covered. A lot of them get it just for that. They're not necessarily worried about the money. (44:128/21:67)

Respondents argue that ensuring that benefits are extended for some period of time may help people make this transition. (9:4/44:35, 23:15/44:45) A city administrator noted that families are eligible for some transitional assistance, including medical assistance, for one year after transitioning off of welfare. After a year, many children still qualify for free medical assistance through another program for low-income families. She notes, however, that many parents will not have an alternative source of medical coverage once the transitional assistance expires. (MC11) It was also reported that residents are not necessarily afraid of the financial insecurity but the insecurity of moving into a workplace and all its expectations that they may feel unprepared to meet. (7:5)

Dynamics of Welfare Use

Respondents report that those who remain reliant on TANF cash assistance have greater needs than the families that have exited. (35:18, 33:16)

The reality is that families who were easy fixes are off of the rolls...when the pressure was on, they moved quickly, they probably would have moved anyway.

... What you got left now are the cases where there are just multiple, hard core barriers...I think everybody is having to step back and look more carefully at who is left...now you really got to deal with how to we take these more chronic, kinda of hard core cases where there are multiple, various, very serious barriers. (35:18)

Another respondent reports that there still is an influx of people who are using TANF cash assistance on a short-term basis, moving off fairly rapidly. There are others, however, who tend to stay on 24 months or longer and they are more likely to have multiple barriers, (33:16) including medical problems and substance abuse. (33:12)

Among those who are remaining on TANF cash assistance for an extended period of time are women who have multiple pregnancies, and, as a result, are in and out of job training programs without ever completing them. (33:16) Those with more children also have a harder time transitioning off of cash assistance because they will have greater challenges finding day care. Further, because there are more people in the family unit, they remain eligible for TANF at higher income levels than other families. (33:12)

Responding to Substance Abuse

Respondents report that the local TANF agency is responsive to people with substance abuse problems. (3:10, 20:44/44:26, 24:16/43:22) The state approached a treatment program to work collaboratively to address substance abuse issues among TANF recipients (35:10), substance abuse counselors are sited in all the welfare offices, (33:3) and advocates help ensure that clients are able to access the most appropriate

treatment programs. (33:3) Substance abuse treatment can also be counted as meeting the work participation requirements for TANF cash assistance. Not only does this free the individual up for treatment but it allows other supportive services, including child care vouchers, to be made available to them. A provider reports "that made a huge difference, acknowledging these barriers, that working on these barriers out to count as work readiness...was really a huge step in legitimizing what we were doing." (35:10)

Respondents report that the TANF agency is screening everyone for a substance abuse disorder (44:37/9:32, 43:4/3:9) One respondent objects to this, reporting it is offensive to people who are simply using welfare for a short period of time because of temporary unemployment. (44:22/9:32) She also objects, however, to those who continue to receive TANF cash assistance and other forms of aid when it is evident to her that they are under the influence of drugs and are not caring for their children. (43:103/9:35) She simply believes that they should be able to detect and confront people with substance abuse disorders another way.

Everybody doesn't use drugs and it's offensive for them to do [universal drug tests]. We know people lie. But if you are a counselor...one drug addict knows another, one alcoholic knows another, if you've been there, you know....And you being a counselor, you should be observant enough to know, there's questions that you can ask to know. (9:32/43:31)

She suggests that the agency should do more to help those who are using drugs and she is concerned about those who are self-selecting out of programs because they know they

won't pass an inevitable drug test. She proposes that job training programs couple education and information about substance abuse to help people prepare for employment.

(43:100/9:29)

It needs to be a twofold thing, if you're going to be in a program all day, you need to...do the business aspect, the learning aspect and then you need to be in the drug [aspect]...So when they apply [for jobs] they can pass. A lot of people just stay home, 'I'm not going to pass this'...so that's a block [then they drop out].

(9:29/43:100)

A service provider reports finding the local director of a neighborhood based welfare office to be extremely helpful and responsive to her clients in substance abuse treatment. (35:20) She notes that there is widespread interagency ownership over responding to the substance abuse problem in the city, and the effort is not compartmentalized. (35:24)

A city administrator reports, however, that despite the commitment they have made to help people with substance abuse disorders they are still challenged by those who move on and off of drugs and remain unable to find, or should they find, maintain, jobs because of drug use. (33:3)

Service Delivery Challenges

Among the challenges particular to the TANF agency is the shift in workers' jobs. TANF caseworkers reportedly lack some expertise because they "went from determining eligibility to becoming work counselors." (33:19) They have made large strides in recent years, however, the agency still needs the expertise of "mental health counselors...still

need the substance abuse certified person on site...because you just can't expect someone who has focused on employment and benefits to necessarily understand that.” (33:19)

There is a concern that some people with special needs are not getting identified nor receiving comprehensive services that they might require to address that need.

(33:44) Disabilities for example, may be missed unless the individual self-identifies.

(33:44) A strategy that is being adopted is building inter-disciplinary teams including those specializing in mental health, substance abuse, and employment to help explore potential interventions. (33:36) Another strategy is contracting with a program that can offer a clinical assessment of the entire family system to assess potential barriers to employment (33:55)

Another challenge is that some people are not succeeding in the job training programs they are participating in. A strategy they've undertaken is to allow people to experiment with different job training programs because they've discovered that “sometimes people don't connect to one program but they connect to another and do wonderfully.” (33:32) The use of vendors helps the agency deal with another challenge, people's frustration or anger about being required to participate in a program. Because the vendors are seen as separate entities, the negative feelings are isolated to the local TANF agency.

We kinda of intentionally let [vendors] seem to be something else...if they want to have a negative attitude about [welfare office], that's fine and they can have a totally different perspective on the vendor. ... It's like, you know, ‘these people are helping me, but you're just cutting my check.’ (33:41)

Eligibility Restrictions

TANF resources can be flexibly utilized to help people transition into employment though its main purpose has been to facilitate the transition to work for those who are reliant on TANF cash assistance grants. A respondent noted that while non-custodial parents can receive services to help them transition into employment, she notes that the TANF block grant includes real disincentives for the program to provide such services more broadly.

We have had to turn away non-custodial parents ...because our programs are not set up to serve them ...And I think it's a mistake. I think it's hurting families more. If anything it's keeping people from being married...if they are seriously concerned about the family structure and well being, I would think that we would need to loosen the regulations [so]...everybody could be served all under the same umbrella. (33:22)

The program, however, is defined by the priorities in the TANF statute and non-custodial parents are simply not a priority.

Our money [is] allocated to the priorities of the law... and the priorities...are to make sure welfare clients are in work activities ... so it's kind of hard when you are looking at the budget to pull resources from the population where we have to meet the requirements as opposed to [non-custodial parents] who, if we did it, we'd be doing it for altruistic reasons ... it's allowed, but...we have just not put our budgets in that area ... if we do, I'm not sure that [we would] meet the needs of the clients that we have. (33:22)

The restriction of some programmatic and policy efforts to help people who are transitioning off welfare may have a perverse effect—encouraging people to re-enroll on welfare so that they can be eligible for those opportunities. In one example, a respondent reports that residents were frustrated to discover someone recruiting workers would only accept applications from current welfare recipients.

[It didn't make sense because people are not trying to go backward, they're trying to go forward and there was a lot of mothers in here [saying that] 'Well, I already been on Social Service and I had got my job.' Like one lady, ... she got laid off. [She asked] 'Why would I want to go back and get on welfare to get a job? ... Why can't I just go and fill out an application? ... I don't want to go get food stamps and check. I wants to get a job!' (10:11)

TANF Reauthorization

One city administrator described the Administration's current TANF reauthorization proposal as "much more grueling" than the existing language (32:24) and another reports that her hope was that the Administration would have sought a straight reauthorization because it offered adequate flexibility to meet the city's needs. (33:30) A proposed increase in the proportion of the caseload involved in work and the number of work hours participants will be expected to perform will increase the demand for child care for the city that will generate stress on the program.

It's already close sometimes, but somehow we've always had people moving in and out enough that we're okay but I think it could be an issue if we really have the full population engaged in work. (33:30)

Another concern is the proposed limits on rehabilitative services. One respondent reports that they have discovered, through trial and error, that women with substance abuse disorders weren't successful with six months of substance abuse treatment; they need something closer to twelve. (35:16) Because of this finding, the State changed how long TANF recipients could be engaged in drug treatment and have it count as a work activity. The Administration's TANF reauthorization proposal caps treatment and other forms of rehabilitative services as meeting work requirements for three months. The current Senate TANF Finance Committee bill allows for six.

During the member check, a city administrator reported that the state has decided to modify their program to comply with the Administration's plan for TANF reauthorization. After three months in a drug treatment program, those that are able to will be engaged in community service activities (meeting the work requirements) for 24 hours a week. Those that the substance abuse counselors assess as being unable to do so without jeopardizing their sobriety, will be exempt. (MC12) However, since the proportion of the caseload that each state will be expected to engage in countable work activities will increase substantially under the Administration's plan, there will be strong disincentives to allow many individuals to be identified as exempt after three months.

Empowerment Zones

The study community falls within one of the city's empowerment zones. The empowerment zone is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide funding to urban areas to help revitalize economically distressed neighborhoods. In the city, the funds have been used in part to fund

neighborhood based service centers that have a focus on improving work participation among residents within the target neighborhoods.

Respondents question the impact the funding has had for some of the more distressed communities in the city. (35:29, 33:57) One respondent reports that the infusion of resources had stimulated a great deal of hope and excitement in the community, but now, several years later, she reports little has seemed to change.

There was huge expectations about what that would mean in terms of employment and revitalization and all that. And here we are at least 5 years later and...things are continuing to deteriorate, pretty rapidly actually. I think there's just a lot of ... frustration in terms of these massive projects that hypothetically should be pumping huge amounts of money into these very poor and economically underserved neighborhoods...I don't think [most of] the money ever...got down to the neighborhood frankly...I mean there's no evidence of it. (35:29)

Another respondent indicates that improving employment in economically distressed communities is a large undertaking. And, when they are successful moving someone into employment, those individuals tend to move out of the distressed neighborhoods, not remain.

I don't think you can have an entire neighborhood of [concentrated] poverty and expect [much change]. ...[It will be]...the rare person...that is going to be able to pull themselves out [and if they do,] ...they don't tend to stay in that neighborhood, as soon as they get a job [they move]. (33:57)

To the extent, then, that an empowerment zone initiative is successful in improving the economic well-being of an individual or family within a distressed community, there is a marginal benefit to the community. As their economic well-being improves, they leave.

Community-Based Social Service Agency

Some respondents stated that residents were aware of social service programs in the community to help them. (1:3, 1:59, 23:37) Other respondents stated that people are not aware of the services offered in the community-based organizations (3:27, 6:36, 16:15). "There's a lot of things that are for this community people just don't take advantage of, there's a lot of things ...they don't even tell you." (16:15)

Some respondents reported that the programs in the neighborhood are helpful. (1:3, 3:28, 5:25, 6:34, 6:36, 6:38, 24:40, 13:40) Among the reasons provided is that the staff are seasoned (1:3) and "nice." (3:28) One respondent noted that the staff of one local community based organization grew up in the neighborhood and will go all out for you but will confront you if they think you are wasting their time. (1:59)

Others questioned how much community based organization programs really are working. (25:48, 23:37) Another respondent was cynical. "I can't see nothing that they have accomplished to prepare people that looks for jobs." (10:54) Respondents also report that some of the programs available to residents of the community to help them access education, job training or placement assistance are being under-utilized. (1:3, 24:41).

Eligibility Restrictions

The empowerment zone funded service center in the study community requires proof of residence in the target neighborhood to access services. As a result, boyfriends, adult family members no longer on leases of public housing units, and homeless individuals who are arguably residents of the neighborhood may be unserved. (34:13, 16:15) This has had a disproportionate effect on men according to one respondent.

[T]his is the problem for men, they're not on the lease. ... The way the welfare office and housing have it set up, if you are receiving welfare, you cannot have a male living with you. ... And if he is and he's working then you most definitely [are] not able to put him on the lease. That will void your welfare benefits. So the man is there but he really can't go to [the center] ...for those services although he's been living in this zone mostly all of his life. (7:41)

The respondent quoted above does note that individuals who are not on leases can receive services if they have a letter from the leaseholder stating that they do indeed reside in the neighborhood and they have no income, but many are reluctant to take this step. "There's a whole lot of lying that has to go on, so a lot of men just won't go through that, that pride, they just won't go through that." (7:41) Instead those "unofficial residents" seek assistance through homeless service programs. He believes this is the appropriate venue for them to access services. "Homelessness is when you are not the person that owns your home. Who are you living with? You're homeless." (7:41)

An initiative being undertaken with empowerment zone funds in the city is outreach to incarcerated individuals to help them prepare for a successful re-entry.

Again, since the use of funds are restricted to residents of empowerment zones in the city, programs were unable to fully serve, or be reimbursed, for services provided to those who are not official residents of the empowerment zone. (34:12). A recent study found that many incarcerated individuals in the state will be re-entering the city and will disproportionately be returning to several disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city. (LaVigne & Kachnowski, 2003). It is very likely also, that many will be “unofficial” residents who are reluctant to demonstrate “proof of residence” in an empowerment zone community. This may be particularly true if the individual is planning on residing in a public housing unit in an era of “one strike” housing policies that can result in the eviction of an entire household for the criminal behavior of one resident. (34:10)

Ironically then, the residence requirements imposed by the service center may impede their ability to help some of the most disadvantaged residents of the empowerment zone. This is particularly problematic when the services are reportedly being under-utilized rather than over-subscribed. (34:31)

A service provider noted that targeted programs that are exclusively for people living in a disadvantaged community have another, likely unintended, consequence for service provision. Because programs for youth, for example, are only open to youth that live in the immediate area, it has the effect of perpetuating the isolation, and segregation, that the young people already encounter in most other aspects of their daily lives. The program participants will include the same young people they see in their own neighborhood, in their school, and now in a social program. He proposes that there would be benefits instead to promoting a policy that facilitated greater integration.

Sometimes you need a mixture of individuals....take the success for the military for whatever it is. They seem to blend a mixture of individuals from all over the country....across class and race and things like that. Give them an opportunity to be something and be a team, they gel together. (26:10)

Job Training and Preparation Activities

Some TANF recipients are required to participate in a job search or job training program to remain eligible for, or to access, cash assistance. Other residents can volunteer to participate in a program and access those services through a WIA one stop agency or the local community based organization that relies on empowerment zone funds. Each of the three funding streams has been used to purchase job search and job training services from private vendors in the community. The services different vendors or programs offer can vary and residents report both positive and negative experiences in job preparation and job training programs.

The TANF agency has found that it is important that all TANF recipients receive life skills training. (33:4/33:52)

Five years ago we had vendors who tried to just...do the bare minimum...and they would just send people in and say 'could they have these jobs?' And it didn't work, ...they couldn't place people, if they did they didn't stay because they didn't do any kind of preparation. So as basic as that sounds I think it's very, very needed.

(33:52)

Subsidized employment training is being used by some welfare to work vendors. Because the wages of clients in job placements are subsidized, employers are willing to

be more tolerant of mistakes or poor behavior than they would otherwise be willing to accept from employees. This is particularly true in public programs because it is difficult to fire workers in the public sector once they've worked over six months. Because these subsidized placements are part time, welfare recipients are also reportedly able to concentrate on developing skills or improving their education. (33:53) Another perceived benefit of subsidized employment is that the participant receives wages that are not taken into account when determining the payment level of their TANF cash assistance. Subsidized employment is time limited to six months so as not to disincentivize moving into traditional employment. (MC1)

A service now being offered is "customized training" where costs are shared by the employer and the public workforce system. The primary benefit is that if the individual performs well, he or she will be placed in a position that is available. (32:33)

We've had a lot of success with that. And I think it is [because] people can see something at the end of the tunnel. So they don't mind making the sacrifices or whatever is necessary because they know they're going to have a job at the end of it and they're acquiring skills while they're doing it. (34:28)

Job Programs Helpful

Some respondents observed that the job search and job training programs they were required to participate in to sustain TANF assistance ended up being helpful. One respondent reports she was hired in her work placement where she remained for five years until the store closed down (17:33, 44:99/17:8) She reports it also provided her with motivation and built her skills. (44:100/17:8)

I think I gained a lot of help from it. It gave me...the urge to move on and try to get employment and go back and forth to a career training...They provided you with day care, transportation..[job search assistance][and taught us] how to fill out [an] application...dress for interviews...[write] resumes, how to call people on the telephone...how to talk to people. (17:8/44:99)

Since she's been laid off, she's hoping to move directly into another job and avoid welfare cash assistance altogether. (44:103/17:28)

Another respondent went to nursing assistant program to become a certified nursing assistant. She was at the top of her class before a second background check found an old warrant making her ineligible to work in that field. She reports, however, the program was still helpful to her. (22:6/44:143) "Because I learned something, I met nice people, I went to school, I learned a lot. It helped a lot of people." (22:20/44:124) She reports that most of her classmates found jobs before the class was even completed and it has inspired her interest in one day going to nursing school now that her warrant has been cleared up.

Respondents who report that they found job training programs to be helpful include one man who voluntarily participated in a six month janitorial training program in 1994. He reports that the program helped him build his skills, referred him to job openings, and served as a reference when he applied for jobs.

I wanted to do something. I wanted to find something that would fit me.

Something I know I could do and I could just...go through the training. They trained me and taught me to do something good and I could do it, and I was

already doing that before I did it...but, you know, I just improved on it. Buffing floors, waxing floors, mopping and cleaning offices and all that stuff. (5:18)

A single father also reported having a very positive experience in a job preparation program that he participated in to fulfill welfare to work program requirements though he still has not found a job. One of the more significant accomplishments of the program is a successful effort to build a support system among the program participants in his class that extended beyond the time frame of the class. As a result, program participants continue to provide assistance and support to one another and additional supports were leveraged from the support networks of the program participants.

[The program had activities that] got us to bond together and the more we got bonded together the more we talked ...the more we...could help each other, cause ... some people had the same problems. And you get together and talk about [it]. ... And then some of [other participants] had ... boyfriends [and] ... some of them had ... high school diplomas, ...college degrees [and] they would help us [too]. (19:36)

He reports that the on-going support provided by the group of individuals who participated in the welfare to work program helps those who are continuing to look for employment avoid getting discouraged and giving up.

All of us keep in contact with each other. ... Some of [us are] working, some of us [are] not working...the ones that is working say, 'Well don't give up, you gonna get a job sooner or later'....We help each other because sometimes people get

discouraged, they say 'Well I've done been in this program for this amount of months, this one got a job and I ain't got no job, so I don't want to go there no more' ...so we try and keep each other up. (19:36)

The time spent by the program nurturing the relationships between program participants has had long term consequences. It has fostered on-going supports for participants that have exceeded the duration of the program and expanded their network of “helpers.” The tutoring help offered by the partners of program participants is one example. The expansion of the social network may also improve opportunities for employment through informal job referrals.

Another program element that the respondent quoted above found to be very helpful was mandatory drug screenings before services are offered. He notes that this allows those with drug problems to be identified early and referred to appropriate treatment services. In contrast, in other programs, people with drug problems were not identified until after they completed a training program and failed an employer's drug screening test. This increased the likelihood that participants would give up and not return to a program. As a result, they never access needed services.

They said there was no need [to return to a program] because they wasn't going to help them no ways because if they go on the job they wasn't going to be hired, so some of them left. You know a lot of people leave. ...With this program here, they get you from the beginning...so if you have any trouble and you need help when they come back you can talk to them, then they send you to [get treatment that fits their family needs]. (19:21)

Since participation in a program is required for some welfare recipients to continue to receive TANF cash assistance, dropping out of the program also means they lose what may be their only source of income.

Job preparation services can prove a useful resource for the future. One respondent reports that she continues to rely on the material she was provided when she went through a training program. She found the information about how to look for work and prepare for interviews to be very helpful because she used to get nervous on job interviews. (24:21/44:11)

Other respondents report that they observe the training programs are useful to residents in the study community. (44:129/21:67) "I see a lot of people that's been ... on Social Service and have been in the program, became productive and is working good jobs. ... As I say it's all up to the individual."

Job Programs Not Helpful

Other respondents report less satisfactory experiences. Respondents expressed concern that programs are stating that they can help people access jobs and that is not true (14:49, 9:59, 14:57, 14:51). "That's the way I guess they're coming off to you. 'Oh I can get you a job.' But it's not, they can't. They can get you an interview." (14:51) Instead many are accessing training that never leads to jobs (9:59, 11:43) or they only receive help establishing job interviews (14:49, 8:21, 14:51). As a result, some are disappointed. (8:21)

A primary complaint was not that the training did not lead to jobs but that people felt they had been led to believe it would. One respondent reports that a local program

advertises that they provide “job placement,” but they have changed the interpretation of that word.

People [are going in] thinking that they're going on an interview and they're going to be placed into a job...And when that does not happen, people get discouraged. ...[The term ‘employment placement’ is being used to mean that] they are going to teach you the skills to be able to go out there and access a job on your own. That's not employment placement. (8:21)

Another respondent reported a similar sentiment. “It really upsets some of these people around here. Because they went to [job training programs], they tell them one thing and they go there and they do everything that they're supposed to be doing and then when their time is up and they completed it, they're right back on the street. No job.” (10:23)

When job training and job placements don't appear to be connected to accessing jobs, people may be less inclined to use those programs on a voluntary basis because they are viewed as a waste of their time or have offered less than the participants believe was promised to them.

To me, it seemed like a waste of time, because they weren't offering you too much of nothing....They were offering training, but they're not offering no job providing...if they had you in training, they should be able to place you on jobs. ... What's the use of going through the training if they don't place you in a job? (11:43)

A respondent who did get a job several months after completing a job training program also complained that as far as job placement the organization did little more than

set up an interview for her. "I got myself the job. So that's what I'm saying, a whole lot of programs promise you something, but they don't tell you that you're actually getting the jobs yourself." (16:53)

Respondents report feeling betrayed when the job program they participate in sent multiple people out to interview for the same job. (16:53, 14:5/44:82)

I thought that was a wrong thing for them to do...send a lot of people out on one job interview...if you send me on a job interview with somebody that's [better qualified in one area of the job] ... of course, they're going to get the position. (14:5/44:82)

Another respondent noted that after participating in job training programs, many welfare recipients appear to be moving into jobs they could have gotten without training. While she believes there is room to improve those programs, she reports they are still providing a valuable service.

A lot of them are moving into jobs they could already get. But it's always good to sharpen skills and all of that. I don't think it hurts. What I think is wrong with the job readiness program is they don't prepare, they're not prepared when they leave them, not really to go out there and get a substantial job. I mean, they'll do computer skills for a couple of weeks...come on, you need much more time than that. They need more expensive training. But, you know, you take what you can and use it the best way that you can...I think they should use every avenue that's open to them. (24:23)

Another respondent listed job training that she has received that has had little relationship to jobs she's actually acquired. "I'm a certified nursing assistant, I'm a certified office specialist, I'm a certified data entry, and I never got no job, the only job I got through my certificates was nursing, nursing assistant. I did do data entry through...an agency and that didn't last long. And now I'm a food service worker." (14:19)

While respondents complain that the job trainings aren't preparing people adequately to enter the workforce, two respondents report that some people who are participating in programs are only doing so because they are required to and have no intention of looking for employment in the short-term. (16:12/44:95, 44:84/23:6)

One respondent reports that if they are going to invest in providing training to help people move into jobs, they should provide training that will help them move into jobs that will provide decent wages.

If you're going to do something, than do something to give these people adequate incomes. Because after this person gets this job at this McDonald or...housekeeping, cleaning offices or something and they're still making minimum wages, after a certain amount of time you're going to cut their benefits off, than where are they?...They still can't afford to pay rent, they still can't afford to adequately care for their families. So what have you really done except for taking the burden off the government for them? (8:26/44:7)

Concerns also include whether the programs match what residents in the study community require (16:15, 34:26, 27:30). One respondent described attending GED preparation classes where all the students in the room were well ahead of her.

I'm like, I'm sitting there, like 'What are you talking about?' And it goes way over my head and I just be sitting there looking dumbfounded...They were more advanced than what I was. I was sitting there looking all crazy. I'm just beginning, they're all forward. (2:101)

Another respondent referred to a job training program offered by the housing authority to train tenants to become exterminators. She questioned how many positions really exist for such program graduates. (27:30) Another questioned the number of low-skilled workers that could reasonably be expected to be absorbed in the existing local labor market. (36:9)

Finally, participants report being sent to job search programs that involved little more than sitting in a room each day for a set number of hours each week with classified ads or a computer with online job listings (44:17/8:26) One respondent reports that before applying for TANF cash assistance she was required to sit in a room every day for two weeks, dressed for an interview just in case she would be sent out for a job interview. During the day she and other participants were encouraged to look through the classified ads, something she felt she could have done at home. She reports her time here felt like a waste of time. The one time she was sent out on an interview with several other TANF applicants, they encountered a number of other TANF applicants from the neighboring county in the waiting room also waiting to be interviewed. She reports that they all

wondered whether they were really going to be interviewed for a job or whether they were just being tested. (16:12)

A city administrator reports that vendors that are charged with helping TANF recipients transition to employment are required to meet job placement and retention goals and are paid for performance. They receive a payment if the participant retains employment for four months. Thus, she argues, vendors are strongly motivated to try and get participants into jobs they can sustain. (MC15) She further notes that the goal of the TANF agency is to move their client population into the workforce. The city agency has encouraged the development of some programs to prepare people for work and there are other publicly-funded programs that TANF recipients are encouraged to utilize. The jobs that welfare recipients enter upon leaving cash assistance are seen as the first of a succession of jobs the individual will hold and the majority of workers who start working at minimum wage will receive wage increases as they move into other jobs or receive promotions. (MC15)

Service Delivery Strategies and Challenges

Among the challenges providers face is preventing sending their clients into the workplace too early, thus setting them up for failure. Providers also note a need to market job training services to employers. Program outcome requirements and funding streams can create challenges. Providers have found that to be successful, a holistic approach is often required that may extend beyond what is traditionally thought of as job preparation services.

Avoid Setting Clients up to Fail

Service providers report that it is important to avoid sending their clients into the workplace before they are prepared to be successful. (37:48, 30:25, 30:29, 33:49, 35:36) One respondent reports that “one [reason] is selfish, I don't want to lose funding, two is I don't want to add to their failure rate, I'd rather say not yet ...my theme is based on protecting them and protecting the opportunity for the next [group].” (30:25) Another respondent also affirms the need to retain relationships with employers for future clients. “We're not going to send them to a ...private employer that is going to get upset [and then] who will never let us send another person again.” (33:49)

One service provider reported that placing people into jobs before they can be successful represents the provider's failure to the client.

I think the worst thing...they can do is get these folks into job situations too quickly and inappropriately. They lose them, they get fired and now they got another black mark on their record and they've been in this very punishing situation and get discouraged. And I think that we're screwing up, they're not, because we're ... not putting the right support systems into place to help them keep those jobs. (35:36)

It can also make it difficult for clients. One service provider indicated that due to a number of failure experiences, one of her clients is reluctant to leave the security of the job training program her organization operates.

After so many let downs, he began to start to kind of take responsibility for why he kept getting rejection letters from employers...he's back with us in a wage only

position but he'll do that for as long as it lasts because I think...the rejection that he experienced [and] the fear of [experiencing] that same feeling [again] probably makes him stay where he is. (30:27)

Marketing Workforce Development

Respondents indicate that programs that provide training are meeting employers' needs. (30:16, 37:58, 33:49) The tight labor markets in particular led employers to seek out new marketplaces for employees including local job training and social service programs.

I think especially before the recession there was such a need for workers that they were coming to us saying 'we need entry level people.' ... All the vendors tell them about the tax credit and help them fill out [the] paperwork, so I think that helps out as well...that's giving them some extra money for training. (33:49)

One respondent identifies another way in which job training programs are meeting the needs of employers. He notes that in today's economy there is little expectation that workers will remain with one employer over the long-term. (37:58) This reduces the interest, then, in investing in developing a workforce. A public workforce system externalizes this cost. (37:58) He further notes that prepared workers will have greater retention. "Employers [should] buy into training with agencies like ours so that we can move that person to being a good employee because it costs them more to hire and fire folks than it costs to invest in them." (37:57) This is a relationship that should perhaps be highlighted for advocacy purposes, stressing how workforce development and related supportive services meet both employers' and citizens' needs.

Respondents also indicate that employers should be the target of interventions.

One respondent suggests that employers should be offered incentives to provide the supports in the workplace that will help many entry-level workers navigate the challenges that will emerge and to improve employment retention. (30:18) Others propose that employers need to be educated about the city's untapped workforce.

They need to look at this new pool of people, be it whether they have criminal backgrounds, whether they have [histories of] substance abuse, if you are going to improve the quality of living for everyone, then you got to get those folks to work too...just because they didn't get it before doesn't mean that they can't get it and they can't become one of your best employees. (37:57)

Interventions with employers should include challenging stereotypes some employers may have of stigmatized groups, including ex-offenders and people in recovery.

[Some employers expect that people in recovery will] steal, [that] they are placing themselves at huge risk, huge risk for criminal activity in...their work site...and sometimes they're right but more often they're not, they're probably going to be wrong in applying these preconceptions to everybody, so I think really educating the employer more about this population, the realities of life, ...of who they are going to be hiring. Most of them are very bright, they're very capable, they need to be primed and be given the skills to be able to do the job. (35:34)

Coordination of Services

Respondents indicate that some coordination exists between programs and more needs to occur. (32:2) One service provider notes that developing linkages and

coordination across agencies is being actively encouraged to promote holistic service delivery. "If you look at most RFPs now for services, they require you to do the collaboration with the literacy, with the life-skills, with the job readiness and with training." (37:33)

Examples of cross-agency collaboration include assistance the city TANF agency provided to relocate tenants from public housing. (33:51) Other agencies work to support the TANF agency's welfare to work goals. Some of the neighborhood centers that serve empowerment zone residents, including the one in the study community, are qualified providers of welfare to work services so neighborhood residents can meet their work activity requirements for TANF cash assistance at those sites. (34:29) In addition, participation in some job training programs that the housing authority offers to their residents can also be counted toward meeting the TANF cash assistance work requirements. (33:51)

City and state agencies have made efforts to support welfare to work activities by serving as work experience sites for TANF recipients. "It's just something that agency heads have...been behind, like the governor and the mayor just said, ...'you guys have to support this welfare program,' and they do it." (33:55) She further notes that she believes the public agencies have benefited from the contribution TANF recipients have made because they receive additional staffing. Her agency has hired on TANF recipients who completed placements and who have since advanced on the job. (33:55).

Some challenges in service delivery remain, however. Respondents indicate some areas in which the service delivery system have failed to respond to the needs of their

clients and may actually be impeding their ability to work. Specifically one respondent reported that welfare caseworkers are continuing to set up appointments for their clients during the work day, disrupting their work schedule.

Sometimes they [make] these appointments [at the] last minute and okay, listen, I'm on your side, I'm trying to help out here, but if you're creating internships that are out in the business community [that's a problem]. ... If you want them to get into the business world, you gotta be understanding of the differences in taking all this staff times to work with these people and train them and you can't be pulling them out of there during the work day. (32:42)

Similarly, another service provider noted that parole officers often demand ex-offenders who are trying to maintain employment visit their office and submit to a drug screening during the work day. He states this can cause problems on the job for people who already have challenges finding employment. "The employer then says, 'John, you're missing a lot of time.' ...You lose your job....I know there are instances where you must monitor closely, but there has to be [another] way of monitoring folks." (37:16) Indeed, he notes, that if drug screenings were conducted in the evening, parole officers could also be helping to structure the off-work hours of the ex-offender. (37:17)

Outcome Requirements

Respondents express concern with some outcome requirements that are being imposed. One primary concern is that the time being allocated to help people transition into the workforce is not realistic for some of the clients they are serving.

Workforce policymakers haven't given me that time [needed to work with individuals with more complex needs]...you have a certain level of folks that you must place in employment annually and you're expected to meet your numbers regardless of the social skills or the substance abuse problems of your folks and all of the other barriers, you still have to make your numbers and that is what [it] has come down to. (37:36)

He notes that they are now serving a more disadvantaged population than they have in previous years. Their outcomes, such as the length of time it takes to move someone into employment, will be longer if they are serving them well. (37:37) "So you're spending more time with that individual to get [same] result that you may have gotten very fast from some others." (37:35) Indeed, some of the clients they are taking longer to place may be receiving richer services to address and build education and social skills. What may be interpreted from outcome data, however, is less efficient service delivery as placements slow down.

As a consequence of imposed outcome requirements, they have modified their service delivery and this has affected the quality of services they are able to provide. (37:37)

I think it has somewhat diminished the kinds of services that we can provide...[sometimes to the] detriment to the client, detriment to the organization as a whole when you have someone go out to an employer and fails. The employer then says, 'Well I don't want anymore of your people' [and the] detriment to your staff. (37:37)

Outcome requirements or limitations can mutually inform service delivery and policy practice. The State initially allowed TANF recipients to be engaged in substance abuse treatment for a limited time before they were expected to move into other approved work activities. (35:36) When the restrictions were deemed to be overly restrictive, the policy was changed. The substance abuse provider also modified their services, to begin welfare to work activities earlier, concurrently with substance abuse treatment.

Our system historically has taken a sequential approach - first you deal with their substance abuse and then you deal with their work readiness....[TANF rules] really forced [us] ...to create a parallel process. And so while we were in the process of really trying to help them become sober and clean, [we are] also immediately starting to talk to them about their work readiness and looking at work related barriers. (35:12)

Employment outcomes are also being imposed on other providers according to one respondent. City substance abuse treatment providers are being required to have clients employed or involved in education or job training programs upon discharge.

The program now has a benchmark that they have to meet in terms of rates of employment of patients who are completing treatment with us [and]...I think that is misguided because most of our patients aren't ready to make that leap and we're not an employment agency. ... That is asking us to do things we're not in a position to do. And that's why we have employment agencies out there. (35:36)

Funding Streams

Funding restrictions influence and constrain practice. In some cases providers have found mechanisms to meet needs within existing constraints. One provider notes that her agency's goal is to be able to respond to the diverse needs of clients, and that entails helping their funders see the connection between resolving social problems that may appear on the surface unrelated to meeting employment outcomes.

There's a lot of willingness here but we are limited by our funding. ... So when we run into housing and health and substance abuse problems, we...have to do a lot of stretching to address that...we have to do a lot of communicating with our funders and ... potential employers as to what we're doing to make these kids better [prepared] ... from a funder's point of view. (30:35)

Service providers identified areas they felt were critical to meet their public policy charge but were restricted from providing. They did, however, find ways to navigate those restrictions. Empowerment zone funds, for example, cannot be used to help support an individual in housing. It can be used, however, to provide substance abuse treatment services. Transitional living services are described as part of the substance abuse treatment continuum—ensuring better treatment, and employment, outcomes. As a result, transitional living programs are considered to be an extension of substance abuse treatment and are being funded. (34:17) The response to substance abuse and aftercare needs for the target population are viewed, along with all other services funded by empowerment zones, as moving toward an “inevitable outcome [of getting them to] jobs and getting them to work.” (34:24)

In another example, the WIA program staff identified a need to do more “incumbent” training, building the skill set of the already employed low-wage, low-skilled workers. Focusing on incumbent training would have negatively affected their performance for the federal block grant, so instead they advocated for, and received, state funds. (32:9)

Another mechanism to ensure clients’ needs are met is using resources to ensure better service delivery from another provider. TANF resources cannot be used to purchase medically based substance abuse services, however, Medicaid can be used. Staff of the TANF agency have found that that Medicaid system has incentives to move clients into less costly services. The TANF agency has hired substance abuse advocates who work with their clients to seek the best possible substance abuse treatment services funded through Medicaid.

Medicaid providers in this area were just not giving people the full information.

The clients...need advocates to get...into appropriate treatment because they make less money if they give them the long-term in house treatment versus just trying to give them less [like outpatient]. (33:5)

A primary funding concern is shrinking dollars. One administrator expressed concern that existing WIA dollars for training will be spent before the end of the fiscal year and will likely force cutbacks in services.

We're not going to have enough....we're probably going to have to take some measures and roll back so those individuals that are going to need training this

year, it's going to be more limited, which also means that you don't have as much to offer employers. (32:33)

The agency administrating TANF has already experienced a hiring freeze.

"With the freeze we're down 20% and they're abolishing [positions], so the likelihood of us getting, even the level of staff we had a year ago is very slim." (33:50) As a result of the cuts, the TANF agency is able to do less in-house work with TANF recipients before referring them to vendors in the community for job training and other approved work activities. In the long run, she notes, this might be more costly as some TANF recipients drop out quite quickly from vendor-provided job training programs. If they had remained in-house longer, the agency would have been able to do a more thorough assessment of the client's needs and do a better job of matching the TANF recipient with a vendor. (33:50)

There is also concern over future funding. One administrator reports some wariness over federal funding for the WIA program.

I think funding is the major problem right now...the Bush Administration...is not seeming to realize what workforce does. ...[They are proposing cuts to] training across the board...I don't know how you can continue to provide the same level of service, to help remove the barriers as far as skills development and job readiness, if you have less funding. (32:35)

While providers may be facing funding strains, they note services that they would like to provide if they had more resources. One administrator reported a desire to do more

“customized training” a training approach that represents a partnership between the public and private sector to train people for jobs that actually exist in the community.

(32:33) In addition to wanting to provide more in-house services to women transitioning off of welfare, one city administrator said that she would like the agency to be able to do more for TANF recipients as they transition from welfare to work.

Sometimes I wish we could give them a little bit more support when they're going out into the workforce....it's not like they've been sitting on cash.... it's like all of us need to buy new clothes if we haven't worked for 5 years and stuff like that....I would like to see us give a little bit more ...not cash necessarily but actually give them things that we would think would be directly related to work. (33:50)

One provider stated that what is really required and what no funding stream seems to be currently purchasing is intensive case management. (35:19) She notes it is a critical resource in helping TANF recipients with substance abuse disorders who are now receiving case management services through a demonstration grant program.

I think some system has got to ante up and pay for case management services. ... At a really intense, we're talking an intensive level of case management...and it's absolutely the glue that's needed to get these women to negotiate all these different systems that they have to work within and to keep them in treatment so when they would be in danger of dropping out, they would go to their home and literally just drag them back in and nobody has the capacity to do that. (35:25)

There is also the strain of maintaining balanced funding. One community-based service provider reports seeking federal dollars has driven him to spend less time on basic

core services (26:29); it has also reduced funding from private sector as they don't see a need to support what the government is contracting with him to provide (26:29)

Holistic Approach Required

Respondents indicate that, to be successful, providers need to take a holistic approach. The holistic service delivery mechanism is critical, according to one respondent, because if "the product [or goal] is a better employment outcome, the actual pieces that need to be in place need to be broader than...just moving people into employment." (32:40) One provider, for example, found that many of his male clients had high blood pressure, improving their health care increases the likelihood they can be successfully employed (37:52). Another provider who works with young parents found a need to work with the entire family system that includes other adult members in the household. An intervention might be helping the young parent's parent access substance abuse treatment. "When you go into a home and the young man [is] on your caseload...to work [with] that client you have to work with that entire family....every issue that comes up...you can't just say...I'm just going to work with you and I can't help [the other members of your family]'... It doesn't work like that." (28:9)

One provider reports a need to respond to an array of issues that they have found necessary to address to help their clients attain, and then retain, employment.

We now...bring in the mental health issues component to our services [because] we have some women who have identified the fact that they were raped, and it's coming out years after and it's an issue that our programs will have to deal with, so we've got an MSW on staff, who can help walk through this. ... People come in

with all kinds of legal issues as well as social, substance abuse and all those other kinds of issues that prevent them from concentrating on work, that's the piece that policymakers miss I think. That you have to heal the person in order for them to concentrate on work. And that allows them to [weave] work [in] as an integral part of their life ...not that work should identify who you are, but work should be part of your well-being, part of your healthiness. (37:17)

Chapter 7: Summary and Discussion

This study highlights constraints and how people respond to them. Residents of the extreme poverty neighborhood interviewed for this study face significant stressors and challenges simply living safely in their neighborhood. There are a number of responses by residents to these challenges, including learning how to live within the context of those constraints, working to change those constraints for members of their community by contributing personal strengths and resources, or by trying to leave.

Residents of the neighborhood also report significant employment barriers that are constraining. The residents and service providers alike respond in various ways, including trying to dismantle those barriers, managing within the context of those barriers, or giving up. Service providers and city administrators have tools to intervene but can feel similarly constrained by limited resources, lack of flexibility in how resources can be utilized, program rules and practices, and imposed outcome requirements that occasionally seem counter-productive to shared goals. In each instance, whether responding to the challenges of living within an extreme poverty neighborhood or by responding to employment barriers, residents and service providers require additional supports and resources to strengthen their existing efforts.

Summary of Findings and Implications

One of the major findings is the extent to which community life appears to confer disadvantage, particularly among the young people. Despite challenges, however, residents are actively engaged in trying to address and dismantle barriers to employment, both for themselves and for other community residents. Social policies are needed that are responsive to the local labor market and designed to facilitate, not impede, work

participation. There are those with significant challenges to employment within the neighborhood. Efforts will be needed to ensure that there are pathways to employment, particularly for those whom employers may be less inclined to take a chance on. Finally, work alone cannot be the only tool to combat poverty.

Community Life: Conferring Disadvantage

Illegal drugs played a prominent role in the description of community life. It had been anticipated that by asking respondents about employment barriers faced by residents in the community rather than barriers respondents personally face, drug use might take a more prominent role than normally captured in studies. It was not anticipated that it would play such a central one, however. The pervasiveness of drug use, the drug trade, and the accompanying violence constricts the behavior of residents, generates stress and discomfort, weakens families and informal helping networks, can be “depressing,” and leads young people to become “hardened” or simply “accustomed” to it as a way of life. Drug use can also serve as an escape for those under stress. Involvement in the drug trade can bring income into poor households. The drug trade can also seem glamorous or exciting for some young people. It was startling to learn that one young woman who has never used drugs is socially active in Narcotics Anonymous and the members have reportedly adopted her as a sort of mascot. Even for an individual who has never used drugs, therefore, the drug community plays an important role in structuring her life.

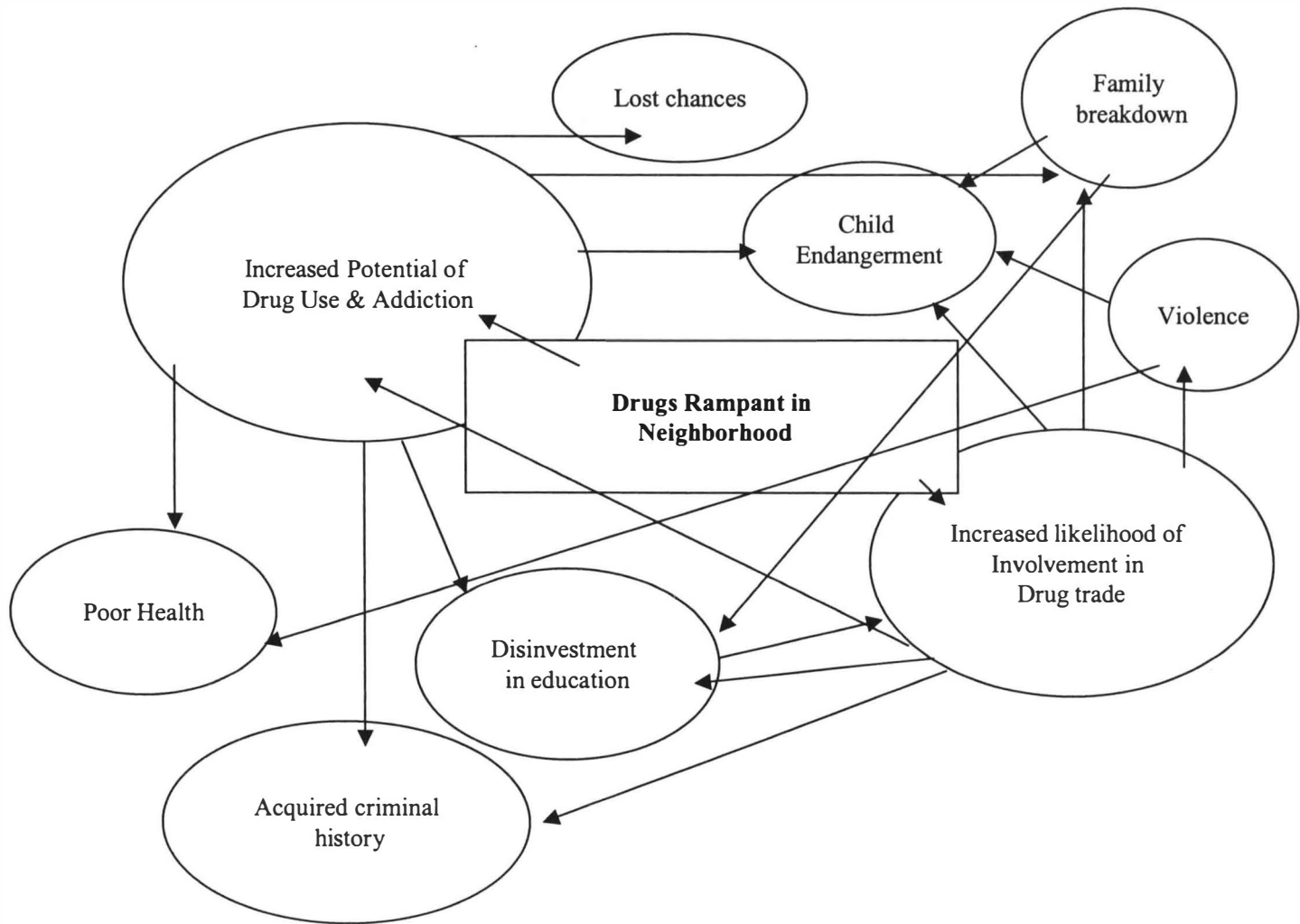
The residents in the study use various mechanisms to live within an environment that can be dangerous for themselves and for the community’s children. Residents have strengths that they contribute to try to create change. These include reaching out to neighborhood children, participating in the resident council, advocacy, and efforts to

improve the community for the well-being of all residents. Residents also value the contributions some of their neighbors make, in particular, for the benefit of the children. Despite these contributions, it is difficult to imagine how they can succeed in improving the life chances of the study community's youth without an infusion of significant support to strengthen their efforts.

The pervasiveness of the drugs increases the risk that family members will become involved in drug use or the drug trade or simply be victimized by the accompanying violence that surrounds it. Importantly, drug use and participation in the drug trade seems to be one root cause of a host of other barriers to employment. The involvement of young men in the drug trade seems perfectly designed to produce the same characteristics that so greatly impede the employability of some adults in the study community. Indeed, it appears to be related to the acquisition of some of the more difficult barriers to overcome—addiction, criminal history, and limited education. And, of course, acquiring characteristics that will confer long-term labor market disadvantage might be the least of the possible negative outcomes of their involvement in the drug trade. Involvement in the drug trade puts youth at higher risk of being victimized by violence or killed. Just as some policymakers and social scientists have seemed to embrace the reduction of teen pregnancy as a primary strategy to combat future and persistent poverty among young women, so too must there be efforts to help young men avoid the drug trade.

Figure 2 identifies the relationship between the prevalence of drugs in the neighborhood and existing barriers to employment and other challenges faced by residents. It is worth noting that this diagram over-simplifies that relationship and merely

Figure 2: Prevalence of Drugs Contributes to Other Challenges/Barriers



identifies the consequences that were directly observed or reported by respondents. Since the exploration of drugs in the community was never intended to be the focus of the study, the extent to which challenges were attributed to the prevalence of drugs is significant. It underscores the need for researchers examining employment challenges within extreme poverty neighborhoods to focus on the role of drugs in the lives of research subjects.

It is, of course, also worth stressing that drug use and the drug trade did not take root and thrive in a healthy community. It has thrived in a community where there was a significant loss of jobs and where many young people are described to feel hopeless about their own future. It is disturbing to contemplate that one reason for the transition from a black market trade made up largely of adults to one in which youth play a more prominent role may in part have been facilitated in response to more punitive social policies for drug-related convictions. It is also worth noting that while youth play a large role in the drug trade in the study community, and are recruited, or groomed, to do so, the drug trade in the end is an adult “game” in which young people are actively enticed to participate, are exploited and endangered.

Exposure to the risks associated with the drug trade that can be pervasive in high poverty neighborhoods is not the only risk young people in the community face that will impede future labor market participation. A new analysis by Swanson (2004) of the Urban Institute has found that Black youth in high poverty neighborhoods have a graduation rate of 50%, much lower than for other groups. Specifically, he examined the rate at which students enrolled in 9th grade graduated from high school four years later. He found that the impact of living in a low poverty neighborhood has a much stronger

effect for Black youth than for other groups. Black youth residing in low poverty neighborhoods have a high school graduation rate of 70%. Swanson (2004) examines graduation rates in each jurisdiction, and the figures seem to hold true for the study community. Black youth in the city have a high school graduation rate of 49% and Black youth in the surrounding county have a graduation rate of 82%. White youth in the city had much lower graduation rates, 37%, which is certainly not the national norm. As one respondent in the study stated quite succinctly, “The labor market has no mercy on you when you don’t have education or skills. It just doesn’t.” There appear to be fewer and fewer job opportunities for less educated workers and fewer paths to earn wages nearing the cost of living. It seems that this will become even more true in future years. The fact that so many of the city’s youth will be reaching adulthood without even the most minimal requirements for low-skilled work surely indicates a looming crisis for the city’s social service delivery system and a strong likelihood that many city residents will continue to experience severe labor market disadvantage in the future.

The consequence of living in a high poverty community seems to take an inordinate toll on the youth in the community. On occasion, the researcher reflected on how inconsequential a study examining barriers to employment must seem to residents who are struggling with such significant environmental stressors. This was particularly true when the well-being of the study community’s youth was the focus of reflection. A concerted social policy focus to help low-income adults overcome obstacles to employment and transition into the workforce seem misguided in the absence of significant efforts to prevent low-income youth from acquiring those same obstacles. Attention to promoting improved educational outcomes and protecting the community’s

youth from the dangers of drug use and drug trade involvement are necessary to prevent the further transmission of disadvantage across generations.

Labor Market and Public Sector Responsibility

Before turning to a discussion of employment barriers, it is important to attend to the labor market in which residents are expected to find employment. In the course of twelve years, years that included the booming economic recovery of the late 1990s, the city lost 57,000 jobs, a 12% drop in employment overall (Atkinson, 2002). A large number of the jobs that were lost were in manufacturing and construction, typically well-paying fields for low-skilled workers. The few jobs that were added in the city were in services. Indeed, it would appear that the growth industry within the city is in the delivery of services to other disadvantaged people. Because services comprise a bigger share of employment opportunities, workers may be transitioning into less lucrative fields. This may mean accepting employment for lower wages. Thus, they would see diminishing returns from sustained work effort.

Much of the region's job growth did not occur within the city, but in the outlying counties. This is not unique to this study community. In many metropolitan regions, job growth is concentrated further from the city's core (Brennan & Hill, 1999). As many low-income individuals have remained in central cities, the disparate growth has created employment challenges. Indeed, many early studies examining the challenges welfare recipients' faced in moving to employment pointed to the need for transportation assistance. This need is likely exacerbated, if not wholly created, by disparate job growth.

The capacity of the city's low-income residents to follow job growth is dependent on the development of a public infrastructure to allow them to do so—including investment in public transportation and housing that is affordable to a low-skilled workforce. Investment in expanding public transportation and affordable housing can be inhibited by those who seek to replicate racial and economic segregation. It can also be constrained by limited public resources, political will, or merely poor regional planning.

The loss of jobs within the city and the disparate job growth is outside of the control of study community residents. It is, however, in part a consequence of social and economic policies. The discourse around the Presidential elections seems to indicate that the public sector has an obligation to provide job opportunities for our nation's citizens. If the public sector has responsibility for stimulating job growth, does the public sector have an obligation to the citizenry when they fail to do so?

Startlingly absent from interventions to promote employment are meaningful policy investments in developing job opportunities, particularly for low skilled workers. Policy initiatives, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Work Opportunities Tax Credit (WOTC), and Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Zone tax credits have the effect of lowering the cost of employing low-wage workers by providing subsidies to either the wage-earner or the employer. This may increase the number of workers an employer can afford to employ, but does not necessarily stimulate the demand for workers.

Social policy interventions to improve employment outcomes cannot be successful by merely targeting the potential worker. Employers, too, must be the focus of interventions to improve employment outcomes of disadvantaged people. Regardless of how effective social programs are in encouraging people to work and helping them

eradicate barriers to employment, the larger issue of ensuring an adequate supply of job opportunities still remains. Not even the most brilliant social policy intervention to facilitate work participation can solve the disconnect of too few jobs for too many workers. Employment outcomes will always be, in large measure, determined by employment opportunities. Indeed, the capacity of tight labor markets to pull disadvantaged workers into the workforce is a testament to the effectiveness of a full employment policy to meet social policy goals of reducing dependence on social welfare programs. So, if social policies are being crafted to push people into the labor market, corresponding economic policies should stimulate local labor markets' capacity to absorb them. Importantly, if the economic policies are unsuccessful in generating the capacity to absorb low skilled workers, there should be adequate triggers built into social policy efforts to ensure that people aren't being pushed without access to a safety net when there are simply no jobs.

To date, however, it would appear that the burden of disparate job growth is being relegated to low-skilled workers in poor communities and to service providers who must manage with too few resources. For example, the study community has invested public resources for low-income families to provide temporary remedies to help welfare recipients and other low-income residents access employment in the outlying counties. This means that scarce funds for alleviating poverty and unemployment are being used to bridge and remedy the failure of the public sector to build its infrastructure.

Using resources for low-income people to substitute for public infrastructure investment can be a poor use of resources. It may require that access to those services or supports are limited to individuals eligible for the program funding stream. As a result,

other needy individuals cannot utilize the service even if there is no additional cost for them to do so.

In a study undertaken by the researcher in another low-income neighborhood, residents were also challenged by the lack of public transportation to areas of job growth. In that community, van transportation was provided for TANF recipients for one year following their exit from the TANF caseload. Not surprisingly, when the year was up, some lost their jobs because there was no replacement for the transitional transportation assistance. The van continued to serve the community, but would only allow those enrolled in TANF or receiving transitional assistance to get on the van. This excluded those who had “graduated” from TANF cash assistance to employment and those who strived to avoid seeking welfare assistance in the first place.

The public sector has a responsibility to meet the needs of its entire citizenry, including those with low-incomes. Some of the challenges that those individuals must overcome to transition into the workforce are a product of social policies and a result of the failure to invest in strategies that meet the needs of all residents. When designing policy interventions, care should be taken to assess whether policy efforts on behalf of participants of low-income assistance programs would be better deployed by investing in program initiatives to meet the broader community’s needs.

Responding to Employment Constraints

The passage of PRWORA stimulated a plethora of research regarding employment challenges that low-income women face in transitioning off of welfare and into employment. The research findings served to complement the work of urban poverty researchers. This study offers little new insight to the wealth of existing knowledge

about the factors that constrain the labor market participation of low-income individuals. It is hoped, however, that it provides insights into how those challenges constrain work participation and how residents and service providers struggle within the context of those constraints to create change.

The presence of “barriers to work” does not always constrain workforce participation. Drug use, for example, did not constrain work for several respondents who sustained employment, albeit, marginal employment, well into the latter stages of their addiction. Indeed, it appears that some temporary employment agencies not only accommodate people with addictions in their workforce, but appear to be designed to capture, or exploit, the labor power of those whose drug-use related behaviors would make it difficult for them to sustain permanent employment. Having alternative means to earn income also did not appear to dampen work effort for some. Two individuals who reported substantial income from the drug trade in their youth also noted an affinity for work. In another example, one respondent reported that, prior to welfare reform, she volunteered to participate in a work experience job placement that offered very minimal returns simply because it offered something for her to do and might lead to further opportunities.

There are, however, some employment challenges faced by residents in the community that are serious impediments to finding employment. Unsuccessful job search can convey to some that they are not needed, nor welcome, in the labor market. This can be especially poignant when the challenges that make it difficult for them to find employment are not something that can be remedied. This can be particularly true for people with criminal records.

Since there appears to be a high number of people in the state who are arrested under the influence of drugs and, as in most states, those incarcerated are disproportionately people of color (La Vigne & Kachnowksi, 2003), a criminal record is likely only one of several barriers to employment these individuals possess. The perception that there is little one can do to overcome one's personal history can lead some to a sense of paralysis, or helplessness, and exacerbate feelings of hopelessness and despair. It is such a perception that likely underscores the transition from "job seeker" to "discouraged worker," the population available to work who have stopped seeking employment. It would appear, for some, that the transition from active job seeker to discouraged worker may be a reasonable one given an individual's assessment of how likely job search is to lead to employment.

A disturbing recent study by Pager (2003) examined employment disadvantages experienced by Black men with a criminal record in a study that relied on college students who acted as "testers," some applying for jobs and claiming to have a felony criminal conviction and some reporting no criminal record. Five percent of Black applicants with a criminal record were called back by employers compared to 14% of Black applicants without a criminal history. The White testers who reported a criminal history were called back 17% of the time, compared to White testers without a criminal history who were called back 34% of the time. The study highlights the substantial disadvantage conveyed with a criminal record, coupled with the entrenched disadvantage that Black workers experience in the labor market. Without a criminal record, Black workers were less than half as likely to receive a call back than White workers. Indeed,

Black workers without a criminal record were less likely to be called back than White workers with a criminal record.

Pager's (2003) study was conducted in Wisconsin and further replication is needed. However, if her findings are supported in other states and localities, it would stand to reason that Black men with criminal records would be highly represented among discouraged workers. Indeed, given the small chance of receiving call backs, it would be more surprising to find such workers continuing active job search.

It should be noted that whether people are indeed locked out of the labor market or just perceive themselves to be so, the consequences can be devastating. It can lead people to believe that they have no other alternative path to the self-destructive one that they are already on. Often this is a path that has negative impacts for other community residents and society at large. It can also increase the likelihood of recidivism and weakening fragile families.

There are other barriers to employment that, should residents overcome them, employability would be greatly enhanced, including substance abuse disorders and education deficits. Unfortunately, resolving those challenges can be difficult to do. There may be long waits for substance abuse treatment, people may be referred to short-term programs when they may benefit from longer-term treatment programs, GED preparation courses may not be well suited for people with learning disabilities, and poor upfront assessment may mean that individuals are referred to classes that do not match the individuals' skill level. There is a need, therefore, to make it easier for those who have barriers to employment to access the services and supports they need to eradicate those barriers.

While the employment barriers of a disadvantaged population are often the object of study, too little attention is focused on employers as a target of intervention. The one exception is the examination of discrimination by employers. There is no shortage of studies demonstrating the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in the labor market and Pager's study (2003) is a substantial addition to that body of literature. What is now needed, however, is research that examines which interventions change the behavior of employers. Such research would examine what interventions can increase opportunities for disadvantaged people and what services and supports can be offered to employers and workers to help improve employment retention.

Regardless of the barriers to employment that people may possess, what seems to have the greatest effect in persuading employers to overlook disadvantage is very tight labor markets. Respondents indicate that in times of tight labor markets, employers actively sought out social service organizations to locate workers with only minimal requirements, for example, reliable attendance. The declines in welfare caseloads have led some to herald the virtue of PRWORA in compelling low income people to enter the workforce. However, the bigger news of the late 1990s is that the nation can sustain much lower unemployment rates than previously thought without triggering inflation (Mishel et. al, 2003). The resulting tight labor markets pull people into the labor market—including discouraged and disadvantaged workers. The labor market participation must receive a large amount of the credit for the record declines in poverty across groups in the late 1990s.

The barriers to employment that many of these disadvantaged and discouraged workers present to employers are real. Interventions to help people access jobs by

overcoming barriers and providing support to help them retain employment can only be enhanced by a high demand for their participation in the labor force. Economic policies that promote full employment can stimulate greater work participation among low-skilled workers. It can also increase the bargaining position of low-wage workers and stimulate wage growth while avoiding protracted social policy debates on the merits of increases to the minimum wage or need for living wage ordinances.

Through manipulating interest rates, the Federal Reserve seeks to manage unemployment, setting it at what is considered to be a sustainable rate. Too low, it is argued, and inflationary pressures may develop. While some economists point to an unemployment rate of 5.2% as an appropriate and “sustainable” level, others have argued that recent evidence demonstrates a lower unemployment rate can be sustained without triggering inflation (Bernstein & Baker, 1999). Indeed, it is argued that 4% unemployment can reasonably be considered “full employment.” It is abundantly clear that disadvantaged groups benefited from the tight labor markets of the 1990s. Because tight labor markets can be facilitated or impeded by monetary economic policy, such policy becomes critically important to those who are invested in improving the well-being of disenfranchised individuals. If target unemployment rates are set too high due to fear of stimulating inflation, progress made by disadvantaged groups in the labor market will be lost.

Generating and Promoting Pathways to Employment

There is a need to develop pathways to employment for some people with significant barriers to employment. Job training programs that build skills are seen as inadequate when they do not provide substantial assistance in helping people transition

into employment. It has also become clear that helping people transition into employment is only a first step. Many who have been outside of the labor market and have significant barriers to employment will need support to sustain employment. It would also appear that there is a need for support that will help people ultimately find employment that will offer improved economic returns as well as increased meaning and satisfaction in work. Such support can ultimately be beneficial to employers as well as those who are currently unemployed or under-employed.

Prioritizing the identification of pathways to employment can lead to the development of program and policy interventions that effectively place individuals with barriers to employment into jobs in the private sector. It can also have the effect of highlighting the instances in which a public jobs program may be necessary.

In helping people access employment, there is a need to learn from residents' own experiences. The most effective means of finding employment for residents appears to be through the use of referrals from people in their social network. Thus, time spent developing social relations may be more effective than time spent helping program participants learn how to engage in job search through cold calls to employers. Indeed, it appeared that the job training program that nurtured relationships among program participants not only helped the participants build a potential job referral network, it helped establish a support system that appears likely to generate returns well after the program ends. Awareness of existing pathways to employment used by residents can provide insight to program providers about how those pathways can be strengthened. Such knowledge can also be used to ensure that providers do not undermine existing pathways when developing interventions.

Residents of extreme poverty neighborhoods may have insufficient social networks or have fewer people in their social networks that can connect them to jobs (Wilson, 1987). It has been proposed that reliance on social networks to access jobs may have the effect of reproducing racial segregation in the labor market (Elliott, 1999). It may be similarly likely that reliance on existing social networks may be insufficient to help disadvantaged individuals access jobs that are likely to offer better wages and opportunities for greater social mobility. It may be useful, therefore, to help expand the networks disadvantaged individuals may rely on to access employment as well as strengthen their ability to use other means of accessing employment.

It appears that temporary labor pools have both benefits and disadvantages for people in the neighborhood. What should be intriguing for program providers is how temporary labor pools are able to fill a niche in the labor market. They provide a low threshold entry point for some workers, meet employers' needs, and generate a profit. Temporary employment through labor pools can exploit workers and trap individuals in a secondary labor market. However, it can also offer a pathway to permanent, full-time employment for individuals who may be the least desirable for employers to take a chance on by hiring outright. It would appear that there is a need for the nonprofit and public sector to examine what lessons can be derived from labor pools to develop interventions that would provide incentives, rather than disincentives, to move temporary workers into full-time, permanent positions.

Supporting Work, Fighting Poverty

In addition to doing more to help people address their barriers to employment and create pathways to employment for individuals with significant challenges, there is a

need to continue supports that make work viable for low-income people and social programs and social policy efforts are still needed to ensure that people within and outside of the labor market can escape poverty. Needed work supports include the availability of child care that is safe and reliable and that residents are comfortable with. Low-wage workers are not finding jobs that offer health care coverage and that continues to create a disadvantage for leaving welfare cash assistance. Indeed, the lack of an adequate safety net for low wage workers, including more difficulty accessing unemployment insurance and health care benefits, means that families who have a crisis are more likely to have to turn to TANF cash assistance. If such assistance is truly to be time-limited, therefore, more needs to be done to repair these holes in the low wage labor market. This should include policies, such as increasing the value of the minimum wage, that would increase the likelihood that work will help people transition out of poverty. Finally, it is important not to tie all poverty-reducing policy efforts to work participation. The EITC has been enormously successful in reducing poverty, however, the value of public assistance for low-income families who are outside the labor market have declined considerably. This greatly compromises the well-being of families. While poverty rates fell in recent years, it also deepened for many who remained outside the labor force. This cannot remain an issue at the margins of social policy efforts, particularly when unemployment is increasing.

Utilizing a Structuration Perspective

The researcher utilized a structuration perspective to inform the study. The appeal of a structuration perspective is that it recognizes and incorporates the role of both structural constraints and individual agency. A structuration perspective views social

social structures as constantly being reproduced across time and space through the actions of individuals who have become accustomed to how social structures constrain and enable. The model of how social structures are reproduced offered little utility to the researcher; however many of the concepts were useful.

Anthony Giddens (1984, p. 326) posits “the concepts of structuration theory should for many research purposes be regarded as sensitizing devices, nothing more....useful for thinking about research problems and the interpretation of research results.” A structuration perspective guided the researcher to examine not only the existence of constraints, such as employment barriers, but also how those constraints may be perpetuated over time. It further guided the researcher to attend to how people respond to constraints, how those constraints may impede individual action, and how service providers and residents alike attempt to dismantle, or work within, the constraints. Finally, a structuration perspective sensitized the researcher to the need to attend to unintended consequences. As it has yet to be addressed, a more thorough discussion of how unintended consequences of social policies may reproduce disadvantage follows.

Unintended Consequences of Social Policies

Giddens (1984) argues that social scientists should examine unintended consequences of actions, in particular, how such unintended consequences serve to reproduce patterned social relations. He posits that the reproduction of social structures is related to the tendency of people to behave similarly across time and space, thus sustaining existing structures. The following examples demonstrate how some social policies serve to reproduce marginalization. It does not appear, however, that routine

behavior of individuals can alone explain how such policies have the effect of reproducing disadvantage.

Housing Policies. Rental policies in subsidized housing developments may have the effect of facilitating economic segregation. In subsidized housing, the rent increases and decreases with household income. This ensures that housing will remain affordable to low income families despite variation in income. As incomes increase, so does the rent. As the rent increases, expectations also increase as one contrasts the rent paid with what may be available in the private market. Dissatisfaction may result in the transition of people out of the community that have the greatest economic security, those who remain will likely be those with the greatest level of economic insecurity. The result of the rent policies, exacerbated by the shortage of alternative affordable housing for those with the lowest incomes, thus exacerbates economic stratification.

Economic Revitalization. Efforts to combat economic and racial segregation through economic revitalization may facilitate only the geographic relocation of economic and racial segregation. The loss of the large public housing developments in the 1990s must have had some effect in deconcentrating poverty in the city. There are indications from respondents' reports, however, that in some cases people were relocated to other distressed areas, including the study community. This, of course, further concentrates disadvantage elsewhere even if it was diminished in the larger context.

A concurrent effort to combat economic segregation is the development of mixed income housing in the areas where the public housing was lost. Some respondents perceive the anticipated rents as pricing out most of the former tenants of the public housing units and there are far fewer replacement units being developed than were lost in

the community. Though it often appears that mixed-income housing is marketed as a tool to enhance the standard of living for people who are living in distressed public housing, it is clear to some that the result is often displacement of low-income people with little regard to the consequences for those families. Further, the loss of public housing may facilitate gentrification that leads to further loss of low-income housing in the community, and increases the potential for further displacement. What may not be clear, however, is whether this indeed is an unintended consequence of a social policy effort or simply a recognized and accepted byproduct of economic revitalization.

TANF. A clear example of a policy effort that encouraged a perverse outcome was described by a study community respondent. Unemployed and under-employed residents of the community were recruited to participate in a meeting to learn about job opportunities. The residents discovered at the meeting that the opportunities were restricted to current TANF recipients. Some residents interpreted this to mean that in order to access job opportunities, they should re-enroll in the cash assistance program. This was at complete odds with what they wanted to do, which was avoid returning to welfare by finding employment. This was also at odds with messages that policymakers clearly want conveyed.

Workforce Development/Job Training. Work first policies that promote work before some people are prepared to be successful potentially undermine efforts to help people transition to work. This can have the consequence of subjecting participants to, as one respondent describes it, more failure experiences. The result can be frustration and avoidance of future job search and disengagement from programs.

It also seems that as job training providers work to build skills or provide tools to give program participants a small advantage in job search, the result may be the institutionalization of those “small advantages.” As an example, many respondents report having spent time in job training programs learning how to prepare resumes for job search. As a result, low wage employers can now expect to accept resumes instead of job applications from job seekers. To the extent that this has become an expectation, no “advantage” was really provided to participants and indeed, non-program participants may now be at a disadvantage for their inability to meet this new expectation.

One of the complaints about job training programs is that many seem to lack the ability to place people into employment after training. But addressing this deficiency may create other challenges that should be avoided. In particular, the development of strong referral networks between job training programs and near-by, large employers, while valuable, should not undermine the informal referral networks that are supporting other disadvantaged neighborhood residents who do not participate in job training programs.

Informing Practice

This research offers lessons for social workers engaged in policy practice, research, program administration and direct practice. For policy practitioners, it becomes clear that there is a need to begin to assess the potential for perverse outcomes while policy remains in development. For research practitioners, the most compelling lesson the researcher will take away is the importance of honoring the community’s needs from the research and not only the researcher’s. Each of the respondents’ offered a glimpse of their own personal journey and struggle; it is difficult to walk away without making a

more substantial commitment to helping them utilize such findings to create change. Program administrators who were interviewed for this study were, by and large, very reflective and attentive to the strengths and weaknesses of program initiatives and are committed to modifying interventions as they determine it is needed. As a result, programs improve over time. Unfortunately, some who participate in emerging programs that may promise more than they can reasonably provide may leave some only further disillusioned and more difficult to engage in the future. The study also highlights the important role that community-based social workers can play in strengthening and enhancing the well-being of residents in distressed communities.

Policy Practice

The study offers some lessons for policy advocates and practitioners beyond recommendations for specific policy proposals. First, there is the potential for some unusual alliances in developing and promoting policy proposals that are likely underexplored. Examining the benefits employers derive from job training and preparation programs as well as support services, such as child care and transportation assistance, might prove to be a very promising tool and resource when engaging in federal or state policy advocacy on behalf of low-income groups. Second, there is a need to assess the potential for perverse outcomes while policy remains in development. Finally, there is a need to assess when eligibility requirements may prove too great an impediment to program and policy goals and when interventions would be more effective if they were more universally available.

In Spring 2004, the U.S. Congress is working on the reauthorization of the TANF block grant program. Surprising many, given the common perception that PRWORA

was a success, the Bush Administration proposed sweeping changes to the TANF block grant program. Despite the onset of a recession and higher unemployment, the Administration's proposal greatly increases the proportion of families on welfare caseloads that are expected to participate in work, increases the hours family heads are expected to be in "countable work activities" to remain eligible for cash assistance, and narrows the definition of what can count as work.

The Administration's proposal, almost identical to the bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 4), affords much less flexibility to the states to design their TANF program. This means much less flexibility to tailor programs to meet the needs of people with the most significant barriers to employment, including those with substance abuse disorders, learning disabilities, criminal records, and educational deficits. The more restrictive proposal will also result in less child care resources for low income families (Parrott, Goldberg, & Fremstad, 2003). Poverty advocates have expressed concern that PRWORA has led to declining well-being for many low-income families who lost access to cash assistance through sanctions or cuts to immigrant families. However, it appears likely that maintaining PRWORA as it is currently constructed would be better than what might emerge from the current Congress.

Congress is also considering the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Bills have passed the U.S. House of Representatives (HR 1261) and the U.S. Senate (S. 1627), and a conference is required between the two Houses of Congress to reconcile differences in the bills. There are a number of differences between the bills that have repercussions for residents of the study community. There are differences regarding caps on the amount of WIA resources that can be spent to serve young adults

who are enrolled in school as opposed to youth who have already dropped out of high school and regarding the extent to which disadvantaged individuals are prioritized for funding. A primary concern, however, appears to be a dearth of funding for job training activities that neither the House nor Senate appears prepared to solve (Holzer & Waller, 2003).

In the short-term, federal policy efforts appear to be more likely to result in a retraction, rather than an extension, of efforts to help low-income, disadvantaged individuals access the labor market. This is occurring even though states already have limited resources to provide such assistance and the Administration is being criticized for their inability to stimulate promised job growth. For those policy practitioners and advocates committed to work for policies that improve the well-being of low income people, it will, unfortunately, be primarily a task of prevention rather than progress in the short-term. It appears that substantial effort is required to avoid losing ground for low-income groups before progress can be made to improve the capability and “life-chances” of all of our citizens.

Research Practitioners

In formulating how to gain access to a disadvantaged community, the researcher under-estimated the challenges. In initial efforts to develop access, the researcher was informed by one staff person of a community-based service organization that she was merely one of a long line of social scientists seeking to exploit the residents of a disadvantaged community for her own purposes. She noted that researchers gather information from those who willingly share it, only to disappear afterwards. The research findings never seem to benefit the research participants. A similar sentiment

was expressed by a service provider who did participate in the study. She noted that the researchers from a near-by university “rape the community.” She further informed the researcher that she would have not met with the researcher had it not been for the intervention of a neighborhood resident who took it upon himself to facilitate the research process for the researcher. The researcher had mistakenly assumed that it would be neighborhood-based service providers who would be well placed to help her access residents that she would otherwise be unable to engage. As it happened, quite the opposite was true. Without the help of this neighborhood resident, the researcher never would have gained the access that was ultimately achieved.

The service providers were correct, however. Research participants are owed more from their participation with researchers. It would seem the ideal would be a more reciprocal relationship in which the community informs the researcher and the research informs the community. It would also appear that the ideal would be that of an on-going relationship. To gain trust within a community is not easily accomplished and once accomplished it seems unfortunate to leave it behind when more can be done to contribute to the well-being of residents and more can be learned by the researcher.

Finally, a lesson that will be carried forward is the value of capturing the perspectives of frontline practitioners and program administrators. They are often the first to identify the challenges that emerge in the implementation of social policies. They are also among the first who reflect upon, and work to, counter those challenges. Such direct practice and program administrators may have existing mechanisms to provide feedback and seek policy modifications. While some lament that direct service practitioners underutilize the findings of research practitioners, so too may research

practitioners be underutilizing the expertise and insight into social policy challenges that direct practitioners focus on every day.

Program Administration

Respondents highlighted a need for social programs to begin to modify their own practices to better respond to a new client population of workers. This may require evening or weekend hours to help people who are making a transition into the workforce and are unable to take time off during the workday to meet with counselors and caseworkers.

As was noted earlier, service providers are constrained by funding stream program requirements. Some have observed that some program requirements may be counter-productive to the goals of their program and they have, therefore, developed strategies to work within those constraints. It would be useful if program operators had opportunities to share with one another strategies that they are adopting to do so. There is also a need for evaluation of some program elements to facilitate learning across programs. This would help identify what elements of program strategies appear to be working and which are not. It would have been difficult to predict, for example, that program activities that helped build relationships among program participants might be more promising than program activities that help people seek employment. But, according to some respondents, this indeed might be the case. The outcome of relationship-building strategies is to extend one's support network, increasing the likelihood of a job referral. On the other hand, few respondents report finding employment through traditional job search efforts, so time spent preparing for job search may in the end be less productive.

Improved evaluation of program elements can also help build the case for what some service providers have observed—their client population face a myriad of challenges that are likely to undermine their ability to transition successfully into employment. If those individuals are able to find employment, they perceive that sustained efforts will be necessary to help them retain employment. Again, greater substantiation of strategies that work, particularly for those that are considered to be hard to serve, will be necessary to promote social policy efforts that will confer the flexibility that providers indicate is needed for working with this more disadvantaged population.

Finally, there is a word of caution to program providers and administrators. In the study community, vendors funded through TANF, WIA, and Empowerment Zone funds competed for program participants. In the early days of those programs, a wide variety of programs emerged that were approved to provide training or other services to the target population and they were then reimbursed through public funds. In the years since, block grant administrators have evaluated the performance of those vendors and weeded out poorly performing programs. Administrators appear largely satisfied with the vendors that remain, while acknowledging the early problems.

One of the benefits of using private vendors is that clients can select programs that best suit them and different vendors can meet different needs. Another benefit is that vendors may outreach to those who might need enticing to participate. This may ensure that the target population is more likely to use programs because of the active outreach. However, a consequence of the competition may have been some over-selling of what programs can actually provide to program participants. Promises of well-paying jobs and other positive outcomes of program participation may not have been intentionally

disingenuous. There are consequences, however, when programs fail to meet promises or expectations. People in the community inform their neighbors about the usefulness of the programs they participate in. Collective experiences of disappointment can lead to alienation and under-utilization of programs that have since improved. While administrators might plan for early failures as programs adapt and improve, program participants do not. Early failures will make it harder to re-engage those individuals and those in their social networks, at least for voluntary participation.

Direct Practice

The researcher began this study with a commitment and primary interest in community-based social work practice. The commitment is stronger at the conclusion of this study. There are existing strengths and resources in the study community that may be difficult to detect without more active engagement within a community. Engaging community residents is not an easy task. It requires a commitment of time and being willing to listen and respond to the articulated needs and goals of the community residents. It is a population whom has been promised much by social policies in the past, and it would appear, have been let down before. It is with some skepticism, therefore, that some will greet the arrival of social workers engaged in community practice. It is unfortunate then, that the duration of social workers in the “frontlines” of social work practice often seems short. It would appear important to develop mechanisms through which the trust can be built institutionally, to extend beyond the tenure of individual workers.

Often “empowerment” seems to be defined as providing opportunities for community residents to have “ownership” of programs. It would appear, however, that

too often activities deemed to be empowering merely conveys responsibility without transferring resources, power, or capabilities. At best it is patronizing, at worst, it is alienating, disempowering, and allows more powerful others to shirk shared responsibility for creating change.

Social workers who are engaged in community based practice should commit to strengthening the resources and capabilities of community members. It is important that practitioners acknowledge the wants and strengths of community residents. The goal should be to honor and strengthen the existing efforts of residents to manage challenges and create change while building the internal capacity of community residents to intervene. Failing to take into account existing strengths and practices may mean that social workers may undermine or destroy that which is functional and effective for community residents.

As this study demonstrates, the needs of community residents are diverse though some issues, such as substance abuse appear pervasive. It seems that the ideal practitioners for community-based practice in similar communities are skilled, generalist practitioners who have the capacity to develop collaborative relationships with a wide array of social service providers who can provide specialized services. Such an individual can provide a bridge for those practitioners into the community and for residents to those practitioners. With expertise as a generalist, such an individual can help external service providers understand the cross-cutting issues that may be foreign to those who typically work in silos.

The priorities of residents may sometimes appear to be a poor match for the concerns of social workers, or at least the social worker's primary charge. As an

example, “more activities for children” may be interpreted as secondary to issues like unemployment and poverty, but it may be the primary concern of residents who see children as being highly vulnerable within the community. Non-threatening interventions, such as providing activities for children, can provide opportunities to build bridges with the adults in the community while demonstrating responsiveness to their concerns. This will further strengthen a foundation of trust and build the social workers capacity to intervene in the future.

It is worth noting that some of the issues that are of greatest concern to residents—the well-being of community’s children and the impact of drugs and drug use, are issues that often solicit a more coercive or confrontational societal intervention through corrections and child welfare agencies. Community-based skilled practitioners that are seen as partners of residents in improving the community, may be well placed to intervene in a more cooperative, less adversarial fashion before issues escalate.

Foreshadowed Research Questions

Before bringing this research study to a close, it is useful to return to the beginning to ensure that the questions guiding the research have been adequately addressed. This study set out to answer the overarching question of how labor market marginalization is reproduced and transformed within an extreme poverty neighborhood and to further examine the role played by social policies, programs, and the praxis of actors in both reproduction and transformation of disadvantage. Before turning to the overarching question, a review of the foreshadowed questions follows.

Perceived Barriers and Opportunities

One guiding question was what are the perceived barriers and opportunities to access employment and how are they perceived to be changing. As described in full in an earlier chapter, there was an array of barriers to employment encountered by residents, including drug-related barriers, lack of education, criminal history, and limited work supports such as child care and transportation assistance. Some barriers are seen as becoming harder to overcome, for example, a limited education was perceived to be a greater impediment to finding a job now than it was in earlier years. Other challenges are seen as becoming easier to navigate. For example, there are improvements noted in the availability of child care for TANF recipients. There seems to be no consensus around whether opportunities for employment are improving or worsening. Some perceived opportunities but found them to be out of reach for those who lacked education or transportation. Others discounted barriers and asserted that opportunities existed for those who tried.

Response to Barriers

A second question guiding the study was how residents of the study community respond to perceived barriers. Respondents note a number of responses to barriers including attempting to remediate barriers, trying to navigate around, or within, barriers, or by trying to dismantle the impact of barriers to employment for the residents of the community. One response that was noted is that some people who experience challenges finding employment can give up and stop searching for employment. There are also responses that attempt to prevent the reproduction of disadvantage, in particular, by

· outreaching and attending to the community's children and youth so they don't acquire the same characteristics that impede employment for the community's adults.

Role of Social Policies and Programs

Another foreshadowed question was the perceived role of social policies and programs in the reproduction and transformation of labor market disparity. Changes to the distribution of cash assistance to low income families that require participation in job training or other work activities were widely perceived as a contributing factor to an increase in the number of people in the community that are working. The job training programs were not as widely seen to be a contributing factor, largely because residents could point to friends or neighbors who actively participated in those programs, expecting to be employed but exiting the programs without jobs. It seems the expectation that work effort was required, coupled with the realization that some job training programs were not going to be helpful, spurred some to access employment on their own.

To some extent, therefore, welfare reform and job training programs are transforming the under-representation of study community residents in the workforce. There are, however, people who are not being reached by programs designed to improve the employment outcomes of individuals in the community. Indeed, some of the most disadvantaged individuals are among those who are ineligible for such programs. The expectation that those who are ineligible for programs because they are non-custodial parents or because they are not on the leases of their mother's or girlfriend's apartment should seek services through homeless service programs would seem to exacerbate a sense of marginalization, not diminish it. So, one large failing of social policies and programs is the failure to reach many who may be in great need. The second, perhaps

larger, failing is that while social policies and programs are designed to remedy labor market disadvantages among the adult community residents, there is need for a much more concerted effort to prevent the acquisition of those same challenges among the community's youth.

Role of Temporary Employment Agencies

It was anticipated that because of the loss of low-skilled jobs from the city and the growth of temporary employment agencies, temporary employment would play a large role in mediating employment opportunities for residents of an extreme poverty neighborhood. This is not necessarily the case as respondents did not see temporary employment agencies as a large source of employment for the study community residents.

Temporary employment was seen as both enabling and constraining. It was seen as a viable and helpful way for some individuals, particularly those with significant barriers to employment, access full time, permanent positions. Because there is little commitment, employers are more willing to employ through a temporary agency individuals they would not have been willing to employ outright. If those individuals prove themselves to be valuable workers, those employers may then offer them permanent positions. While many respondents pointed to the benefits of temporary employment, others pointed to the costs to the community. Some temporary employment agencies are seen as exploiting people with addictions and viewed as leading to a reduction in permanent positions community-wide as employers rely on temporary employment rather than hiring directly. It would appear, therefore, that temporary

employment serves to both reproduce and transform disadvantage for individual residents.

Perspective of Policy Practitioners and Service Providers

The final foreshadowed research question was how the interpretations of employment barriers and opportunities differed between resident respondents and service providers and program administrators. It was anticipated that the researcher would be able to contrast how the perceptions of providers contrasted with the perceptions of residents. It seems to be a false division, however. Several of the service providers that were interviewed identified strongly with residents of the community. Indeed, two had grown up within or near the study community and two others had grown up in similar neighborhoods within the city.

Program administrators who were not on the front-line of service delivery seemed to have a great deal of respect for the challenges that residents face both within their community and in transitioning into employment. They seemed much less focused on how to change the behavior of disadvantaged people to fit their program than they were on exploring how their own programs could be modified within policy constraints to better meet the needs of the residents.

The actual interpretations of employment barriers and opportunities differed little. Service providers were more likely than residents to identify challenges such as mental health problems or learning disabilities that may be less visible to study community residents. Service providers seemed less aware than residents of the potential for temporary employment to serve as a mediator in moving those with significant barriers

into employment and the importance of social networks in finding employment for members of the community.

Service providers and program administrators typically took a broader perspective because it was difficult for them to shepherd their impressions from the study community alone; they were instead informed by their experiences from clients throughout the city. Both residents and service providers are informed about the impact of social policy as defined by the larger world, outside of their own experiences. Indeed, after summarizing the impact of welfare reform on study community residents, one resident respondent backed up her account with the experiences of a woman who was portrayed in a television talk show.

Reproduction and Transformation of Marginalization

The primary focus of this study is how marginalization is reproduced and transformed in one extreme poverty neighborhood. There are a number of factors that play a role and marginalization is not a “state of being” but rather the result of dynamic forces. There are strong structural constraints, including the loss of jobs within the city and disparate job growth. There is a lack of supports that would make employment more easily navigable for people, including transportation assistance, child care, and stable, safe housing. There are also personal challenges, including substance abuse disorders, mental health disabilities, fear, and interpersonal communication challenges, that must be overcome. There are also, of course, the activities of residents who attempt to resist marginalization both for themselves and their children and for other members of the study community. There are social policy efforts that in part work to transform the marginalization of people within the study community. Work requirements and work

supports appear to have accomplished this for some residents. And of course, there are social policy efforts that have the result of reproducing marginalization. Housing policies that result in perpetuating economic and racial segregation are one example of this.

Throughout Europe, the term utilized to describe individuals who are marginalized in society due to joblessness and poverty is “social exclusion.” The remedy to social exclusion is one of “social inclusion.” The United Kingdom Prime Minister has developed a cabinet office in England to examine the causes of social exclusion and how the resources of the nation can be brought to bear to promote social inclusion (Cooper, 2004). The concentration of disadvantage and the need for a holistic response that brings solutions together from a variety of federal agencies is a particular focus of this new cabinet. The Social Exclusion Unit is a public admission that more is required from the government to ensure that all their citizens have more equitable life chances and that society as a whole is disadvantaged by the exclusion of some of its members. It is a similar commitment and recognition that is needed in the United States.

Conclusion

A fair critique of this study would be that the examination of barriers within the study neighborhood was too broad. Each of the barriers to employment that arose is the subject of research and an area of speciality for academics. Each area requires further study to determine how those challenges impede labor market participation and how impediments are being overcome in greater depth. By being expansive, this study managed only to skim the surface of the array of challenges residents in the community face. Yet, by being expansive, this study highlights that all of these issues are impacting people within one community. These are intersecting issues and it is researchers and

theorists who have imposed the boundaries around how we think about and investigate social problems. As a result, social policies are similarly bounded, though these boundaries may have little meaning or utility for those struggling to overcome challenges.

The formation of the research question and the researcher's commitment to embark on this study were fueled by frustration over what appeared to be overly simplistic policy prescriptions that were a part of PRWORA. It appeared that the policies adopted failed to take into account the complex realities of people's lives and experiences, including their challenges and strengths. Once again, Congress is embarked on a similar path with the reauthorization of the TANF block grant. What is different today than when Congress passed PRWORA and created the TANF block grant program is how much more is known about the challenges that welfare recipients face in moving into employment and what is needed to help them retain those jobs. Unfortunately, that wealth of research is not being used to inform the development of federal social policy. It can only be hoped that such knowledge will prove useful to the many committed program administrators and frontline practitioners who are striving to work within policy constraints to provide a more equitable future for disadvantaged people.

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Appendix A

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF
EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN A DISTRESSED
URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD (Resident)**

You are being asked to participate in a research study of employment barriers and opportunities in a distressed urban neighborhood.

The researcher will ask you about your opinion about barriers to employment, job opportunities, and the impact of social service programs and other agencies that are attempting to link residents of your community to work.

With your permission, the researcher will use an audiotape recorder during the interview. If you prefer, she will use handwritten notes.

Benefits:

You will receive no direct benefits from agreeing to participate in the study, but you will be compensated for your time.

Risks and Discomfort:

A potential risk to you in this study is the sharing of confidential information about yourself and your experiences with the researcher. The researcher will guard your confidentiality and any information you provide cannot be traced to you.

None of the questions should cause you any discomfort. You are free to refuse to answer any questions that cause you discomfort and you can end the interview at any time.

Costs:

You will not incur any costs from participating other than your time. The interview should take no more than one hour to complete.

Compensation for time:

You will receive compensation of \$20 for your time.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be used in the report and it will not be kept with any of the information you have provided. Audiotapes will be destroyed once the researcher has transcribed the tape.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and you can end your participation at any time without penalty or any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask that the interview be stopped immediately and the audiotape destroyed. You may also request after the interview that the information gathered in your interview be destroyed.

If you are willing, the researcher will contact you at a later date to seek your help in interpreting the results of the study. You do not have to give the researcher permission to contact you again. If you do give permission to the researcher to contact you, you can refuse to meet with her. You do not have to agree to allow the researcher to contact you to receive compensation for your time today.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the researcher, Sharon McDonald at [REDACTED] or her supervisor, the Principal Investigator, Dr. Elizabeth Hutchison at [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about how your rights as a participant in a research study will be protected, you can contact the Office of Research Subjects Protection at Virginia Commonwealth University at [REDACTED]

Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all your questions.

This consent form has been read to me. All my questions about the study and my participation in it have been answered. I freely consent to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a signed and dated copy of this consent form for my records. By signing this consent form I have not waived any of the legal rights that I otherwise would have as a subject in a research study.

Subject Name, printed

Date

Subject Signature

Date

Legally Authorized Representative Signature, if appropriate

Date

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion

Date

Investigator Signature (if different from above)

Date

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF
EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN A DISTRESSED
URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD (Non-Resident Respondent)**

You are being asked to participate in a research study of employment barriers and opportunities in a distressed urban neighborhood.

The researcher will ask you about your opinion about barriers to employment, job opportunities, and the impact of social service programs and other agencies that are attempting to link residents of a distressed community to work.

With your permission, the researcher will use an audiotape recorder during the interview. If you prefer, she will use handwritten notes.

Benefits:

You will receive no direct benefits from agreeing to participate in the study.

Risks and Discomfort:

A potential risk to you in this study is the sharing of confidential information about yourself, your agency and your experiences with the researcher. The researcher will guard your confidentiality and any information you provide will not be traced to you.

None of the questions should cause you any discomfort. You are free to refuse to answer any questions that cause you discomfort and you can end the interview at any time.

Costs:

You will not incur any costs from participating other than your time. The interview should take no more than one hour to complete.

Compensation for time:

You will not be compensated for your time.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be used in the report and it will not be kept with any of the information you have provided. Audiotapes will be destroyed once the researcher has transcribed the tape.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and you can end your participation at any time without penalty or any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask that the interview be stopped immediately and the audiotape destroyed. You may also request after the interview that the information gathered in your interview be destroyed.

If you are willing, the researcher will contact you at a later date to seek your help in interpreting the results of the study. You do not have to give the researcher permission to contact you again. If you do give permission to the researcher to contact you, you can refuse to meet with her.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the researcher, Sharon McDonald at [REDACTED], or her supervisor, the Principal Investigator, Dr. Elizabeth Hutchison at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions about how your rights as a participant in a research study will be protected, you can contact the Office of Research Subjects Protection at Virginia Commonwealth University at [REDACTED].

Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all your questions.

This consent form has been read to me. All my questions about the study and my participation in it have been answered. I freely consent to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a signed and dated copy of this consent form for my records. By signing this consent form I have not waived any of the legal rights that I otherwise would have as a subject in a research study.

Subject Name, printed

Date

Subject Signature

Date

Legally Authorized Representative Signature, if appropriate

Date

Witness Signature

Date

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion

Date

Investigator Signature (if different from above)

Date

Appendix B

Sharon McDonald






DATE

ADDRESS

Dear _____

My name is Sharon McDonald and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Social Work and Social Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. I am engaging in a neighborhood case study and would value the opportunity to include your perspective.

The title of my study is: The Labor Market and Structuration Theory: Utilizing a Structuration Perspective to Examine Perceptions of Labor Market Opportunities & Constraints in a Distressed Urban Neighborhood. The purpose of my study is to gain a better understanding of work barriers and opportunities and the role of social policies and programs from the perspective of those most directly impacted—residents of neighborhoods, service providers, policymakers, program administrators and other neighborhood leaders.

I hope you will agree to be a respondent in my study and share your observations. I will contact you next week to set up a time. Your participation is, of course, completely voluntary and if you should agree to participate, will be kept confidential. The interview should take no more than one hour. If you wish to contact me, I can be reached at   during the day and at  in the evening.

Sincerely,

Sharon McDonald, Ph.D. Candidate
School of Social Work
Virginia Commonwealth University

Appendix C

Invitation

To participate in a study examining:

Barriers to Employment & Job Opportunities in your neighborhood & the Role of Social Programs and Social Policies.

The researcher requests adult residents who are willing and able to share their observations of the barriers to employment and opportunities for employment contact her to set up an interview. The interview should take no more than one hour.

The researcher will ask you questions about your observations, your own personal experiences and participation in any social programs (such as a job training program or welfare training program). Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential and your participation will not be shared with anyone.

Participation in this study is completely voluntarily and you can change your mind about participating at any time.

You will receive compensation of \$20 for your time.

If you are willing to participate, please contact the researcher, Sharon McDonald at:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix D

Instrument: Guided Interview
Service Providers/ Policymakers/ Program Administrators and
Other non-resident informants

1. What employment barriers do you believe the residents of this neighborhood face, if any? *Probe: What have you personally observed?*
2. How do you think people in the neighborhood respond to those barriers? *Probe: What have you personally observed?*
3. What are the opportunities available to residents to find employment or seek better employment? *Probe: Ask about specific programs/policies serving the neighborhood.*
4. How do you think residents respond to those opportunities? *Use Probes: What have you personally observed?*
5. What is the role of your program in creating change for residents?
6. Are there any other program/policies that are making a difference in changing employment barriers or job opportunities within the neighborhood? If so, how? *Use probes: welfare reform, any local employment program, labor pool, churches, new initiatives, etc.*
7. Is there anything you observe the residents are doing to make a difference in changing employment barriers or creating job opportunities in the neighborhood or for residents in the neighborhood?
8. Overall, how do you see employment barriers and opportunities changing within the neighborhood or for residents of the neighborhood if at all?

Demographic Information: Position held by informant, Role in the community, Length of time providing services, Type of agency: government, non-profit, faith-based, etc., Race, gender of informant.

Resident Interview Guide

1. What are some of the challenges or barriers people in this neighborhood face finding jobs or getting better jobs? What challenges have you personally experienced?
2. How do you think people in your neighborhood respond to those challenges? How have you personally responded?
3. What are the opportunities available to find employment or seek better employment in your neighborhood?
4. How do you think people in your neighborhood respond to those opportunities? How have you personally responded?
5. Are there any programs that are making a difference in changing barriers to work or job opportunities in your neighborhood? How are they making a difference?
Use probes: welfare reform, any local employment program, labor pools, churches, etc.
6. Is there anything you or your neighbors are doing to make a difference in changing barriers to work or creating job opportunities in your neighborhood or for residents in your neighborhood?
7. Overall, how do you see employment barriers and opportunities changing in your neighborhood, if at all?

Demographic Information: Race, gender, age, family composition, employment status of informant. Information about level of education achieved, utilization of social programs—including history of participation in social programs/policies designed to affect employment (TANF, job training programs, local programs, etc.) and any personal barriers to employment volunteered.

Appendix E

Final Member Check – May 2004

A summary of findings was developed that highlighted key points, including illuminating quotations. The purpose of developing the summary was concern that the draft chapters were much too large and participants would not be interested in or willing to review the entire piece. The development of the summary helped refine and inform the final findings chapters and reduce quotations to key points. The time required to finalize the summary and the need to retrieve material that had been turned over to the auditor that included the researcher's only copy of contact information for some key informants delayed progress on the final member check.

During data collection, all respondents agreed to be contacted in the future when asked whether they would be willing to review the researcher's finding. The researcher identified several resident respondents representing diverse and rich perspectives. Two such residents agreed to review the findings. One who had been in the process of relocating when interviewed, the other who was committed to staying in the community. It was, however, difficult to connect with others. The resident community activist was no longer residing within the community, some had their phone disconnected, and some had a call blocking mechanism that required callers to announce themselves before it clicked through. The researcher sent stamped, self-addressed letters to two respondents without phones and called a family member's number that had been provided by a homeless individual for follow-up calls. Diversity among respondents who provided a member check was sought and achieved, however.

Two service providers, one that was employed in a community-based agency and the other a city administrator of a large block grant program for low income families, were contacted and both agreed to review the findings.

Those who were participating in the final member check were asked to review the findings with an eye for: anything that seemed wrong or incorrect, anything that seemed missing, or whether anything they read, that included the responses of other residents and service providers seemed surprising or if they had learned something they did not know.

Five of the seven respondents who agreed to participate in the member check were provided a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the questionnaire with the above questions. They were also provided other ways to connect with the researcher should they prefer to provide information over the phone, set up an appointment with the researcher to review the findings in person, and an email address. A sixth respondent was contacted by email and the summary was provided as an email attachment. The researcher agreed to meet with the seventh respondent to go over the summary in person.

Reminders were sent to all who agreed to participate after they received the summary in the mail. Three respondents returned the completed questionnaire by mail, one by email, and the researcher met with the fifth respondent in person to review the findings. Two resident respondents who agreed to review the findings and provide feedback did not do so.

Four of the five respondents found the portrayal of the community to be accurate and they found none of the findings to be surprising. One respondent did indicate that she thought the “numbers” (i.e., poverty rate, unemployment, etc.) would be higher than the study indicated which she found to be positive. One of the four indicated that to understand the community better, more information about the need for mental health and day care services might be provided. The respondent who the researcher met with in person expanded on some of the points by offering her own similar experiences that did not emerge during data collection.

The fifth respondent responded in much more detail. Since she had responsibility for the administration of the TANF block grant program, she expressed concern that the perceptions of the residents about the welfare program were not always accurate. Further, if they accurately reflected the individuals’ experiences, they did not necessarily reflect agency policy.

Prior to submitting the response to the final member check, she contacted the researcher to ask whether she should dispute or disagree with other people’s perceptions. She pointed out one quotation in particular in which a respondent reported that a neighbor had tried to apply for TANF cash assistance. The neighbor was discouraged by the caseworker who told her that the father of her new baby should be taking care of her and her other children, not the welfare office. The respondent reported that this did not represent the policy of the program and if it occurred, it was a situation where a caseworker should be reprimanded—it wasn’t something that was supposed to happen. She asked, would the researcher like that information too? Should she point out those contradictions? She was told yes, if anything seemed surprising or wrong, it would be valuable to capture that. She was also assured that the researcher was aware that what respondents reported didn’t necessarily reflect policy. She reported she would like, then, to take more time with the summary and review further, reacting both to the quotations and the assertions made by the researcher.

During the phone call, the researcher did ask a clarifying question of her. The researcher made an assertion in the final chapter regarding the use of scarce TANF resources to compensate for the failure of the public sector to invest in infrastructure investment, such as transportation assistance. On reviewing some of the original transcripts, however, contradictory information became clear—the transportation efforts to move low income people to work was being funded through a federal transportation program. Thus, that argument seemed to be incorrect. The city administrator stated, no they actually used TANF resources as a match, so it was a correct statement. Expanding on the argument that TANF is meeting the needs of other publicly funded programs, she stated that if special education was working half as well as it should, the TANF program would not be nearly as taxed as it is.

She noted several policy discrepancies between what was reported by resident respondents and the program rules. She noted, for example, that it appeared “getting over” was portrayed as easier than it really would be. Caseworkers will not simply re-open a TANF benefits case for a child whose parent has been sanctioned and the application process for SSI is a long process and requires that a disability be substantiated. The discrepancies she noted and clarifying information provided was incorporated in the findings chapters and was coded as such so it could be traced back.

This respondent also found several of the reported findings to be surprising. Unlike the resident respondent who was surprised that the unemployment rates were not worse, she was surprised that unemployment was as high as reported. She reports she had not heard before the perception that employers have a preference for lighter-skinned Black women over darker skinned women as one respondent reported. She stated that she could see this being the case, however, she hoped that it was not a widespread issue. Two respondents had reported that women may have a harder time finding employment than men and this may be related to women's role as primary caretaker of children and employers' fear that they will be more likely to be unreliable workers. She reported that this seemed to make sense but it was not something she has heard about from TANF recipients, including those with large families. Finally, it was asserted that one of the potential unintended consequences of punitive policies for drug trade involvement among adults may have been the increasing involvement of youth. She notes that this seems to make sense and is something she never thought of before.

Appendix F

Sheila Crowley, MSW, Ph.D.

