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**Findings from the First Phase of a Study
of the Transition from Welfare to Work
in Hennepin County, Minnesota**

March 1, 1999

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Executive Memo

The recent changes in welfare rules and time requirements make it important to understand why some welfare recipients participate fully in welfare-to-work programs and others do not. This study examined client, professional, and organizational factors related to successful participation in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) in Hennepin County, Minnesota. Of primary importance is the fact that as of this study, MFIP transition is working for the vast majority of participants (93%).

There were two main components to the study. First, face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sample of 86 welfare recipients in Hennepin County eligible for work and training programs as of September 15, 1998. The information from these interviews was supplemented with two focus groups. Second, a focus group and mailed survey were used to elicit ideas from employment counselors, the professional who work with welfare recipients on a daily basis.

The reason for non-participation in available welfare-to-work programs are multifaceted and complex, as described in the report.

The study found that individuals who did not satisfactorily participate in the welfare-to-work programs (and who consequently were sanctioned) had a different profile than individuals who participated in the programs. Sanctioned individuals had lower levels of conscientiousness (e.g., low levels of time management, responsibility, and dependability), employment commitment (e.g., low levels of perceived importance of work), and social support (e.g., friends, family, and others to talk to and rely on) than individuals who had not been sanctioned. It was also noted that both sanctioned, and non-sanctioned participants reported personal or family health care concerns as a barrier to a successful transition into the work force. Child care and transportation concerns also emerged as barriers, especially to the sanctioned participants.

Given the overall findings of the study a number of recommendations have been developed. The recommendations address the gaps in the delivery system and can lead to improvements in the participants' understanding of the process. Listed below are those that have the greatest potential to deliver improvement in the shortest amount of time.

- * The study proposes that employment counselors should be trained in coaching techniques that help clients to become better at meeting deadlines and obligations (time management).

- * A second recommendation is to create better information and communication strategies. Both employment counselors and clients felt that information was not being effectively communicated to clients.

- * It is also recommended that employment counselors receive additional training about enhancing self-esteem and motivation of clients, through training experiences like poverty simulations. The study highlighted the importance of treating clients with respect, and empathy. Both clients and employment counselors also need to be rewarded or recognized for their interactions with clients. (Continued on next page.)

* In addition to the above, this study found that the typical employment counselor in Hennepin County is struggling with a heavy caseload, making it difficult to spend adequate time with each client. Whether or not caseloads can be reduced, employment counselors would benefit from job redesign efforts, where paper work and other time demands are reduced. Again, time management workshops for counselors would be beneficial.

* Finally, the study provided insight into possible changes in the structure of the work and training programs. While many clients were enthusiastic about specific training options available to them, such as resume writing and interview skills, some were critical of the rigidity of program hours of operation and of what they perceived as needless classroom time. New thinking about training and how it fits into the mandates of federal and state legislation should be pursued by government and the private sector alike.

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I. Introduction

A. Background of the Study

With the advent of recent welfare reforms, in particular the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, large numbers of former welfare recipients are entering the job market, some for the first time. From the perspective of current welfare recipients, the effect of the new reform is an obligatory shift from a system of essentially unlimited benefits to a system of time-limited benefits and work requirements. This means that those individuals who are currently on welfare will need to enter the work force more rapidly than ever before. It is of mutual benefit to employers and to welfare recipients who are required to move into the work force that work and training programs be designed to meet the needs of the full range of welfare recipients.

Elected officials in Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis have passed resolutions that welfare reform will be a joint project and that staff from both jurisdictions will work together in implementing the program. Staff from the Minneapolis Employment and Training Program (METP) and Hennepin County Training and Employment Assistance (TEA) have selected community-based programs that are designed to help individuals make a successful transition from welfare to work. These programs provide welfare recipients services such as job search and job readiness training, childcare assistance, transportation and specific monetary assistance (e.g., buying a wardrobe for work or repairing automobiles). However, there is concern that some of the individuals who are referred to these services are either not using them or taking full advantage of them. The Neighborhood Employment Network (NET) is a network of eight community job banks, many of which operate welfare-to-work programs.

Representatives from NET have also been frustrated by the lack of full utilization of their services by welfare recipients. METP, TEA, and NET requested the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) organize a team of researchers to help identify ideas for changes that might be made within the employment and training programs to facilitate the transition from welfare to work. Meetings and conversations between the research team and NET, METP and TEA administrators enabled the research team to clarify the research questions, along with a suitable research process, as outlined below.

B. The Research Questions

The aim of this study is to come up with some answers to, and recommendations regarding, the following questions:

1. What services do welfare recipients think they need to make the transition from welfare to work?
2. What client, professional, and organizational factors influence successful participation in the work and training programs?
3. How can existing programs be tailored to enable individuals to make a successful transition from welfare to work?

C. The Research Process

Given the desire to develop findings and recommendation that can inform the immediate programmatic and legislative decision making process, this study proceeded in two phases. Preliminary findings regarding 80% of the population (Phase I) are available in this report. Findings representing the full diversity of the population will be available in June 1999, at the completion of Phase II.

This first phase has concentrated on African Americans and European Americans, the two racial/ethnic categories that comprise 80% of the welfare population in Hennepin County. In order to reflect the diversity of the population served, racial/ethnic categories that make up more than 3% of the population will next be studied (Hmong, Somali, Hispanic, and American Indian). Data from the interviews and focus groups with European American and African American clients, the employment counselor focus groups, and the survey of employment counselors are summarized in this first report.

D. Sources of Data

Several research strategies have been used to identify factors that impact welfare-to-work transitions and potential programmatic and/or legislative change. These strategies and sources of data are noted below.

Client Interviews:

Samples of clients who have been referred for employment and training services were interviewed regarding their program participation (of lack thereof). In order to ensure maximum participation in the interviews, two strategies have been employed: first, racial/ethnically matched interviewers with strong interpersonal skills went to the homes of subjects to secure the interview and, second, subjects were compensated \$30.00 for their participation. Questions for these interviews were written by the researchers with consultation from NET, TEA, and METP officials. A special attempt was made to assess the extent social/psychological variables (such as low conscientiousness, low employment commitment, low emotional stability, and lack of social support) may be playing a role in program nonparticipation, along with the more traditionally-studied situational variables (such as lack of daycare and transportation).

Client Focus Groups:

Racial/ethnic-specific focus groups were conducted in Phase I with African Americans and European Americans who agreed to participate when asked during the interview conversation. Seven individuals participated: five European Americans and two African Americans. Subjects were compensated \$30.00 for their participation.

Employment Professionals' Focus Groups and Survey:

A sample of employment and training professionals (staff of the employment and training programs) participated in focus group discussions conducted by a member of the research team. These group discussions helped the research team understand the issues from the employment professionals' perspective, and they also helped frame the questions for a mailed survey of employment and training professionals from twenty-five programs. A summary of the methods and findings

from the employment and training professionals is provided in a separate section of this report.

E. Client Interviews: Phase I Sampling

Given the aims of the study it was considered important that sufficient numbers of both sanctioned and non-sanctioned clients be represented in the sample, as well as both African-Americans and European-Americans. A simple random sample would almost certainly have yielded too few sanctioned clients, given their overall low percentage of the Hennepin County welfare population (< 7%). Accordingly, four samples were drawn with the assistance of Suzanne Gaines, Principal Planning Analyst in Hennepin County Economic Assistance: African American non-sanctioned; African American sanctioned; European American non-sanctioned; and European American sanctioned. The procedure was as follows:

- The total set of welfare clients who had completed orientation and were eligible to be referred to work and training (W&T) as of September 1, 1998 was identified. (N=7,874).
- From this pool, all clients were identified who fell within the following groups. Their numbers were as follows:

• African American Non-sanctioned	5,147
• African American Sanctioned	112
• European American Non-sanctioned	2,582
• European American Sanctioned	<u>33</u>
	7,874
- The goal was to interview approximately 25 clients in each of the above four groups. With the anticipation that it would be difficult to locate many individuals, it was decided to contact the entire pools of African American sanctioned and European American sanctioned clients (112 and 33) by mail to invite them to participate. On the other hand, a random sample was drawn from the much larger African American non-sanctioned and European American non-sanctioned categories, and then all 100 persons within each of these samples were sent letters of invitation to participate. Thus, letters were sent out as follows:

• African American Non-sanctioned	100
• African American Sanctioned	112
• European American Non-sanctioned	100
• European American Sanctioned	33
- The letters of invitation and follow-up telephone calls led to many interviews, especially in the African American non-sanctioned and European American non-sanctioned groups. However, it proved much more difficult to arrange interviews with the African American sanctioned and European American sanctioned clients. Repeated attempts to locate, contact, and interview these

clients still resulted in fewer completed interviews than intended. The numbers of completed interviews are as follows:

- African American Non-sanctioned 26
 - African American Sanctioned 13
 - European American Non-sanctioned 35
 - European American Sanctioned 12
- Participants: N = 86

II. Summary of Findings from Client Interviews and Focus Groups

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the following: Charlesetta Rollack, Project Assistant; Youngmin Kim, Research Assistant; Therese Graner, support staff; and Lisa Guetzkow, Edith Jeske, Kathy Pierce, interviewers. It is to be noted that all results presented are based on the perceptions, ideas and opinions of the interviewed MFIP participants. Questions about this section of the report should be directed to David Hollister, Ph.D., School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, 400 Ford Hall, 224 Church Street SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455 (phone 612/624-1553) or to Mary Martin, Ph.D., Department of Social Work, Metropolitan State University, 700 East Seventh Street, St. Paul, MN 55106 (phone 651/772-3721).

A. Characteristics of the Phase I Participants
Participation in Work and Training

As noted earlier, all of those interviewed had attended an official orientation and were expected to attend work and training programs. However, not all of them had actually contacted the programs. Of 86 persons interviewed, 19 either were awaiting appointments with work and training programs or for other reasons had not contacted work and training programs. The breakdown is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reasons Clients Not in Work and Training

	Frequency	Percent
Bureaucratic error	2	2.3
Non cooperation	2	2.3
Employed full-time	7	8.1
Exempted	4	4.7
Other	4	4.7
In Work & Training	67	77.9
Total	86	100.0

In consultation with the study sponsors it was agreed that it would be appropriate to also secure information from those who had not yet contacted work and training programs, in order to more fully understand participation and non-participation in the work and training programs. Thus, a "Non-W&T" group is included below for the analysis of some of the items. The total set of 86 completed interviews is distributed as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Completed Interviews

	African-American	European-American	Total
Non-sanctioned:			
Not in W&T	9	10	19
In W & T	17	25	42
Sanctioned:			
Not in W & T	0	0	0
In W & T	13	12	25
Total	19	47	N=86

To put it another way, of the 86 interviews completed, 67 had participated in work and training programs and 19 had not.

Residence, Gender, Age and Race of Participants

About two-third of those interviewed lived in Minneapolis, with the remainder living in one of the suburbs of Minneapolis. Almost all of the participants were female. The age of the interviewees ranged from 18 to 58.

Table 3. Residence, Gender, and Age of Interviewed Participants

	Non-W&T		In W & T		Totals	
	AA	EA	AA	EA		
Residence:						
Mpls.	7	4	27	21	59	68.6%
Suburbs	2	6	3	16	27	31.4%
					N = 86	
Gender:						
Female	8	10	28	36	82	95.3%
Male	1	0	2	1	4	4.7%
					N = 86	
Age:						
Range	18-39	18-47	19-46	18-58	18-58	
Mean	27.8	28.6	30.0	34.6	30.9	

The characteristics of the participants in the sample are comparable to those of Hennepin County participants in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) generally, where the average age (as of March 1998) was 31 and the proportion of females was 94.8%.

There were surprisingly few differences in this study that were associated with the participants' racial/ethnic identities. European Americans (55%, n=47) and African Americans (45%, n=39) consistently reported similar perceptions on the questions throughout out the interviews. They had identical percentages of having had at least one previous job (European American 87%, n=41 and African American 87%, n=34). However, there were a few ways in which the two groups differed. African Americans were much less apt to live in the suburbs (13 %, n=5) than European Americans (47 %, n=22). African Americans were also less apt to see their financial counselors in a positive light (21%, n=8) than their European American counterparts (40%, n=19). Given the similarity between the groups that emerged across so many variables, it is clear that the differences between the sanctioned and the non-sanctioned participants were far more pronounced than those found between African Americans and European Americans.

Job Experience

We also asked participants about their job experience, current and previous. The results are summarized in the tables below.

The vast majority of the MFIP participants in this study have had previous work experience. The following tables demonstrate that the majority of the people in all three groups in the study have worked; 95% of those who have not been in work and training programs, 76% of the work and training participants who have been sanctioned and 91% of the work and training participants who have not been sanctioned. The data also show that of the 67 MFIP people in work and training, more than half of the non sanctioned people are currently employed.

There are some notable differences between the sanctioned and non sanctioned W&T participants. There are fewer sanctioned people who have had previous jobs (76% versus 92%). And sanctioned people (12%, n=3) were much less apt to be employed at

the time of the study than those who are non sanctioned (52%, n=22). And perhaps even more importantly, the mean number of months in these jobs was much shorter for the sanctioned people (mean = 3.0 months) than for the non-sanctioned (mean = 14.2 months.) Another difference between the sanctioned and non-sanctioned participants emerged when they were asked why they had left their previous job. The primary reason that the sanctioned people left their last job was the health of themselves or their family members (24%, n=6). The primary reason for leaving for the non-sanctioned people were family issues (21%, n=9).

Table 4. Participants Currently Holding a Part-time or Full-time Job

	Not in W & T		In W & T				Total
			Sanctioned		Non-sanctioned		
Currently employed	8	(42.1%)	3	(12.0%)	22	(52.4%)	33
Not currently employed	11	(57.9%)	22	(88.0%)	20	(40.6%)	53
Total	19	(100.0%)	25	(100.0%)	42	(100.0%)	N = 86

Table 5. Mean Number of Months in Current Job, for Participants Currently Holding Jobs

	Not in W & T		In W & T		Total
			Sanctioned	Non-sanctioned	
Mean	10.8		3.0	14.2	12.6

Table 6. Participants Who have Previously Held a Part-time or Full-time Job

	Not in W & T		In W & T				Total
			Sanctioned		Non-sanctioned		
Previously employed	18	(94.7%)	19	(76.0%)	38	(90.5%)	75
Not Previously employed	1	(5.3%)	5	(20.0%)	1	(2.4%)	7
Missing data	0	(0.0%)	1	(4.0%)	3	(7.1%)	4
Total	19	(100.0%)	25	(100.0%)	42	(100.0%)	N = 86

Table 7. Participants' Reasons for Leaving Previous Job

	Not in W & T		In W & T				Total
			Sanctioned		Non-sanctioned		
Interpersonal	1	(5.3%)	5	(20.0%)	6	(14.3%)	12 (13.9%)
Family	3	(15.8%)	2	(8.0%)	9	(21.4%)	14 (16.3%)
Health: Self or Family	6	(31.6%)	6	(24.0%)	6	(14.3%)	18 (20.9%)
Financial	0	(0.0%)	1	(4.0%)	2	(4.8%)	3 (3.5%)
Moved	2	(10.5%)	0	(0.0%)	1	(2.4%)	3 (3.5%)
Job Ended	2	(10.5%)	3	(12.0%)	5	(11.9%)	10 (11.6%)
Education/Training	1	(5.3%)	0	(0.0%)	3	(7.1%)	4 (4.7%)
Other	2	(10.5%)	1	(4.0%)	1	(2.4%)	4 (4.7%)
No Reason	1	(5.3%)	2	(8.0%)	5	(11.9%)	8 (9.3%)
N/A	1	(5.3%)	5	(20.0%)	2	(4.8%)	8 (9.3%)
Missing	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	2	(4.8%)	2 (2.3%)
Participants	19	(100.0%)	25	(100.0%)	42	(100.0%)	

N = 86 Participants

Measures of Social/Psychological Differences

Participants were asked several social/psychological questions to assess their levels of (1) conscientiousness, (2) employment commitment, (3) emotional stability, and (4) social support and to compare individuals who had been sanctioned versus not sanctioned, and individuals who had participated in work and training programs versus those who had not participated.

Results showed that individuals who had not been sanctioned had significantly higher levels of conscientiousness and higher levels of employment commitment than individuals who had been sanctioned. There was also a trend for individuals who had not been sanctioned to have higher levels of social support, although this trend was not statistically significant. There were not significant differences between sanctioned and non-sanctioned individuals on emotional stability. Following is a more detailed presentation of these findings.

Conscientiousness

Description of conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is a personality characteristic. Individuals vary in their levels of conscientiousness. Individuals with high levels of conscientiousness tend to be very dependable (e.g., careful, thorough, responsible, organized, efficient, and planful) and have a high will to achieve (e.g., high achievement orientation and perseverance). Research has demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of conscientiousness tend to have stronger levels of job performance and tend to engage in active planning and problem solving coping strategies. Individuals with low levels of conscientiousness tend to be less organized, less dependable, and less responsible.

Measurement of conscientiousness. We measured conscientiousness using a 10-item scale. The following items were used:

(Options: 1 = not at all like me 2 = a little like me 3 = like me 4 = very much like me)

1. I am always prepared.
2. I pay attention to details.
3. I carry out my plans.
4. I carry out my chores.
5. I make plans and stick to them.
6. I waste my time. (reverse score)
7. I find it difficult to get down to work. (reverse score)
8. I do just enough work to get by. (reverse score)
9. I don't see things through. (reverse score)
10. I shirk my duties. (reverse score)

The total score was divided by the number of items, so any individual could have a score that ranged from 1, which would indicate low conscientiousness to 4, which would indicate high conscientiousness.

Results. The mean scores on conscientiousness for the participants who were not sanctioned (n = 41; one non-sanctioned participant did not answer the social psychological items) compared to those who were sanctioned (n = 25) appear below. A statistical test showed that individuals who were sanctioned had significantly lower levels of conscientiousness than individuals who had not been sanctioned (p. < .05).

Table 8. Mean Scores on Conscientiousness by Sanction Status

	No Sanction N = 41	Sanctioned N = 25
Conscientiousness	M = 3.35 SD = .40	M = 3.02 SD = .68

(Scale: 1= not at all like me 2 = a little like me 3 = like me 4 = very much like me)

Emotional Stability

Description of emotional stability. Emotional stability refers to the extent to which an individual displays anxiety, anger, hostility, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, vulnerability, and depression. Individuals with higher levels of emotional stability tend to have positive appraisals of themselves and their environment, and tend to interpret ambiguous situations in a positive manner. Data has also shown that individuals with lower levels of emotional stability are less likely to cope with stressful situations through "positive reinterpretation and growth."

Measurement of emotional stability. We measured emotional stability using a 7-item scale. The following items were used:

(Options: 1 = not at all like me 2 = a little like me 3 = like me 4 = very much like me)

1. I often feel blue. (reverse)
2. I dislike myself. (reverse)
3. I am often down in the dumps. (reverse)
4. I panic easily. (reverse)
5. I feel comfortable with myself.
6. I am not easily bothered by things.
7. I am very pleased with myself.

The total score was divided by the number of items, so any individual could have a score that ranged from 1, which would indicate low emotional stability to 4, which would indicate high emotional stability.

Results. The mean scores on emotional stability for the participants who were not sanctioned (n = 41) compared to those who were sanctioned (n = 25) appear below. A statistical test showed there were no significant differences on this variable between sanctioned and non-sanctioned individuals.

Table 9. Mean Scores on Emotional Stability by Sanction Status

	No Sanction N = 41	Sanctioned N = 25
Emotional Stability	M = 3.15 SD = .58	M = 3.18 SD = .59

(Scale: 1= not at all like me 2 = a little like me 3 = like me 4 = very much like me)

Employment Commitment

Description of employment commitment. Employment commitment is an attitudinal variable that refers to the importance or centrality an individual places on employed work. Investigations by several researchers have found that individuals who have high levels of employment commitment look much harder for work while they are unemployed.

Measurement of employment commitment. We measured employment commitment using a 3-item scale. The following items were used:

(Options: 1 = not at all like me 2 = a little like me 3 = like me 4 = very much like me)

1. Having a job is very important to me.
2. I really must get a job or I'll lose my self-respect.
3. Having a job means more to me than just the money it provides.

The total score was divided by the number of items, so any individual could have a score that ranged from 1, which would indicate low employment commitment to 4, which would indicate high employment commitment.

Results. The mean scores on employment commitment for the participants who were not sanctioned (n = 41) compared to those who were sanctioned (n = 25) appear below. A statistical test showed that individuals who were sanctioned had significantly lower levels of employment commitment than individuals who had not been sanctioned ($p < .01$).

Table 10. Mean Scores on Employment Commitment by Sanction Status

	No Sanction N = 41	Sanctioned N = 25
Employment Commitment	M = 3.34 SD = .64	M = 2.56 SD = .97

(Scale: 1= not at all like me 2 = a little like me 3 = like me 4 = very much like me)

Social Support

Description of social support. *Social support* refers to the availability of another individual to turn to for information, affection, comfort, encouragement, or reassurance. Individuals with higher social support tend to experience higher levels of mental and physical health during stressful life events.

Measurement of social support. We measured social support using a 4-item scale. The following items were used:

(Options: 1 = not at all like me 2 = a little like me 3 = like me 4 = very much like me)

1. I have a friend or family member who is around when I am in need.
2. I have a friend or family member that I can share my joys and sorrows with.
3. I have a friend or family member who is a real source of comfort to me.
4. I have a friend or family member who I can talk with about getting a job.

The total score was divided by the number of items, so any individual could have a score that ranged from 1, which would indicate low social support to 4, which would indicate high social support.

Results. The mean scores on social support for the participants who were not sanctioned (n = 41) compared to those who were sanctioned (n = 25) appear below. A statistical test showed that individuals who were sanctioned had slightly lower levels of social support than individuals who had not been sanctioned ($p < .10$).

Table 11. Mean Scores on Social Support by Sanction Status

	No Sanction N = 41	Sanctioned N = 25
Social Support	M = 3.5 SD = .81	M = 3.26 SD = 1.04

(Scale: 1= not at all like me 2 = a little like me 3 = like me 4 = very much like me)

Implications of Findings Related to Psychological Variables

Results showed that individuals who had been sanctioned had significantly lower levels of conscientiousness and employment commitment than individuals who had not been sanctioned. There was also a trend for individuals who had been sanctioned to have lower levels of social support, although this trend was not statistically significant.

Conscientiousness. Employment counselors can make use of the finding that sanctioned individuals tend to be lower in conscientiousness. For example, some individuals who have been sanctioned may need to be coached about techniques they can use to become better at keeping and meeting deadlines and to become better at meeting their obligations. Employment counselors might be trained in coaching techniques to positively encourage individuals to become better at meeting deadlines and obligations. To do this, employment counselors need some coaching skill. Furthermore, they need to have information and tips about time management to give to the clients. There are several available books with good ideas about techniques that can be used to improve a person's time management and reduce procrastination patterns.

The above discussion all deals with *after* an individual has already been sanctioned, however. In a preventive sense, it would be ideal for workshops to deliver training to clients on time management, responsibility, and reduction of procrastination *before* they have been sanctioned. If these workshops are already offered to clients, they should be evaluated for their effectiveness and an attempt should be made to ensure that they are high-quality, due to the great importance of the topic.

Employment Commitment. Employment counselors can also make use of the finding that sanctioned individuals tend to be lower in employment commitment than non-sanctioned individuals. People tend to operate on a "What's in it for me" basis. If clients do not value work, they will be less likely to work toward the goal of employment. Employment counselors may need to communicate to clients some of the benefits of working, *beyond* income, such as:

- Work gives many people a new means of self-expression and purpose.
- Work is a good way of meeting people. It can lead to friendships and new feelings of self-respect.
- Work provides an important role model behavior for children.
- Work provides a means of allowing a break from constant care of children, which can be a very difficult job. (This argument might just be used for a mother who expresses some frustrations with her children.)
- Many employers, due to the low unemployment rate, are in high need of workers to fill shifts. (This argument appeals to the need to help others.)

If the client is worried primarily about her children, and that is acting to reduce her perceived importance of work, then employment counselors might demonstrate to the client why working really can be the best thing for the children. A long-term perspective might be advocated, rather than a short-term perspective. While in the short-term it may seem to a client best to stay home with the children, in the long-term perhaps the role modeling of work is the best thing for the children. Such values may be difficult for an employment counselor to espouse, but may be shown in other ways, for example by having successful welfare-to-work clients share what work has done for them with clients that are more dubious about the value of working. The employment counselor may also let the client generate other benefits of working in a brainstorming type session, rather than just lecturing the benefits to the client. The topic can be brought up in more of a discussion-based manner, rather than in a "lecture."

Social Support. Social support refers to the availability of another individual to turn to for information, affection, comfort, encouragement, or reassurance. Our findings showed a trend for social support to be higher for individuals who had not been sanctioned. Social support has been shown in the psychological literature to be an extremely important factor for individuals in almost any difficult situation. Employment counselors can encourage their clients to call upon their support networks to discuss their situations and to ask for help when needed. In situations where possible, support networks can be encouraged among welfare clients, and time in workshops can be taken to have clients share their difficulties with others.

B. Work and Training Programs

Work and Training Program Selected

The 67 participants in work and training, sanctioned and non-sanctioned, were distributed quite evenly among the various programs, as shown in table below. The three programs most frequently selected by the participants were HIRED—N. Mpls. (11.9%), Hennepin County WERC (10.4%), and EAC—Wings N. (9.0%).

Table 12. Work and Training Programs Utilized by Participants

Provider	Number in Sample
Connections to Work/PPI	2
East Side Neighborhood (EAC)	3
EAC-Suburban Pathways	3
Employment Action Center (EAC)-Wings No	6
EAC-Wings So	6
EAC- Young Parents	1
Hen Co Work & Econ. Resource Center (WERC)	7
Hen Tech CO Employ & Training Programs	2
HIRED	4
HIRED-No. Mpls.	8
HIRED-So. Mpls. Sabathani	3
JVS 1500 S. Hwy 100	2
Loring Nicollet Community Center	2
Lutheran Social Services	1
MDES-Minnetonka Area Job Service Office	3
MDES-No. Mpls. Workforce Center	3
MDES-So. Mpls. Workforce Center	3
Mpls. Public Housing Auth. Welfare to Work	2
Mpls. Urban League	2
Pillsbury Neighborhood Services-Unity Center	2
Seton Services/Catholic Services	3
Total	N = 67

Reasons for Selecting Work and Training Program

Various reasons were given for selecting the work and training program, as shown in Table 13, with the majority citing proximity as the reason. It is interesting to note that over half (55.2%) of the 67 in work and training programs who were interviewed made good use of the earlier policy decision to decentralize work and training services.

Table 13. Reason for Choice of Work and Training Program

	Number	
Proximity	37	(55.2%)
Reputation	4	(6.0%)
Don't know	6	(9.0%)
Assigned	9	(13.4%)
Previous Connection	7	(10.4%)
NA	4	(6.0%)
Total	N = 67	(100.0%)

Participants' Experiences with Work and Training Programs

Services offered

Interviewees were asked, "Can you tell me what services you have been offered at (name of W&T program)?" Their responses were categorized as shown in Table 14. This open ended question was asked in order to ascertain the perceptions that the participants have about their W&T experience. Their responses were coded using the range of services listed in the following table which flow from the MFIP regulations. The majority of the participants stated that they had participated in a job search (76% sanctioned, 52% non-sanctioned). However, less than half said that they had developed a plan (40% sanctioned, 39% non-sanctioned).

Perhaps one of the most surprising findings is that so few participants mentioned anything about assessment in their description of the services they received. This finding was pursued in the focus group discussion. And when the participants were queried about this, there was an agreement that they had all received some sort of an assessment. However, when we probed about this they described simple reading tests, "We had to be able to read at the fifth grade level." or vague descriptions of pencil and paper tests. They did not perceive early conversations with their counselors to be assessments.

The table demonstrates that the sanctioned and non-sanctioned participants frequently perceived the services offered to them in similar ways. Transportation help was reported by over one third of both groups (44% sanctioned, 38% non-sanctioned). Both groups reported relatively low levels of service provision in advocacy, assessment, and housing. However, there are notable differences in the reporting of education and child care services. Only 1% (n=1) of sanctioned persons reported receiving education services, whereas 29% (n=12) of the non-sanctioned people reported being in school. Twenty percent (n=5) of the sanctioned participants reported receiving help with child care, while 38% (n=16) of the non-sanctioned people reported receiving child care.

Table 14. Participants' Reports of Services Offered by Work and Training Program

	Sanction	
	Yes	No
Advocacy	3 (12.0%)	3 (7.1%)
Assessment	0 (0.0%)	3 (7.1%)
Education	1 (4.0%)	12 (28.6%)
Employment Plan	10 (40.0%)	16 (38.1%)
Housing	2 (8.0%)	5 (11.9%)
Job Search	19 (76.0%)	22 (52.4%)
Other	6 (24.0%)	7 (16.7%)
Training	5 (20.0%)	8 (19.0%)
Child Care	5 (20.0%)	16 (38.1%)
Transportation Help	11 (44.0%)	16 (38.1%)
Participants	N = 25	N = 42

Additional Help

After asking people to talk about the services they were offered, the interviewers asked if there were other things that the program could have done for them. Nearly half (48%, n=32) responded to this question. The following table lists the items most frequently mentioned by the participants.

Table 15. Other Things Program Could Have Done (N = 32)*

	Number	
1. Improve counselor behavior	7	(22%)
2. Provide day care assistance	5	(16%)
3. Transportation assistance	3	(9%)
More resource information	3	(9%)
4. More job options	2	(6%)
Education as an option	2	(6%)
Leave client alone	2	(6%)

*There were 8 responses (25%) which were too individualized to categorize.

Participants' Perceptions of Work and Training Factors that "made a difference."

Participants were asked, "Were there one or two things at ___ (name of work & training program) ___ that made a difference to you in your progress toward achieving your Employment Development Plan?"

Thirty-nine positive factors were noted by the 67 participants, as shown below:

Table 16. Positive Factors Noted by Participants About Work and Training Programs

Difference/plan	Sanction		Total
	yes	no	
Counselor +	1	6	7
Environment +		1	1
Economics +		5	5
Family +		1	1
Range of offerings +	4	9	13
County Policies +		2	2
Other +	2	8	10
			39

Forty-seven negative factors were noted by the 67 participants, as shown below:

Table 17. Negative Factors Noted by Participants About Work and Training Programs

Difference/plan	Sanction		Total
	yes	no	
Counselor -	3	3	6
Environment -	1		1
Family -	3		3
Range of offerings -	1		1
County Policies -	4	2	6
Other -		3	3
Nothing	6	21	27
			47

Over two thirds of the participants (70%, n=47) reported specific positive and negative incidents that had made a difference to them. They reported that programmatic offerings (32%, n=15) and the quality of the counselors (28%, n=13) were especially important to them in their progress from welfare to work. (The external factors (30%, n=14) included a wide range of things that are beyond the scope of the work and training programs; such as family, income, and personal motivation.)

Table 18. Participants' Perceptions of Influences on Progress (n=47)

	Frequency	Percent
Counselor	13	27.7%
Program	15	31.9%
External	14	29.8%
MFIP Policies	5	10.6%
Total	47	100.0%

Programmatic offerings

Several participants (21%, n=10) mentioned the value of specific training experiences. The following comment was typical of many others, "Resume writing was really helpful. I had never written one before and that was really useful." A sanctioned woman also spoke positively about the training,

They were really good about helping us with interviews and stuff. Cuz' I really needed to refresh - all the stuff you kind of forget from school. I'm old, you know. They also helped with resources and what jobs are available.

The following comments demonstrate the dramatic differences heard throughout the study of the perceptions about the quality of the work and training experience.

They could have offered me day care right then and there. They could have offered me training so I wouldn't have to go out and find a petty job. They say, 'Here's your job log. You go out and fill out your job log and bring it back next week.'

One participant compared her positive experience at her work and training program with that of other MFIP participants,

The people, the staff there [made the difference.] Very helpful and informational. And they were really willing to work with you. Everyone else I know at other places, I've heard they hear, 'No, no, no!'

Employment counselors

Nearly a third of the participants (28%, n=13) who made specific comments about what had made a difference to them, mentioned the importance of the quality of their counselors. The following comments about counselors demonstrate the either extremely positive or negative perceptions held by the participants. A woman currently enrolled in a college program spoke of the importance of her first contact with her counselor:

The initial interview just made all the difference in the world. She just said, 'We are gonna' approve this.' All my plans and goals, no questions asked. It was really nice of her to kind of confirm and show back to me that I could keep my desire to do this.

A woman who had left her work and training program for a full time job, and who had not been sanctioned, stated,

I found a job so soon because I felt the worker was rude--as if she had a lot of power. She was also rude to my aunt on the phone. I wanted to get off the program as soon as possible so I wouldn't have to work with her. I even tried to change workers.

No Difference

It is important to note that nearly a third of the participants (30%, n=20) said that nothing at the work and training program had made a difference in their progress. One woman in good standing with her program commented, "I've done everything on my own." Another woman who had been sanctioned said, "I had to find my own job and had to find and pay for day care myself." The programs that they and others are participating in are not always perceived as making a difference in their efforts to find work.

Sanctioned and Non-sanctioned Responses

A person's status within MFIP was correlated with the nature of the responses made to the question about what made a difference towards progress to work. Those who were complying with their work and training program (57%, n=24) were twice as likely to speak of positive influences than those who had been sanctioned (28 %, n=7). Nearly half (48%, n=12) of the sanctioned people spoke negatively, whereas only 10% (n=4) of the non-sanctioned people did.

Table 19. Attitudes Toward Progress by Sanction Status (n=67)

Sanctioned n=25	Non-sanctioned n=42
28 % (n=7) positive	57 % (n=24) positive
48 % (n=12) negative	10 % (n=4) negative
24 % (n=6) nothing	33 % (n=14) nothing

There is a dramatic difference in the direction (positive or negative) of the sanctioned and non-sanctioned. However, Table 20 demonstrates that both groups see the

same factors as having made a difference to them: programmatic offerings and counselor quality. In addition, the sanctioned people (21%, n=4) were more apt than the non-sanctioned (3.6%, n=1) to report the influence of MFIP policies on their progress. These are the policies that were instrumental in the sanctioning they experienced.

Table 20. Perceived Influences on Clients' Progress by Sanction Status (n=47)

	Sanction				Total	
	yes		no			
Counselor	4	21.1%	9	32.1%	13	27.7%
Program	6	31.6%	9	32.1%	15	31.9%
External	5	26.3%	9	32.1%	14	29.8%
MFIP Policies	4	21.1%	1	3.5%	5	10.6%
Total	19	100.0%	28	100.0%	47	100.0%

Participants' Recommendations for Change

Near the end of the interview, participants were asked the following related question: "If there was one thing you could change at your work and training program, what would that be?" The responses in Table 21 fall into two categories: the programmatic aspects of the agencies and the efficacy of the counselors within programs. Sanctioned (52%, n=11) as well as non-sanctioned (44%, n=8) participants were clearly eager to see changes in their work and training programs. And a third of both the sanctioned (33%, n=7) and the non-sanctioned participants suggested changes in counselor behavior. Programmatic and counselor related suggestions are discussed below.

Table 21. Changes Recommended by Participants by Sanction Status (n=39)*

	Sanctioned (n=21)	Non Sanctioned (n=18)
Programmatic suggestions	11 (52.4%)	8 (44%)
Counselor changes	7 (33.3%)	7 (39%)
Other	3 (14.3%)	3 (17%)
Totals	21 (100%)	18 (100%)

*Only 58% (n=39) of the 67 work and training participants responded to this question

Programmatic Suggestions

Participants made concrete suggestions as to how they would change the programs. Several participants appreciated concrete training sessions, especially around specific skills, like resume writing and interview techniques. However, even more calls were made for less time spent "just sitting" in classes. One participant who works full time stated,

Change the time they want us to spend in the classroom. That could be time we could be spending out looking for a job.

There were several recommendations that there be more choice throughout the programs, especially in terms of setting goals and choosing jobs.

I would let people have a free choice. I would ask them what they want to do with their five years.

Other people suggested that the program be made more accessible. "I would change [by having] more convenient hours scheduled around client availability." A non-sanctioned working participant said,

They need to work with the client, on their schedule. Because we can't always make appointments on the worker's schedule. There's a little irony that I have to take time off from work to see my counselor.

Changes in Counselor Behavior

When participants spoke of the changes they would like to see in the counselors at the programs, they mentioned the lack of availability of counselors as well as a desire for higher quality counseling staff. Several participants mentioned a wish for counselors who were able to individualize the needs of each client. This wish represent a theme in the responses to this change question, as well comments made throughout the interviews. There was a consistent appreciation when the client was treated as a unique person. And there was an oft repeated desire that the program and the counselors would treat each person as an individual.

Really listen to what a person wants to do with their life and give them help in that area. If someone wants to go to college help with tuition. Help a person learn a trade if that's what they want. If someone has job skills, help them with a car so they can find a job.

They should just sit down with people and see what's really bothering them, or what they really need to have. Or if there's people who are real smart or if they can't read or are not very smart, but are willing to work, but just can't find a job. If there was something I could change, I would try to help those people who are trying to get somewhere, but just can't.

C. Counselors

The research subjects in the MFIP work and training programs are clear that the quality of their employment counselors is central to their progress toward employment. This emphasis emerged in the question about what has made a difference in their experience as well the inquiry as to their change recommendations for the programs. Subjects were also specifically asked, "Was there something about their employment counselor that had helped or hurt their progress with their program?" The responses to this question are presented in Table 22.

Table 22. Participants' Perception of Employment Counselors by Sanction (n=67) <p < .02>

		Sanction		Total
		yes	no	
Employment Counselor	Positive	6 24.0%	19 45.2%	25 37.3%
	Negative	12 48.0%	7 16.7%	19 28.4%
	Neutral	7 28.0%	16 38.1%	23 34.3%
Total		25 100.0%	42 100.0%	67 100.0%

Non-sanctioned Participants

Nearly half of the non-sanctioned participants (45%, n=19) see their employment counselor as having a positive influence on their progress. Less than a fourth of the sanctioned participants (24%, n=6) considered their employment counselor in a positive light. In fact, 48% (n=12) of sanctioned participants perceived their counselors' influence as negative, whereas only 17% (n=7) of non-sanctioned participants perceived theirs as negative.

Non-sanctioned participants describe their employment counselors as being available to them when needed: "He's always available. When I call, it doesn't seem like I'm bothering him. He doesn't seem rushed." They are seen as sources of resources and information: "She makes sure I get the help I need. She even calls and gets information for me." The employment counselors are described with words "sweet," "patient," "clear" and "to the point." However, some non-sanctioned participants had negative perceptions of their employment counselors.

I have had so many workers, they don't even know who I am.

She just said, 'You gotta get a job.' She wasn't understanding.

Sanctioned Participants

Sanctioned people were more apt to see their employment counselors as negative, condescending and lacking in understanding. However, sanctioned participants also had positive comments: "She is very understanding of my situation." "She is really nice and understanding. A couple times I didn't get along with her, but she was only looking out for my self-interest." The following quote is typical of the 48% (n=12) sanctioned participants who perceived their employment counselor to be a negative influence on their progress.

I have had several workers. I tell my story over and over, but its like talking to deaf ears. They just get information and push on. They have no desire to help on a personal basis.

Participants tended to see their workers as very positive or very negative. The following two comments from the same sanctioned participant illustrate the vast differences in the relationships that develop between participants and counselors.

My first worker, she's real cynical - just no empathy. I told her I couldn't find child care. She was like, 'Tough.' She was one of those people who was older, her kids were grown, but she still had a lot of animosity toward her first marriage. She'd say how he was... Things I don't need to hear.

So I got a new worker who's great--like a cheerleader. The first worker was like; look for a job, write it down. But with this new worker, she gave me all kinds of tips and stuff. So I tried to get this job at the school district and she got me all psyched up. They probably thought I was on Speed during the interview. But I was just like happy and bubbly and I got it. And I went back and called her she was like...my cheerleader. It helped enormously.

Sanctioned and non-sanctioned participants alike saw themselves as vulnerable to the quality of the counselor they are assigned.

Focus Group Discussion on Employment Counselors

The women in the focus groups confirmed the findings from the interviews about the variability of the counselors. They discussed the staff that they encountered in their work and training programs as varying widely in terms of their empathy and respect. One woman stated, "I've been treated poorly. I have cried and I was yelled at. But, then I have been treated well enough by other counselors." Another participant's comments are representative, if a bit more colorful, of frequent statements about the unpredictability of their assigned counselors.

It's like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to get.

There were repeated calls for respect in the focus group discussion. One woman said that the employment counselors need to learn to "look at you with dignity." Two women reminded the group about how hard it is to be stereotyped. "They don't understand that I have worked, paid taxes. I'm on MFIP now 'cause I'm divorced." and "A worker should be supportive and remember you have not been where you are all the time." One participant suggested an administrative response, "A lack of respect by workers should be penalized."

The focus group participants were asked to talk about what they would like to see in a training program for their employment counselors. After the laughter subsided following one woman's announcement that she had already trained her worker, the group was full of ideas. They called for training in "basic social skills", "patience", "empathy" and "respect." They suggested training in basic communication and in learning how to "network," how to get resources for their clients.

The suggestion that elicited the longest conversation was having workers participate in a "poverty simulation." One woman had participated in a program in which volunteers were required to role-play simulations of typical crises faced by MFIP clients. The group heartily endorsed that idea and went on to talk about the lack of empathy they had experienced with their counselors. They spoke of the constant binds that their situation places them in and which their counselors do not seem to grasp. They gave the example of having to get a counselor or training appointments in order to avoid sanctioning, but only having one bus card, three kids with a relative who had not shown up and no money for a cab. They mentioned that the best worker is "someone who has been on assistance themselves."

There were many comments about the power that their counselors have and about the tendency of some to use that power over them. One suggested, "Test them psychologically. Be sure they are not power hungry. They are hurting our spirits."

Financial Counselors

MFIP participants typically have two counselors; an employment counselor and a financial counselor who works for the county. Participants were asked, "**Is there anything about your financial worker that has made a difference—good or bad—in your progress?**" Table 23 demonstrates that sanctioned and non-sanctioned participants

had comparable perceptions of their financial counselors. About a third had positive, a third had negative and another third had neutral assessments of their financial counselor.

Table 23. Perceptions About Financial Counselors by Sanction

		Sanction		Total
		yes	no	
Financial Counselor	Positive	8 32.0%	14 33.3%	22 32.8%
	Negative	8 32.0%	13 31.0%	21 31.3%
	Neutral	9 36.0%	15 35.7%	24 35.8%
Total		25 100.0%	42 100.0%	67 100.0%

Efficiency and Openness

Participants were especially concerned that they maintain efficient and open communication with their financial counselors. Sanctioned and non-sanctioned participants frequently mentioned workers who were especially conscientious in this regard.

Me and her talk over the phone about once a month. I can even fax my report to her and she will fax to me. Once I was late and I was not penalized. She just faxed the forms to me. She's okay.

He gave me a boost in ego and stuff. I just think he helps you out no matter which way. And he makes sure you get things done by the deadline.

Availability was a recurring concern. Several participants indicated that they had learned to manage the problem of accessibility through frequent phone and fax communication, as well as by personal assertiveness.

The only complaint I have about my financial worker is that he doesn't call me back. I've learned the best time to call him, so he can't escape me now.

Only a few people spoke of a counselor error that had resulted in a loss of benefits or other benefits, such as medical coverage. However, the potential for such errors to seriously disrupt a participant's financial life is great and the participants are especially appreciative of the conscientious worker.

Participants see the relationship with their financial counselor as more neutral and less emotionally laden than their connection with their employment counselor. Participants are less enthusiastic and less critical about their financial counselor than they are of the counselor they work with at their work and training program.

The following statements are typical of participants who see this relationship as neutral and impersonal.

She's just administrative. She lets me know I'm getting my quota of money every month. She's quick and blunt and not real receptive.

We don't talk. I just gotta fill out the forms and send 'em in.

Financial Counselor Attitudes

Even though the participants speak less about the understanding and empathy they wanted from their employment counselor, they are sensitive to the attitudes they perceive in their financial counselors.

He doesn't call me back. He told me I was too demanding. He insulted me.

She hurt me more than she helped me. She knew I was pregnant and still sanctioned me. I asked her how I was supposed to make it and she said, 'Get a job.'

She's good. She returns calls, is polite--never rude. She's never on a power trip.

Most of the comments that participants had about their financial counselors relate to the fundamental needs they encounter. The comment of one participant is typical of the gratefulness of many for help in a crisis: "He helped me. He's really good and helpful. When my water was turned off, he helped me."

Barriers to Progress

Participants were also asked this question: **"I'm going to mention some issues that might have affected your progress with your Employment Development Plan. Could you tell me about ways that any of them made a difference?"**

Health, child care and transportation issues emerged as impediments to the participants' progress in their transition to work. Table 24 details the responses to the request of participants to assess the impact of several factors on their progress (health, child care, family, drugs and alcohol, and transportation). Few participants (both sanctioned and non-sanctioned) indicated that any of the factors had a positive influence on their progress. However, there were major concerns regarding three areas: child care, transportation and health. These concerns varied in intensity between the sanctioned and non-sanctioned participants. Sanctioned participants were much more apt to see these issues as negative influences on their progress.

Table 24. Barriers to Participant Progress by Sanction (n=67)

Health by Sanction Crosstabulation				
		Sanction		Total
		yes	no	
Health	Negative	11 44.0%	15 35.7%	26 38.8%
	Neutral	12 48.0%	22 54.4%	34 50.7%
	NA	2 8.0%	5 11.9%	7 10.4%
Total		25 100.0%	42 100.0%	67 100.0%

Child Care by Sanction Crosstabulation				
		Sanction		Total
		yes	no	
Child Care	Positive	4 16.0%	7 16.7%	11 16.4%
	Negative	13 52.0%	12 28.6%	25 37.3%
	Neutral	8 32.0%	23 5.8%	31 46.3%
Total		25 100.0%	42 100.0%	67 100.0%

Transportation by Sanction Crosstabulation				
		Sanction		Total
		yes	no	
Transportation	Positive	3 12.0%	7 16.7%	10 14.9%
	Negative	13 52.0%	14 33.3%	27 40.3%
	Neutral	9 36.0%	21 50.0%	30 44.8%
Total		25 100.0%	42 100.0%	67 100.0%

Sanctioned

Well over half of the sanctioned participants (52%, n=13) spoke of the problems they faced around the care of their children and their transportation situation.

I have no transportation at all. One time they offered me a bus pass, but now they've sanctioned me.

My car is old and there is always something going wrong with it. I got help with the parts. But while it was down, I had to depend on the bus. I lost a job 'cause I had to take three busses to get to it. I was 5 to 10 minutes late every morning.

Fifty three percent of the sanctioned participants (n=13) mentioned that care for their children presented obstacles to their progress. One woman stated that, "They didn't

provide any when I really needed it." Several other women stated that they had difficulty getting to training because they had no one to care for their children.

Close to half of the sanctioned participants (48%, n=12) described the health status of themselves and their family members as a barrier to their progress. The complications of pregnancy frequently emerged as a problem. One mother said,

I can't always get in there [to the work and training program] because I am on bed rest off and on cause I'm pregnant. It's a lot of stress, you know. And then my hands and my foot got burned, so that was a problem for me too."

The health issues often hampered participants' capacity to participate fully in work or training efforts. A sanctioned man said,

My arthritis has been a major issue in finding and keeping a job. One time my arthritis flared up and I had some heart problems. I was fired...I think 'cause of my health.

Non-sanctioned

Non-sanctioned people emphasized the same issues as those who were sanctioned. A notable percent of the non-sanctioned participants mentioned child care (29%, n=12) and transportation (33%, n=14) as obstacles to their progress. One woman spoke of the obstacles she faces.

I need care for my child that I know and trust. I look at it as convenience versus trust... And I don't drive. I have a permit, but I can't afford the lessons to get a license.

Although few participants saw child care or transportation as a positive in their efforts, the following woman demonstrates how important it is when there is help to address these barriers.

I get help with child care. I don't really have any family support and child care helps immensely. I don't know what I would do without child care. As for transportation... I do have a car and they have helped me financially with that. Otherwise I may not make it.

More than half of the non-sanctioned participants (54%, n=22) stated that health issues had had a negative impact on their progress.

III. A Summary of Findings From a Focus Group and Survey of Welfare-to-Work Professionals

Acknowledgments

This is a brief report summarizing the results of a focus group and a survey of welfare-to-work professionals in the Fall of 1998. It is to be noted that all results presented are based upon the perceptions, ideas, and opinions of individual employment counselors and should be interpreted with appropriate caution. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Charlesetta Rolack, Lamonica Irvin, Iesha Odeneal, and Charles Primus in collecting this data. Questions about this report should be addressed to Connie R. Wanberg, Ph.D., Industrial Relations Center, University of Minnesota, 3-255 Carlson School of Management, 321-19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Phone 612-624-4804.

A. Purpose of This Study

The aim of this project was to come up with initial answers to the following two questions:

What client, professional, and "system" factors explain why a proportion of welfare recipients do not participate in available welfare-to-work programs?

How can involvement in welfare-to-work programs be increased among current and future welfare recipients who do not participate in these programs?

Information to answer these two questions was gathered from professionals in welfare-to-work programs across Hennepin County in Minnesota during October through December of 1998.

B. Method

We collected data in two steps. To get initial ideas regarding reasons for and solutions for non-participation among clients, we held a **focus group** for professionals who work with welfare clients. The focus group was held at the Carlson School of Management on October 30, 1998. Connie Wanberg facilitated this focus group and it was professionally transcribed by Lamonica Irvin. Twelve professionals, representing three welfare-to-work programs (Hennepin County WERC, HIRED, and Employment Action Center), participated in the focus group. These three organizations were chosen with the help of Chip Wells, Director of the Minneapolis Employment and Training Program (METP). At the beginning of the focus group, a short survey was given to individuals who participated in the focus group to assess their demographic information and to ensure that each individual had an opportunity to record some comments about the issues of concern. A copy of the survey that was used, along with the focus group protocol, is included in Appendix A.

Following the focus group, a **mail survey** was developed and mailed to 134 professionals from 25 welfare-to-work agencies. The mail survey was designed to quantify and extend findings from the focus group. A copy of this survey is included in Appendix B. Of the 134 professionals that were sent surveys, 60 were returned.

It is to be noted that all results presented are based upon the perceptions, ideas, and opinions of individual employment counselors and should not be interpreted as fact.

C. Results of the Focus Group

The 12 professionals attending the focus group were asked to list on a survey the three primary reasons why they thought that individuals who had been referred to their program sometimes end up not participating in the program. The following reasons were identified (see Table 1):

Table 1: Reasons for Client Non-Participation Identified in Focus Group

- Welfare recipients do not believe that the five year deadline on benefits is "real."
 - Recipients do not have enough information about available programs.
 - Dependency problems.
 - Do not want to work.
 - Clients procrastinate or do not have any concept of time.
 - Have other sources of income.
 - Denial of welfare reform.
 - Tired of same old government programs telling them what they have to do.
 - They are unable to be responsible or accountable to anyone.
 - They consider welfare an "entitlement."
 - Afraid to confront issues of employment, training, or participating in general society.
 - Low self-esteem.
 - Don't want to be told what they have to do and be forced to participate.
 - They have more barriers than the providers can address.
 - They do not believe they are employable and are afraid to face it.
-

Note: These data are based on a sample of 12 welfare-to-work professionals attending a focus group.

The 12 professionals attending the focus group were also asked to list on their survey three ideas for increasing participation among individuals who are referred to a program but end up not participating. The following reasons were identified (see Table 2):

Table 2: Ideas for Increasing Participation in Welfare-to-Work Programs

- Help clients see work as a positive thing.
 - Help clients see welfare-to-work programs positively.
 - Make the vendor visible to the person right away. Tell them who their contact person is right away.
 - Have people who have been through the program market it at the orientation.
 - Close MFIP case after 30 days of nonparticipation.
 - Hold a "Get-out-of-Sanction" Party for nonparticipating clients--give prizes and give out information about the programs that are offered. Let clients bring their kids. Have food and a tour of the job room.
 - Improve current workshops to make them more helpful and interesting.
-

Note: These data are based on a sample of 12 welfare-to-work professionals attending a focus group.

The professionals made a few comments that suggested that they did not worry too much about non-participation as they were so busy with the clients that did participate that they did not know what they would do to serve more.

In conclusion, several interesting comments and ideas came out of the focus group that helped the research team better understand the issue of nonparticipation. Based upon the results of the focus group, a follow-up mail survey was used to generate more detailed information about the issue. The results of the mail survey are described in the next section.

D. Results of Mail Survey

A mail survey was developed based on information derived from the focus group. One purpose of the mail survey was to "quantify" reasons that were given for non-participation in the focus group. That is, several reasons were given in the focus group regarding the nonparticipation of clients. However, we did not know whether or not this information was generalizable to the other welfare-to-work organizations, or how strongly individuals felt about the reasons that were given. Another reason was to get more ideas about how to increase participation in the welfare-to-work programs, as there were not a high number of ideas generated in the focus group.

The mail surveys were sent to 134 employment counselors in 25 welfare-to-work agencies. There were 60 respondents, for a 45% response rate. The mail survey is shown in Appendix B.

The characteristics of the 60 respondents are shown below:

- Gender 52 women and 8 men
- Racial Background 63% White, 3.4% Hispanic, 16.9% African American, 5.1% Native American, 6.8% Asian American, and 5.1% Other
- Average age 34.7 years (range = 23 to 60 years)
- Average education..... 15.9 years (range = 12 to 17 years)
- Average tenure 29.6 months (range = 2 to 204 months)

Individuals were first asked 16 questions regarding reasons about nonparticipation of clients in the welfare-to-work programs. The instructions given for these 16 questions were "**Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following items as reasons why individuals are not showing up to participate in the welfare-to-work programs.**"

Following is a summary of the answers to the 16 questions. Below each question appears the number and percentage of the respondents who gave each answer on the scale.

1. Clients do not believe that the five year deadline on benefits is "real."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation						A major or typical reason for non- participation
1.7% (n = 1)	15% (n = 9)	6.7% (n = 4)	18.3% (n = 11)	26.7% (n = 16)	21.7% (n = 13)	10% (n = 6)

Mean = 4.6

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 5.0

2. Clients do not have enough information about available programs.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
6.7% (n = 4)	26.7% (n = 16)	23.3% (n = 14)	16.7% (n = 10)	13.3% (n = 8)	10.0% (n = 6)	3.3% (n = 2)

Mean = 3.5

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 2.0

3. Clients have dependency problems.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
1.6% (n = 1)	9.8% (n = 6)	9.8% (n = 6)	24.6% (n = 15)	26.2% (n = 16)	19.7% (n = 12)	8.2% (n = 5)

Mean = 4.6

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 5.0

4. Clients do not want to work.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
4.9% (n = 3)	18% (n = 11)	16.4% (n = 10)	21.3% (n = 13)	18% (n = 11)	11.5% (n = 7)	9.8% (n = 6)

Mean = 4.0

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 4.0

5. Clients procrastinate.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
1.7% (n = 1)	10% (n = 6)	6.7% (n = 4)	16.7% (n = 10)	21.7% (n = 13)	18.3% (n = 11)	25% (n = 15)

Mean = 5.0

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 7.0

6. Have other sources of income and thus are not concerned about a sanction.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
6.6% (n = 4)	11.5% (n = 7)	16.4% (n = 10)	16.4% (n = 10)	31.1% (n = 19)	9.8% (n = 6)	8.2% (n = 5)

Mean = 4.2

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 5.0

7. Clients are in denial of the welfare reform.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
4.9% (n = 3)	6.6% (n = 4)	13.1% (n = 8)	24.6% (n = 15)	27.9% (n = 17)	13.1% (n = 8)	9.8% (n = 6)

Mean = 4.4

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 5.0

8. The clients are tired of same old government programs telling them what they have to do.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
1.6% (n = 1)	9.8% (n = 6)	9.8% (n = 6)	14.8% (n = 9)	14.8% (n = 9)	32.8% (n = 20)	16.4% (n = 10)

Mean = 5.0

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 6.0

9. They are unable to be responsible or accountable to anyone.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
6.6% (n = 4)	23.0% (n = 14)	19.7% (n = 12)	16.4% (n = 10)	14.8% (n = 9)	13.1% (n = 8)	6.6% (n = 4)

Mean = 3.8

Mode (Most Frequent Response; Shaded in Table) = 2.0

10. They consider welfare an "entitlement."

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
4.9% (n = 3)	9.8% (n = 6)	4.9% (n = 3)	21.3% (n = 13)	23.0% (n = 14)	23.0% (n = 14)	13.1% (n = 8)

Mean = 4.7

Mode (Most Frequent Response) = 5.0 and 6.0

11. Afraid to confront issues of employment, training, or participating in general society.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
1.6% (n = 1)	11.5% (n = 7)	9.8% (n = 6)	13.1% (n = 8)	23% (n = 14)	26.2% (n = 16)	14.8% (n = 9)

Mean = 4.8

Mode (Most Frequent Response) = 6.0

12. Low self-esteem.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
0% (n = 0)	3.3% (n = 2)	11.5% (n = 7)	16.4% (n = 10)	23.0% (n = 14)	26.2% (n = 16)	19.7% (n = 12)

Mean = 5.2

Mode (Most Frequent Response) = 6.0

13. Don't want to be told what they have to do and be forced to participate.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
1.6% (n = 1)	3.3% (n = 2)	6.6% (n = 4)	14.8% (n = 9)	27.9% (n = 17)	21.3% (n = 13)	24.6% (n = 15)

Mean = 5.3

Mode (Most Frequent Response) = 5.0

14. They have more barriers than the providers can address.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
1.6% (n = 1)	6.6% (n = 4)	11.5% (n = 7)	21.3% (n = 13)	21.3% (n = 13)	23.0% (n = 14)	14.8% (n = 9)

Mean = 4.8

Mode (Most Frequent Response) = 6.0

15. They do not believe they are employable and are afraid to face it.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
3.3% (n = 2)	9.8% (n = 6)	13.1% (n = 8)	19.7% (n = 12)	29.5% (n = 18)	16.4% (n = 10)	8.2% (n = 5)

Mean = 4.6

Mode (Most Frequent Response) = 5.0

16. Too much time elapses from the time a person chooses a program and the time that an individual can begin participating in the welfare-to-work program.

1 A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation	2	3	4	5	6	7 A major or typical reason for non- participation
6.6% (n = 4)	26.2% (n = 16)	16.4% (n = 10)	18.0% (n = 11)	13.1% (n = 8)	16.4% (n = 10)	3.3% (n = 2)

Mean = 3.7

Mode (Most Frequent Response) = 2.0

The responses to the questions listed above (questions 1 through 16) were correlated with employment counselor tenure to assess whether employment counselors who had worked at their current organization longer tended to agree or disagree with certain statement. One question, question 4, had responses that were related to how long a person had worked at their current organization.

Question 4 was "Clients do not want to work." As tenure increased, employment counselors were less likely to agree with this question.

Professionals were also asked "...list what you think is the primary reason why individuals who are referred to your program end up not participating in the program." The answers given are shown in Tables 3a-3c. With the recognition that the reasons given sometimes did not neatly fit into one category, we have roughly placed the reasons given in three categories: Psychological or Person-Based Issues, System-Based Issues, and Family Issues or External Barriers.

Table 3a: Primary Psychological or Person-Based Reasons for Client Non-Participation

- Fear of Change and Difficulties of Change
Fear of being entirely responsible for the well-being of their own family. Uncertainty of their place in society and how that place can evolve. Do not know another way of life. Fear of the unknown. Fear of having to become independent. *(This theme mentioned by 16 professionals)*
- Mental Illness, Disabilities/Chemical Dependency
Undiagnosed/unidentified disabilities: TBI, learning disability, depression, or other mental illness. Chemical dependency issues. A number of clients are functionally disabled but never meet strict disability tests of SSI/RSDI. *(This theme mentioned by 10 professionals)*
- Lack of Motivation.
They do not want to make the effort to look and work to get a job. Easier to stay home. Lack of motivation. "They are lazy and haven't worked for years" *(This theme, with various wording, was mentioned by 8 professionals)*
- Lack of Responsibility/Time Management/Self-Sufficiency
They are not able to be responsible to be in the same place at the same time every day for 4 weeks straight! Lack of experience with self-sufficiency and personal role models who have accomplished it. *(This theme mentioned by 3 professionals)*
- Low Self Esteem
(This theme mentioned by 4 professionals)
- Low Cognitive Ability
Inability to comprehend the required documentation of participation. Low reading/writing/math skills. Unable to effectively apply critical thinking and problem solving skills. *(This theme mentioned by 2 professionals)*
- A Sense of Entitlement
(mentioned by 1 professional)

Note: These data are based on a sample of 60 welfare-to-work professionals completing a mail survey.

Answers to the question "...list what you think is the primary reason why individuals who are referred to your program end up not participating in the program" *continued*....

Table 3b: Primary System-Based Reasons for Client Non-Participation

- Disbelief that the Welfare Rules are Really Changing
They don't take the system seriously and the five-year limit is too far down the road to see or believe; Do not believe welfare rules are changing; "I'll wait to get a job at the end of the five years."; I think many participants don't believe that welfare reform is real; Disbelief in the time limit and that the end of benefits will come; They do not believe the system will let them off after five years quite frankly neither do I. Plus some people are just fine with a sanctioned check. We are still a high paying state cutting 30 percent will just bring us toward the national average.
(This theme mentioned by 7 professionals)
- Dislike of Government/Don't Like Being Told What To Do
There is an apparent dislike of government programs and people telling them what to do; They don't want another person controlling them. They don't want requirements; they don't want us in their business. *(This theme mentioned by 6 professionals)*
- Individuals Have Income from Other Sources
(This theme mentioned by 5 professionals)
e.g. "Several individuals do not care if they are sanctioned as long as they have medical insurance and a little food stamps because most have subsidized housing and are not too worried about losing 30 percent of their grant. Plus, most think they have five years to think and then they'll react because Minnesota will find another program." and "They have another income besides their public assistance check and participating prevents them from 'tapping' that other source."
- Consequences of Not Participating are Not Always Immediate
Sanction process sometimes takes months
Lose track of them while they are waiting on the referral list.
(This theme mentioned by 2 professionals)
- Lack of Information
Lack of information; not enough information about what employment services provide. *(This theme mentioned by 1 professional)*

Note: These data are based on a sample of 60 welfare-to-work professionals completing a mail survey.

Answers to the question "...list what you think is the primary reason why individuals who are referred to your program end up not participating in the program" *continued*.....

Table 3c: Primary *Family Issues or External Reasons* for Client Non-Participation

- Issues Related to Transportation, Childcare, or Housing
These barriers were mentioned by 9 professionals. One additional professional remarked that some welfare recipients don't want to leave their young children in daycare.
- Other Family Issues
Concerns with behavioral-problem children mentioned by one professional.
- Cultural Adjustment Barriers
One comment read: "*We get a lot of the Somali's. They don't seem to understand the concept even when it is translated. Their needs are monumental--language, family, post-traumatic stress syndrome, cultural adjustment, climate, and arranging childcare.*"

Another comment read "*Most of my students are Hmong. Some are literate but have trouble speaking English. Some speak well but are illiterate. All are women, most have five or more children, and many of them are older than forty-five. The majority have never worked before. They believe they should be entitled, and I agree with them*"

Note: These data are based on a sample of 60 welfare-to-work professionals completing a mail survey.

Summary of Tables 3a-3c

It is clear that the reasons for nonparticipation are complex and diverse. As one professional wrote in her survey, "*I believe there is no one reason individuals are not participating. A variety of factors contribute to the lack of participation...disbelief in the changing system, other sources of income, and the fear of changing their lifestyle.*" However, it is possible to understand from the survey responses that the professionals feel that their clients are impeded by a tremendous fear of change, mental illness, chemical dependency, and other disabilities, a disbelief that the system will really "cut them off," a dislike of government, and several other barriers such as daycare and family problems.

Finally, the mail survey asked professionals to "*please provide three ideas for increasing participation among individuals who are referred to your program but end up not participating.*" Following is a summary of responses to this question (see Table 4). The responses typed here are example quotes from survey responses. Note that a few respondents discussed ideas for increasing the effectiveness of welfare to work initiatives rather than participation in welfare-to-work programs per se.

Table 4: Ideas for Increasing Client Participation

- Decrease Employment Counselor Caseloads
(mentioned by 12 respondents)
 - Decrease caseload size (per employment counselor) so more time can be spent with each individual. Often clients do not follow through on referrals.
 - Need to increase numbers of providers to bring down case load numbers thus increasing the time available to work with those in a sanction.
 - Smaller caseloads (more time to give to individuals).
 - Allow more time, smaller caseloads, so participants receive more individual encouragement.
 - Smaller case loads so we could spend more time with people. It would help us to discuss more issues or problems they have in their lives.
 - We have over 200 on waiting list. May take 2 years of waiting for services.
 - EP's need time to deal with participants with CD and mental health issues or be able to refer participants to program where time is allocated for them.
 - Strategic case load with ample opportunities for one on one involvement between ESP staff and client.
 - We need to be close to our clients, understand their needs, let them express their ideas.
 - Decrease counselor/client ratio and paper work to provide for more personalized service.

 - Provide Better Information/Communication Strategies
(mentioned by 9 respondents)
 - Hennepin County needs to tell participants more about what we as employment agencies will do for them. Inform the clients more at the orientation before they get referred to us. We're not here to stop them, but here to assist them to look for work.
 - Information about services or money they can get by participating.
 - Explain the program is here to provide them with valuable resources to help themselves and their families (2 comments saying this)
 - I believe the overviews need to be more empathetic and information should be explained thoroughly.
 - A more time appropriate orientation addressing the reality of welfare reform and the benefits of gaining employment.
 - More outreach to these individuals: emphasize that "work activities" include volunteer work, social service participation (i.e., chemical dependency treatment), and work readiness. They can still meet MFIP regulations by participating in activities other than paid employment. Emphasize the urgency of participation--the 60-month time limit. Inform participants who are not complying about the variety of trainings available; mostly short-term. Also, the availability of area GED programs.
 - Find sponsors for TV advertisements showing many positives for people who participate in employment programs and who get jobs.
-

Table 4: Ideas for Increasing Client Participation, Continued...

- Quicker or Stricter Sanction Process
(This was mentioned by a total of 11 professionals. Following are sample quotes)
 - Sanctions don't happen right way so they don't believe they ever will get sanctioned so quicker sanction process needed.
 - Sanction them if they don't show up for the overview, instead of sending them an intent to sanction.
 - Make sanction process quicker and maybe harsher.
 - Employment counselors as a whole do a terrible job of holding participants accountable. Just because they are not participating doesn't mean they are in sanction. Big point to note. Employment counselors complain about noncompliance but don't hold them accountable by sanctioning them--too soft approach or too many second chances for participants.
 - Higher sanctions over time ex. 10 percent first month, 30 percent second and third months, and 50 percent fourth and fifth months etc.
 - 50% sanction the first month.
 - Send intent to sanction notice at same time they are sent notice to attend overview of agency that they must be enrolled by a certain date.

 - Provide Incentives for Participation
(There were a total of 7 responses saying this--here are two sample comments)
 - Increase incentives (\$ bonuses) for participation rather than sanction for nonparticipation.
 - I believe incentives will help to bring the individuals in to our office.

 - Encourage Clients and Treat them with Self-Respect
(Again, about 7 responses with this theme)
 - Spend lots of time focusing on strengths, self-esteem, motivation, and provide this in an ongoing fashion. Show them you really do care.
 - Need to provide more positive messages to participants from the start!
 - More positive messages from County level.
 - Program info. needs to focus on the positive, not always negative—"you have to"—or else!
 - We need to remember that self-sufficiency comes out of self-worth, self-worth comes from self-respect, and self-respect comes from being treated as an individual human.
 - Provide a "real" information session that does not feel or resemble a normal welfare session. This session should provide information that they will feel benefits them (should be done before they get to us). Assure them that we will help with "real" employment issues and that they have choices and can make their own decisions about their employment plans.

-- Be helpful--if a client feels like you're helping resolve issues for them they will be more open to you as a counselor which in turn will increase participation, bonding, and communication.

 - Streamline Services/Speed Up Referral Process
(Again, about 7 responses with this theme)
 - More team work from financial workers. Financial workers & employment service providers co-located.
 - Shorter delay from referral to first appointment (*4 professionals with this same comment*)
 - Closer cooperation between county financial workers and employment counselors--better reporting, sharing some information--maybe meeting with clients at same time.
 - County financial worker and employment services should work as a team.
-

Table 4: Ideas for Increasing Client Participation, Continued...

- Need Better Assessment at County Level
 - Find out in between the orientation at the government center what their barriers are before you send them to employment services (e.g., psych evaluations, chemical dependency issues, legal matters dealing with court, school problems with their kids) (*2 professionals with basically the same idea*)
 - Better assessment at County level before referring to employment services.

 - Provide Other Services/Revamp Existing Services
 - Rather than just focusing on the participant, the approach to welfare-to-work needs to be holistic. i.e., addressing issues within the family unit, identifying and increasing support networks.
 - Instead of providing the cookie-cutter approach, the new MFIP needs to account for the participants' individual needs. This would require changes at the state and county level. Many of the requirements in MFIP are generalized and may not work for each participant. In short, add flexibility to MFIP to account for individual needs.
 - Have longer ESL classes (more work-focused!)
 - Home visits for those under threat of sanction.
 - Increase funds for training options (short term)
 - Intensive training in skills and ESL
 - More training r.e. opportunities before job search is required. Motivational and how to address generational poverty. Learn middle class rules. Ruby Payne Ph.D. book on poverty is an excellent source. She should be a speaker at our statewide conference!
 - Provide counseling, day care, lots of help to find suitable employment.
 - Classes are 20 hours a week, which is very intensive. There is open enrollment, and varying proficiency levels within each class. Open-enrollment minimizes class-cohesion and makes it hard to set overall learning goals for the class. Because of this, students mostly see the class as a way to avoid working for six months. I think that when certain students join the class and realize this, they simply prefer getting a job right away over spending six months doing something which is set up not to give them any sense of accomplishment.
 - More training for providers on diversity, dealing with people etc., mental health issues, chemical dependency.
 - Provide role models (real people) not a tape at orientation.
 - More community outreach, services to address homelessness, chemical dependency, mental health, education.
 - Spend our money on real issues--rent, training, tuition, answering machines, voice mail, etc.
 - Plan a fun activity about employment.
 - More support services for housing, education, & better paying jobs & the opportunity to get those jobs.
 - More individualized attention when it comes to job-searching. This is a big step for clients.
 - Mentors or peer counselors to help participants through the process.

 - Other
 - Our welfare-to-work program does house visits and calls before a person is sanctioned and calls people "one more time" before sending an intent.
 - Find a way to make the deadline real.
 - Provide a more realistic transition from welfare to work; part time supported employment; freedom to volunteer for 3-4 months; less documentation requirements for both counselor and participants.
 - Cut off all MFIP benefits (but that is really harsh).
 - Automatic job placement when completed.
 - Go to the participants' area; not have people come to the provider
-

Summary of Table 4

There is not an easy way to increase participation among nonparticipating welfare recipients. However, it seems that employment counselors feel overwhelmed with their caseloads and feel they could do a better job with their clients if they had fewer clients to work with. There were several individuals who also felt that there was a strong need for work on communication with clients, especially up front at the orientation. Comments suggested that communications be positive and very clear. Several suggestions were also made that it might help to give individuals incentives to participate in the welfare-to-work programs, rather than sanctioning individuals when they do not participate. Others advocated speeding up the sanction process and making it more severe so that recipients would feel the consequences of nonparticipation immediately, instead of after a long delay.

E. Conclusions

This is the information that has been gathered to date on the "professional" side of the study. The report details several probable reasons for nonparticipation of clients in Hennepin County welfare-to-work programs, and suggests possible solutions for increasing participation from the perspectives of 60 employment counselors. This report is meant to complement data that is being gathered from the other portion of this study, which is focused on interviews of welfare recipients.

IV. Conclusions and Implications

Phase I of this study of the transition from welfare to work for African American and European American people in Hennepin County consisted of four separate research approaches;

1. Face-to-face interviews, which consisted of open ended and structured questions, were conducted with 86 sanctioned and non-sanctioned MFIP participants;
2. Focus group discussions with 7 of the interviewed MFIP participants;
3. A mailed survey of 60 work and training professionals; and
4. A focus group discussion with 12 work and training professionals.

The conclusions from this study will be presented in the context of the three research questions that informed the study.

1. What client, professional, and organizational factors influence successful participation in the work and training programs?

Client Factors

The research team recognizes that there is no adequate outcome measure for successful participation in these programs so early in the implementation of MFIP. However, the existence of sanctions for inadequate participation does allow for a comparison of two groups within the program who have been assessed to be at differing levels of compliance. Thus, many of the conclusions include the presentation of the differences between the perceptions and qualities of the sanctioned versus non-sanctioned MFIP participants. It is important to note that in the total population from which the study sample was drawn, only a small percentage of the clients had been sanctioned. (Disproportionate sampling has enabled us to interview a much higher percentage of sanctioned people than actually exist within the whole population. Thus, it is possible to compare the perceptions and characteristics of the two groups.)

Several client characteristics are associated with the sanction status of the MFIP participants. Those who have not been sanctioned are more apt to have a commitment to employment and to be more conscientious than participants who have been sanctioned. The non-sanctioned person is more apt to have had a previous job and to have worked longer than the non-sanctioned participant at that job. The non-sanctioned person also has a higher level of social support than her sanctioned counterpart. The non-sanctioned person is also more apt to have a job currently. The non-sanctioned participant has more positive perceptions of her employment counselors as well as of the overall work and training experience. The non-sanctioned person also expresses a lower need for child care and transportation services. Both groups indicated health factors had affected their progress. Overall, the differences based on sanction status have proven to be far larger than those based on racial/ethnic identity.

Professional Factors

The perceptions that work and training professionals have of their clients influence their interactions with them. They were asked to identify the reasons for some of their clients' non-participation in their programs. The factors that they considered most important were client resistance to being forced to comply, client low self esteem, procrastination, or lack of sense of time and resistance to government control. These are not inconsistent with the some of the characteristics of the sanctioned participants who have low levels of conscientiousness, are not

highly committed to employment and have much higher levels of negativity regarding their work and training experiences.

Professionals also perceived that the non-participating clients were impeded by fear of change, mental illness, chemical dependency, other disabilities, a disbelief that the system will "cut them off," and several other barriers such as day care and family problems. Some of these perceptions are consistent with the responses of the sanctioned MFIP participants. They did demonstrate fear and frustration with the changes in the welfare requirements and also reported significant concern about the availability of good child care. However, the sanctioned participants did not score lower than the non-sanctioned people on the "emotional stability" measure, nor did they indicate that family problems or chemical dependency were important barriers to their success.

The MFIP participants expressed generally equal concern, approval and disinterest about their employment counselors. We found them to be enthusiastic about the counselors they considered to be "good" ones and highly critical of those they perceived as negative. They were especially critical of the quality, availability, empathy and consistency of some of their employment counselors. They were also concerned about the same issues in their financial counselors, although to a lesser degree. About a third of the participants felt that nothing that the counselors did made any difference to their progress towards work. More sanctioned than non-sanctioned people were negative about both their counselors and the programs in which they participated.

Organizational factors

Two thirds of the participants perceived the work and training programs as making a difference in their progress, with the sanctioned people far more negative about their experiences. The proximity of the programs to their homes was mentioned by most participants as their reason for choosing their work and training program. Many clients were enthusiastic about specific training options available to them, such as resume writing and interview skills. They were critical of the rigidity of program hours of operations, of what they perceived as needless classroom time, of the lack of adequate information and referral to job information and services such as child care and transportation. The sanctioned participants were more apt than the non-sanctioned to register concern about MFIP policies than those who were not sanctioned.

What services do welfare recipients think they need to make the transition from welfare to work?

The MFIP participants were clear that they need more child care and transportation support than they are currently receiving and they need to know that the jobs they are expected to move into will improve their financial future. They need work and training programs that are concrete, accessible and inviting, and they need employment counselors who are available, empathetic and consistent. They need to be recognized as individuals who are coping alone with significant barriers of poverty, government regulations, health and family demands who are now being required to adhere to stringent W&T expectations. They need the support of a competent counselor who has the training and the time to address their individual situation and to treat them with respect and patience. The sanctioned people who expressed greater concern about these barriers are especially in need of a positive counselor relationship in order to increase the

conscientiousness and employment commitment associated with success in the transition from welfare to work.

How can existing programs be tailored to enable individuals to make a successful transition from welfare to work?

The studies of employment professionals and of clients each suggest some possible directions for changes that could make the transition from welfare to work easier and increase the rate of participation in the work and training programs. We have organized them under several categories, as shown below.

A. Structure of the Work and Training Programs.

- More employment counselors and reduced caseloads, so that counselors can provide more individualized help to clients and so that waiting lists are reduced
- Shorter times between referrals to Work and Training and service from Work and Training
- Extended hours, to make it easier for clients to access the employment counselors
- More coordination and teamwork (and even possible co-location) of employment and financial counselors
- Better assessment of clients by the County before they are sent to employment services, to better identify and deal with chemical dependency problems, legal issues, school problems with children, etc.
- Provision for home visits to those under threat of sanction
- Possible use of mentors and peer counselors
- Increase the ratio of incentives to sanctions

B. Orientation and Training of Employment Counselors

(We recommend also reviewing pp. 14-15 concerning some specific counseling suggestions.)

- Training that deals specifically with working with clients in involuntary situations; give clients either more real or perceived control over the process
- Training concerning the full range of services that can be offered to clients
- Training concerning when it is appropriate to sanction and the importance of doing it
- Training regarding enhancing strengths, self-esteem, motivation and on treating clients respectfully (Note that it is possible, however, that employment counselors already possess those skills but are not adequately rewarded for using them. It is also possible that employment counselors already possess these skills but simply do not have the time to be "nice" and "encouraging," due to heavy case loads.
- Training in providing clients more choice in setting goals and choosing jobs
- Training in coaching techniques to positively encourage individuals to become better at meeting deadlines and obligations and better at time management
- Training that includes simulation of the life experiences of their clients
- Training regarding chemical dependency and mental illness issues
- (Additional information about employment counselor training needs will be available by the end of March 1999, following the needs assessment results.)

C. Orientation and Training of Clients

- More information about what services the employment programs can provide
- More information about the economic, social, and psychological benefits of gaining employment
- More information about time-frames, opportunities, and sanctions
- More coaching of skills in time management and meeting deadlines and obligations
- More training in specific skills, such as resume writing and interview techniques
- More intensive training in skills and ESL; make ESL more work-focussed
- Structure classes so that people with different proficiency levels can each accomplish things
- Training on building and using social support networks

D. Resources available to clients

- Need for more subsidized child care
- Need for low-cost and reliable transportation
- Health problems remain an important concern for some participants

We offer these as items for further consideration by the programs involved in MFIP, recognizing that each item noted above also has cost implications and some would be less costly and easier to implement than others. However they, along with the (forthcoming) results from the employment counselor needs assessment, could provide useful starting points for discussion of program improvements.

V. Appendices to Clients' Study

TRANSITION TO WORK
PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
INTRODUCTION

I am part of a Research Team from the University of Minnesota that is doing research for the City and the County about the transition from welfare to work.

We are trying to learn how programs can be more helpful. We understand that you have been a part of this transition process. We think that by talking to you, we will learn what works for people and what doesn't.

Then we will talk to the programs about the things we learn from you and others. We hope that will help them do a better job and make it easier for people to find good jobs.

It is important that we have this chance to talk to you. We will be giving you a \$30.00 gift certificate today when the interview is over.

Neither your worker at your training program nor the County knows that we are interviewing you. No one will ever know what you personally said to us. When we write a report or talk about this study we will never connect you or your name with anything that we say.

Do you understand that none of your workers will ever know that you are a part of this study and will never know what you said to us?

The interview will take about an hour. I will be writing down your answers and I will also be using a tape recorder so I can be sure that I catch everything that you tell me. I will destroy the tapes as soon as they have been listened to. And any information that you give me will never be connected with your name.

If you want to stop the interview at any time, please tell me and I will stop immediately. Do you understand that you are not required to talk to us? That if you decide not to be interviewed, it will have no affect on your relationship with the County or with the training program.

Do you have any questions about this?...All right, then before we go on, I would like you to sign this consent form.

11/3/98

Interview Protocol p. 1

ID # _____ Interviewer _____ Date _____

1. How do you spend the 30 hours that you are required to spend in work and training activities?
2. When you went to orientation you were asked to choose a Work and training program. We understand that you chose to go to _____. Can you tell me why you chose that program?
3. Could you tell me what services you have been offered at _____?
4. I understand that everyone who goes to _____ has to make a plan about how they are going to move into a job. It's called an EDP - an Employment Development Plan. Could you talk a little bit about what plans you made with your counselor at _____?
5. Were there one or two things at _____ that made a difference to you in your progress toward achieving your plan - your EDP?
6. Was there something about your employment counselor at _____ that helped or hurt your progress?
7. Are there other things that _____ could do to help you?
8. You have a financial worker at the county as well as a counselor at _____ right? Is there anything about your financial worker that has made a difference - good or bad - in your progress?
9. I'm going to mention some issues that might have affected your progress with your plan - your EDP? Could you tell me about ways that any of them have made a difference.
Health:
Child care:
Family issues:
Drugs or alcohol:
Transportation
10. If there are issues that I didn't mention, would you tell me about them?
11. If there was one thing that you could change about _____ what would that be?

12. Could you tell me about the last job that you had? (IF NO JOB SKIP TO NEXT SECTION.)

What did you do?

How long did you have that job?

Why did you leave that job?

The next part of this interview will be much shorter. I will read some phrases to you. I want you to use this rating scale (hand it to them) to describe how much the statement sounds like you. So when I read a statement I want to know if it describes you as you honestly see yourself, compared to other people you know. We want to know what things are like for you now, not as you wish they would be. Remember, these answers--like all your answers in the interview--are confidential.

(Options: 1: Very much like me 2: Like me 3: A little like me 4: Not at all like me)

How well do the following statements describe you?

1. ___ I am always prepared.
2. ___ I pay attention to details.
3. ___ I carry out my plans.
4. ___ I carry out my chores.
5. ___ I make plans and stick to them.
6. ___ I waste my time.
7. ___ I find it hard to get down to work..
8. ___ I do just enough work to get by.
9. ___ I don't see things through.
10. ___ I avoid my duties.

How well do the next three statements describe how you feel about working?

11. ___ Having a job is very important to me.
12. ___ I really must get a job or I'll lose my self respect.
13. ___ Having a job means more to me than just the money it provides.

And these next questions are statements that describe you.

14. ___ I often feel blue.
15. ___ I don't like myself.
16. ___ I am often down in the dumps.
17. ___ I panic easily.
18. ___ I feel comfortable with myself.
19. ___ I am not easily bothered by things.
20. ___ I am very pleased with myself.

And these last questions are about the support you get from friends and family.

21. ___ I have a friend or family member who is around when I am in need.
22. ___ I have a friend or family member that I can share my joys and sorrows with.
23. ___ I have a friend or family member who is a real source of comfort to me.
24. ___ I have a friend or family member who I can talk with about getting a job.

And now I have one final question that is much more general.

25. Is there anything else that you think I should know about _____ and your whole experience of looking for a job?

Thanks you so much for talking to me.

FOCUS GROUPS

1. Introductions

Go around and introduce yourself and tell about where you have gone for a work and training program.

Then go around and tell us one word that describes your experience at the Work and Training program you have been in—or why you are not in one.

We interviewed 86 people who are in MFIP. We have been hired by the County to help them do a better job with the Work and Training programs that serve MFIP clients. Now we are talking to you to help us understand the programs better.

2. Services

We learned that nearly everyone who goes to a Work and Training program took part in a job search. People told us that they got help to do things like how to write a resume or they got lists of jobs to apply to. Many told us they got day care help and some got transportation help—like bus cards or car repairs.

We thought there were more services at the Work and Training programs. We would like to understand the experience that MFIP people had.

Even though you answered this in your interviews, could you tell us again about the things that you have done when you went to your Work and Training program.

Probe if necessary, especially about assessment

Assessment
Education
Training
Job Search
Employment Plan
W&T Child Care
Transitional Child Care
Transportation
Housing

What could your Work and Training program have done that would have helped you the most?

3. Counselors

In the interviews we asked you about your counselors—at Work and Training and at the county. You told us that some were great, and that others were not so great.

Could you tell us what a good counselor is like?

Probe what do they actually do that is good. What are their personal characteristics that you like?

Describe what a bad counselor does, what he or she is like.

If you could do a workshop to train your counselors, what would you teach them to do?

4. Conclusion

We will be talking to the people at the county and at the Work and Training programs. What do you want us to tell them?

VI. Appendices to Professionals' Study

Appendix A

Welfare to Work Program Protocol--Focus Group of Professionals

Welcome

Welcome. My name is Connie Wanberg and I am on faculty at the University of Minnesota. This is Charlesetta Rolack and Lamonica Irvin. Thank you for coming to participate in this focus group as part of a study by Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis. We appreciate your giving us your time when we know you all are very busy.

Purpose

- The general purpose of this focus group is to attempt to generate ideas on how to reduce the number of individuals who sign up for your program and then never show up to participate. Although this is a small number of individuals, Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis felt that it might be useful to assess possible solutions to the issue of participant drop-out.
- This focus group is one part of a bigger study. Another part of the study involves interviewing 40 individuals who have been identified as individuals who initially signed up for a welfare to work program and then failed to participate and 40 individuals who signed up for a welfare to work program, and then *did* participate in that program.
- Today, we will start by filling out a short survey that simply asks for your ideas about why individuals may sign up for a welfare to work program and then fail to fulfill participation requirements. After you complete the survey, we will discuss your answers as a group. We will dismiss the group by 2:30 p.m. today. Any general questions at this time?

Introductions

Before we begin, let's go around the room and have each of you introduce yourself and say where you work and what you do.

Survey

First, we would like you to complete a short survey. Look inside and see the contents. What we are doing is asking you about your ideas of why individuals fail to participate in welfare-to-work programs. The information you give us is entirely confidential and your name will NOT be associated with any of your responses. After you complete the survey, we will discuss your answers to the participation questions as a group.

On the cover is a consent statement that is standard practice for University of Minnesota researchers. We must ask you to read and sign a statement that assures you of the fact that (1) you do not have to participate in this focus group and (2) your responses to the survey and focus

group will be confidential. Please read this now. Are there any questions? If not, go ahead and complete the survey.

Focus Group

- As moderator, my role will be to present general questions for discussion and to be sure that everyone's viewpoint is heard. ALL OF YOUR COMMENTS ARE COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL and will only be related in summaries without identifiers. There is no right answer to the questions, so please be candid in providing your point of view. I also need to stress that your participation is entirely voluntary, so if you do not have to stay until the focus group is over.

Schedule

The discussion will last about two hours. We will be tape-recording it as a back-up to our notes, but the tapes will *not* be listened to by anyone except the research team at the University of Minnesota.

Questions

1. Can you tell me about your program and the steps that clients go through once they sign up for your program?
2. How many of you have worked with a client who has signed up for your program and then has subsequently not continued in the program despite a requirement?
3. Can you think of any specific reasons for the non-continuance of these clients?
4. Are there are possible changes that could be made in the program to reduce the number of individuals who sign up for the program and then subsequently do not show up?
5. What other issues do you see that become barriers to clients' continuance in the program?

Appendix A Continued...

Professionals: Focus Group Questionnaire

Connie Wanberg, Charlesetta Rolack, and Lamonica Irvin of the University of Minnesota are working in conjunction with Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis to study issues related to non-participation in welfare-to-work programs. As a service provider to individuals in this transitional phase we would greatly appreciate your participation in a professional focus group. The general purpose of this focus group is to generate ideas on how to reduce the number of individuals who sign up for your program, and then never show up to participate.

The focus group discussion will take approximately two hours of your time. The discussion will be centered around your professional experiences encountered while providing transitional services to individuals making the transition from welfare to work.

Information provided during the context of the focus group will be kept confidential. No one but the researchers at the University of Minnesota will ever have access to the information received, regardless of the mode in which it is obtained, i.e. audio tape recorded responses. All records will be kept in a locked file, and your responses will not be labeled with your name or by any other identifiable means.

By signing this form, you are formally acknowledging that you are agreeing to participate voluntarily and that you know you are under no obligation to the researchers, the County, the City or your agency of employment to participate. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your employer. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship. If you have any questions for the researchers, please feel free to ask them now or at any time. If you have questions later you may contact Connie Wanberg at 624-4804 or Charlesetta Rolack at 626-1027.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I consent to participate in this focus group.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Part 1: Background Information

This information will be kept confidential and will not be discussed in the focus group. We need this information simply so we can assess the extent to which individuals who participated in the focus group compare in terms of demographics to the professionals across welfare to work programs.

1. Your Gender? (Circle one number): 1. Male 2. Female

2. Age: _____

3. Racial/Ethnic Group (Circle One): 1. White 4. Native American
2. Hispanic 5. Asian American
3. African American 6. Other: _____

4. Education (Circle highest year completed):

Grade of School 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 College/Vo-tech 13 14 15 16 17+

5. How long have you worked at Hennepin County WERC, HIRED, or the Employment Action Center?

_____ years _____ months

6. What is your job title there? _____

7. Organization you are employed by:

____ Hennepin County WERC

____ HIRED

____ Employment Action Center

Part 2: Your Thoughts on Non-Participation

The general purpose of this focus group is to generate ideas on how to reduce the number of individuals who sign up for your program and then never show up to participate. In light of this purpose, please complete the following questions. We will discuss your answers in the focus group.

1. How concerned are you about non-participation by individuals in your program? (circle one number)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Concerned			Somewhat Concerned			Extremely Concerned

2. How many clients would you say you had in the last month that did not fulfill their participation requirements? Although this may be difficult, an estimate is appreciated.

_____ clients out of _____ in my caseload

3. Please list the three primary (most frequent) reasons why you think that individuals who are referred to your program end up not participating in the program.

4. Please provide three ideas for increasing participation among individuals who are referred to your program but end up not participating.

5. Now please rate each of the ideas you gave under #4 above in terms of whether you think that they would be likely to work. Use the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Unlikely			Neither Likely Nor Unlikely			Extremely Likely

Idea #1 _____

Idea #2 _____

Idea #3 _____

Now please wait until others have finished completing their questions. We will then begin discussing your answers.

Appendix B

Welfare-to-Work Questionnaire

Connie Wanberg and Charlesetta Rolack of the University of Minnesota are working in conjunction with Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis to study issues related to non-participation in welfare-to-work programs. As a service provider to individuals in this transitional phase we would greatly appreciate it if you would complete this very short survey. The general purpose of this survey is to generate ideas on how to reduce the number of individuals who sign up for your program, and then never show up to participate. Note that interviews are also being conducted with clients on this topic.

Information provided in this survey will be kept confidential. No one but the researchers at the University of Minnesota will ever have access to the information received. All records will be kept in a locked file, and your responses will not be labeled with your name or by any other identifiable means.

By signing this form, you are formally acknowledging that you are agreeing to participate voluntarily and that you know you are under no obligation to the researchers, the County, the City or your agency of employment to participate. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your employer. If you have questions you may contact Connie Wanberg at 624-4804 or Charlesetta Rolack at 626-1027.

Please complete and return this survey within one week.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I consent to complete this survey.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Part 1: Background Information

This information will be kept confidential. We need this information simply so we can assess the extent to which individuals who participated in the survey compare in terms of demographics to the professionals across welfare to work programs.

1. Your Gender? (Circle one number): 1. Male 2. Female

2. Age: _____

3. Racial/Ethnic Group (Circle One):

1. White	4. Native American
2. Hispanic	5. Asian American
3. African American	6. Other: _____

4. Education (Circle highest year completed):

Grade of School 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 College/Vo-tech 13 14 15 16 17+

5. How long have you worked at the organization you now work for?

_____ years _____ months

6. What is your job title there? _____

Part 2: Your Thoughts on Non-Participation

The general purpose of this focus group is to generate ideas on how to reduce the number of individuals who sign up for your program at orientation and then *never show up to participate*. In light of this purpose, please complete the following questions. Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be summarized in aggregate.

Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following items as reasons why individuals are not showing up to participate in the welfare-to-work programs.

1. Clients do not believe that the five year deadline on benefits is "real."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

2. Clients do not have enough information about available programs.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

3. Clients have dependency problems.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

4. Clients do not want to work.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

5. Clients procrastinate.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

6. Have other sources of income and thus are not concerned about a sanction.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

7. Clients are in denial of the welfare reform.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

8. The clients are tired of same old government programs telling them what they have to do.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

9. They are unable to be responsible or accountable to anyone.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

10. They consider welfare an "entitlement."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

11. Afraid to confront issues of employment, training, or participating in general society.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

12. Low self-esteem.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

13. Don't want to be told what they have to do and be forced to participate.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

14. They have more barriers than the providers can address.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non-participation						A major or typical reason for non-participation

15. They do not believe they are employable and are afraid to face it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation						A major or typical reason for non- participation

16. Too much time elapses from the time a person chooses a program and the time that an individual can begin participating in the welfare-to-work program.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A minor or nontypical reason for non- participation						A major or typical reason for non- participation

17. Please list what you think is the primary reason why individuals who are referred to your program end up not participating in the program.

18. Now please provide three ideas for increasing participation among individuals who are referred to your program but end up not participating.

Thank you very much for your time! Feel free to share any other comments!