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**Engaging the hard to engage : an examination of sanctioned TANF clients' perceptions of the re-engagement process : a project done in collaboration with the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department.**

Sena M. Perrier-Morris  
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Engaging the Hard to Engage: an  
Examination of Sanctioned TANF  
Clients' Perceptions of the Re-  
Engagement Process

## ABSTRACT

This mixed methods study examined the experiences and perceptions of welfare recipients who were referred to Contra Costa County's sanctioned client outreach program. Contra Costa County assigned social workers ("Client Engagement Specialists") to provide intensive outreach to this client population that was often regarded as difficult to engage in required employment activities and services. The objective was to better understand how welfare recipients viewed the attempt to re-engage them and what county-offered services they regarded as most helpful to them and their families.

The study consisted of a sample of 19 respondents drawn from a larger sample pool of 149 sanctioned welfare recipients referred for services from October through August, 2008. Subjects answered questions from an interview guide consisting of 47 Likert Scale type questions and 4 open-ended questions regarding their experiences and beliefs. Additional data was obtained from the statewide CalWORKs data system used by Contra Costa County, CalWIN.

Findings showed that sanctioned welfare recipients held largely positive views of their social workers and social workers' attempts to engage them in county employment services. They placed particular value on social worker competence in

employment coaching, community resource referral and support. Respondents reported a high level of understanding of both welfare program requirements and the county noncompliance/sanction process. Attitudes toward county work experience and job readiness programs were mixed, with approximately half reporting positive experiences and half expressing dissatisfaction. In keeping with the previous literature, many recipients reported experiences of material hardship, mental health challenges and transportation problems. Spiritual beliefs were reported as a source of support by most respondents, however questions regarding specific beliefs/religious affiliations were not asked.

ENGAGING THE HARD TO ENGAGE: AN EXAMINATION OF SANCTIONED  
TANF CLIENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RE-ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

A project done in collaboration with the Contra Costa County Employment and Human  
Services Department and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2008

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A landmark welfare reform legislation passed by Congress in 1996 represented a profound transformation of public assistance policy. This new program, Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), ended the system of cash assistance as entitlement, replacing it with time-limited assistance and work requirements for aid. TANF had a “work first” focus, placing rapid transition to employment at the forefront of public welfare efforts.

From the beginning, the threat of financial sanction was an integral part of this reform package. It was believed that the threat of grant reduction would be a powerful tool to encourage behavior change among welfare recipients, specifically to encourage an increase in employment and employment-related activities. The use of sanctions in public assistance was not new; but under TANF sanction imposition became mandatory, and the sanctions more numerous, covering a greater number of activities than under previous legislation. Unlike pre-TANF, families could lose their entire cash grant (known as full family sanction). The reductions could be temporary or permanent, depending on state policy choices.

Under TANF, families that failed to follow program rules could lose all or part of their cash aid. These reductions could be temporary or permanent, depending on the state.

Financial sanctions occurred on both the recipient and the program level. States faced financial sanction if their welfare caseloads failed to meet the required work participation rate (WPR) of 50 percent for one-parent households and 90 percent of two-parent households engaged in work or work-related activities. However, the legislation contained provisions that allowed many states to avoid sanction even though their actual work participation rates were below the federal requirement. In addition, sanctioned families were not included in the calculation of the WPR.

When TANF came up for reauthorization in 1996, Congress enacted changes that served to enforce the expectation that welfare recipients would transition rapidly to employment. It did so by reducing the number of activities that qualified as work-related activities, changing the calculation of the caseload reduction credit, and mandating that states include sanctioned and other “non-engaged” welfare-eligible individuals in WPR calculations. These changes had the effect of forcing states to either significantly raise their work participation rates or face large reductions in federal funding for their welfare programs. This, in turn, forced the states to re-focus on the needs of sanctioned families and the methods necessary to re-connect them to services. Sanction studies have focused on differences in implementation between and within states, as well as differences in characteristics between sanctioned and non-sanctioned families (Bagdasarayan, et al, 2005; Keiser, et al, 2004; Klerman & Burstain, 2008; Mathematica Policy Research Group, 2003 Peck, 2007). Some of these differences included the use of full or partial sanctions and different methods of implanting and of curing sanctions. Relatively little research examined welfare recipients’ views of the sanction process (Hildebrandt, 2006;



;Laakso & Drevdahl, 2006). This research study hopes to address this lack of information by examining welfare recipients' perceptions of an outreach program designed to re-engage participants who are either sanctioned or at risk for sanctions.

In Contra Costa, a large, economically and culturally diverse county in Northern California, the county-administered TANF program, known as CalWORKs (California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids) developed a multi-faceted re-engagement plan, part of which focused on the use of social workers as *Client Engagement Specialists* who would utilize a time-limited, intensive case management approach to re-engage CalWORKs participants who are, or are about to be, placed in sanction.

As a discipline, social work has always concerned itself with the alleviation of poverty and the protection of vulnerable individuals and families. Development of social work practice models that are effective in addressing the needs of these families should be a natural focus of social work research. The leading role played by sanction implementation as a means of client engagement has overshadowed other methods that might prove equally – if not more—effective in encouraging engagement among TANF recipients

Thus, the objective of the current study was to answer two questions: One, how do welfare recipients who are sanctioned or about to be sanctioned view efforts made to re-engage them in the county's welfare-to-work employment services? And two, given the array of supportive services offered, what do welfare recipients regard as most important in terms of helping them meet program requirements? This exploratory mixed methods

study utilized an interview guide format that resulted in data gathered from 19 CalWORKs recipients who were referred to the county client outreach program because they were, or were about to be, sanctioned for failing to complete CalWORKs program requirements. Potential participants were contacted by phone and during visits made to Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) offices. Interviews were conducted at county offices, in participant homes and in the community. Participants involved with Child Protective Services at the time of recruitment were not included in the sample. The sample was limited to English speakers.

The findings of this study will, hopefully, benefit social work practice by increasing our knowledge of promising casework practices for this important client population. The results will most likely be of interest to county social service program and planning managers and specifically to those social workers and other frontline service providers who work with TANF families, particularly those families who face multiple barriers to employment.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review describes and critiques the previous research on implementation of financial sanctions in public welfare. The use of sanctions as a tool to encourage welfare clients to engage in employment-related activities will be presented and reviewed. Section one presents the theories underlying the use of financial sanctions in public welfare, as well as the pre and post TANF use of sanctions. Section two describes those characteristics that distinguish families who are more likely to be sanctioned. Section three will examine and critique welfare reform from the point of view of TANF recipients.

#### *History of Financial Sanctions and Welfare Reform*

##### *Pre-TANF Sanction Theory*

Diamond (1935) viewed the development of welfare sanctions as arising out of society's deeply ambivalent attitudes toward the poor and dependent. These attitudes (contradictory emotions of love and hate) occurred as part of the Oedipal struggle between society (representing the father) and the poor and dependent (representing the child). Traditional welfare policies, with their mix of succor and threat, represent society's attempts to balance these conflicting desires. Sanction laws and the intensity

that often surrounds the push to enact them, are the inevitable manifestation of society's attempt to protect itself from the existential threat posed by the poor and the needy.

Gordon (1992) analyzed the influence of gender and class on the development of social welfare policy in the industrial era. A key concern of the largely female, white and upper class reformers was that their efforts on the behalf of the poor not encourage poor people to refuse work. She states:

Social workers usually distinguished between the deserving and the undeserving poor and felt it important to treat them differently. The undeserving could threaten the entire social order by their failure to internalize a work ethic, and social workers worried about the potential for their own helping activity to worsen that shiftlessness. The most important word in the social work vocabulary during the 19<sup>th</sup> century had been "pauperization," which is what happened when the poor allegedly lost their work ethic and began to expect handouts. (The American Historical Review, 97(1), pgs 19-54)

#### *Sanctions and Welfare Reform*

Reflections of these concerns continued in pre and post TANF discussions of welfare reform. Among sanction proponents, the dearth of sanction options in pre-TANF welfare programs was part of what made those programs ineffective in promoting work and self-sufficiency among poor families. Under AFDC, sanctions were usually limited to partial grant reduction and subject to a complex regulatory process before implementation. As noted below, some considered these sanctions ineffective tools for influencing recipient behavior.

Some welfare staff and administrators complained that sanctions under AFDC were too small to effectively induce recipients to

comply with work requirements. In addition, when a family's AFDC grant was reduced owing to a sanction, the family's food stamp benefits were generally increased, partly offsetting the cash sanction. Critics also contended that recipients often abused the conciliation process, a federally required procedure intended to resolve participation problems before sanctions were imposed (Bloom & Winstead, 2002. Sanctions and welfare reform. Brookings Institution Policy Brief #12).

Zuckerman (2005), in her study of the interplay between politicians, the public and researchers in the development of the transformative 1994 welfare reform legislation, PWORK (Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act), cited political and public pressure as key to the transformation of legislation that was originally intended to focus on the elimination of poverty among poor families to one that focused on the rapid transition of welfare recipients from cash aid to unsubsidized employment. Zuckerman noted a changed political environment in Congress after the 1994 Republican rise to power, along with increased public ire toward welfare recipients, as the key to the Act's passage. She also acknowledged the failure of progressive researchers in their attempts to make compelling research-based arguments for their opposition to punitive sanctions, noting that sanction proponents and opponents often cited the same research in support of their opposing opinions.

In a 2004 study, Hasenfield, Ghose & Larson compared the behavioral assumptions underlying welfare sanctions with survey and administrative data on the behavior and opinions of welfare recipients. The researchers stated that mandatory work requirements and the use of sanctions to compel compliance with these requirements are based on two beliefs. The first is the belief that the state has a moral right to impose its authority in this manner. And second is that welfare recipients are

capable of complying with the state's demands. Individual compliance is affected by the recipient's cost-benefit analysis of compliance. Hasenfeld, et al (2004) contend that an examination of the literature does not support these claims, stating that failure to comply with program demands occurred because welfare recipients face difficulties in three main areas: 1) education and employment barriers, 2) health and personal well-being barriers, and 3) logistical barriers. Previous studies suggested that welfare recipients have insufficient knowledge and awareness of sanction policies, leading them to run afoul of the rules through misunderstanding, rather than informed consent. (Nixon, Kauff & Losby, 1999; Overby, 1998). Anderson (2002) conducted personal interviews with 60 welfare-to-work program participants. He found that the participants often did not understand the work incentives available to them and were frequently confused about eligibility rules and requirements.

In the end, however, the debate about the necessity of sanction use was resolved in the political arena. Congress approved the welfare reform legislation, elevating the role of sanctions in state welfare programs by mandating their use. The new legislation allowed sanctions of increasing severity, up to the total elimination of the cash grant. Decisions regarding sanction implementation would be left up to state policymakers. This devolution of policy-making authority from the federal to the state level ("first-level devolution"), another hallmark of welfare reform, led to great variation in sanction implementation as states developed their welfare programs under TANF.

### *State/County Variation in Sanction Implementation*

A federally funded review of state sanction policy implementation (Mathematica Research Group, 2003) described differences in four areas: 1) sanction type, 2) minimum sanction duration, 3) requirements for sanction removal or “cure” and 4) responses to multiple instances of sanction. Thirty-five states had policies requiring graduated or immediate full-family sanctions, 15 had partial sanctions and one had pay-for-performance, where the amount of sanction was determined by the amount of compliance with welfare-to-work regulations. Twenty-eight states had no minimum sanction duration, 15 states required 1-month sanction duration, 8 states required 2-3 months duration. Fifteen states required 1-month compliance before sanction cure, while 8 states required 2-3 months of compliance before cure. Repeated noncompliance resulted in imposition of more stringent sanctions in 10 states; longer sanction duration in 32 states, stricter requirements for sanction cure in 24 states, reapplication for benefits in 24 states and a lifetime assistance ban in 7 states.

Wu (2004) used longitudinal administrative data and event history analysis to determine patterns in sanctioning and post-sanction benefit receipt in Wisconsin. They found that multiple incidences of sanctioning, with fairly short spells on sanction, were a common occurrence. The likelihood of ever being sanctioned was fairly high in the first year and on aid (52 percent) and climbed during the second (60 percent), third (62 percent) and fourth (64 percent) years. Most sanctions consisted of a partial grant reduction; very few (5 percent) ever reached full family sanction.

### *Within-State Variation*

Fording (2006) looked at second-order devolution of authority in TANF policy-making in Florida, a state with full-family sanction and frequent sanction enforcement. Second order devolution involved the transfer of authority from states to county government or other local governing bodies. Second order devolution was found to result in significant variation in sanction policy implementation across Florida counties.

Bagdasaryan, Matthias, Ong & Houston (2005) examined variation in sanction policy and implementation in four California counties. They also found that while sanctions were frequently applied, the rate of sanction varied considerably among counties.

Lens (2008) examined frontline caseworker discretion in sanction administration through an analysis of administrative hearing decisions and interviews with sanctioned clients. Her findings revealed caseworker reluctance to grant clients good cause exemptions (due to skepticism regarding the validity of the claims) and caseworker tendency toward very narrow interpretation of sanction rules.

### *Characteristics of Sanctioned Families*

In an extensive nationwide survey of sanction policies and research findings (Mathematica Research Group, 2003) it was found that sanctioned families were more likely to be African American, young, unmarried or un-partnered and have more children. Sanctioned families were also more likely to be long term welfare



recipients, have limited education and lack significant work histories. This meta-analysis showed that sanctioned families were more likely to report transportation difficulties and more likely to experience alcohol and/or drug problems. Sanctioned families were also more likely to experience material hardships than non-sanctioned families, to have lower earnings from employment, and more likely to return to welfare than non-sanctioned families.

Klurman and Burstain (2008) conducted an extensive study of California sanctions. They found that both sanctioned and non-sanctioned individuals had similar characteristics. Whites were slightly less likely to be sanctioned, Blacks and Asians slightly more so. In keeping with other studies, they found that younger welfare recipients (under age 25) were more likely to be sanctioned and that the likelihood of sanction increased with time on welfare. Sanctioned families were less likely to be employed, but 10 percent of sanctioned individuals were found to be working enough hours to satisfy TANF employment requirements. Half of all sanctions ended within 6 months, and equal numbers of clients returned to welfare or exited to work following a sanction.

Wu (2005) examined the relationship between sanction imposition and the economic well-being of Wisconsin TANF families. While 47 percent of all families exited TANF with lower-paying jobs, sanctioned families were 18 percent more likely to leave with no job and 26 percent were more likely to have a lower-paying job after TANF.

In a three year study examining the relationship between sanction, health and

hardship among a sample of mothers receiving TANF, researchers found that sanctioned mothers were more likely than nonsanctioned mothers to be at high risk for food insecurity, financial hardship, utility cutoff and reliance on family and friends for housing. (Reichman, N; Teitler, J; Curtis, M; 2005).

Utilizing longitudinal and administrative data on welfare recipients in Illinois, Lee, Slack & Lewis (2004) surmised that, as a behavioral change incentive, sanctions may be most effective in encouraging informal job performance (defined as odd jobs, babysitting, hairstyling, selling crafts), rather than formal work. They found sanctions to be positively associated with informal work, job training activities and increased food hardships. Threats to sanction (sanction is initiated but lifted without grant loss) were found to have a stronger association with informal work than imposed sanctions. Having a worker who “takes time to explain program rules” was found to reduce rent and utility hardships. Higher levels of goal orientation were related to lower levels of food and perceived hardships.

Henley, Danziger & Offer (2005) examined the relationship of social support and material well-being among current and former welfare recipients. They found perceived support to reduce the likelihood of living in poverty, or exhibiting certain methods of coping, such as selling blood. However, while found to be important for everyday survival among low-income families, it was not shown to enable economic mobility. While relatively high levels of perceived support were reported, most of this support was non-financial with only a minority receiving financial assistance from family and friends. The amount of this assistance tended to be small. Those relying

on mostly welfare income reported the lowest level of perceived support.

Keiser, Mueser, and Choi (2004) examined the role of race and bureaucratic discretion on welfare sanctioning in Missouri. They found that in any given county whites were less likely to receive sanctions than nonwhites with similar demographic characteristics, work history and welfare experience. However, on the whole whites were more likely to experience sanctions because they were more likely to live in areas that had higher sanction rates. Keiser, et al (2004) believed that this was so because areas with the highest proportion of nonwhite populations had the lowest rate of sanction implementation (a result posited to reflect increased minority political power). Compared to nonwhites, a relatively smaller proportion of whites lived in these low-sanction areas. This difference was strong enough to overwhelm the higher rates of sanction faced by nonwhites in any given county.

#### *Presence of Physical and/or Mental Health Problems among Families on Welfare*

Several studies have examined the prevalence and effects of physical and mental illnesses among welfare families. A study examining the physical health status of TANF-enrolled children (Wise, Wampler, Chevkin & Romero 2002) showed that ¼ of all children had a chronic illness. In another study examining the association of chronic child illness and parental employment among welfare recipients (Smith, Romero, Wood, Wampler, Chavkin, Wise, 2002), researchers found that welfare recipients were more likely to report that their children's illnesses adversely affected their employment. TANF mothers reported more physical and mental health problems, as well as more domestic

violence experiences and substance use, than non-TANF mothers in a study investigating

the impact of health problems in a sample of poor mothers of chronically ill children (Romero, Chavkin, Wise, Smith, Wood, 2002). A longitudinal study of physical and mental health problems among Michigan women on welfare (Corcoran, Danziger & Toman, 2004) noted that women who reported personal physical health or mental health problems, or child physical health problems, had fewer months of employment than those who did not. A study of welfare recipients in Connecticut found that women were more likely to be working if they reported good physical health, received help from their social networks and had at least a high school diploma or GED (Horowitz & Kerker, 2001). Siefer, Heflin, Corcoran & Williams' 2001 research on the effect of food insufficiency on the physical and mental health of low-income women found that women who reported not having enough food for their households were more likely to have functional health problems and meet the diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder

The presence of multiple barriers had a particularly damaging effect on the ability of welfare recipients to participate in employment. Nam (2005) found that welfare recipients with multiple employment barriers leave welfare more slowly and are more likely to leave welfare without working. They also have a higher rate of returning to welfare. Danziger, Kalil and Anderson (2000) examined the occurrence of barriers to employment among a large sample of welfare recipients across four domains: 1) human capital (defined as lack of high school diploma or GED, low job skills or limited employment history), 2) mental health, 3) substance dependence and 4) physical health

problems. Approximately half the participants were free of these barriers to employment. Among those who did have barriers, the employment outcome varied significantly across participant profiles, with those experiencing barriers across three domains being significantly less likely to meet TANF work requirements.

### *Domestic Violence and Employment*

Meisel, Chandler & Menees Rienzi (2003) conducted a three-year study of domestic violence prevalence among TANF recipients in two California counties (Kern and Stanislaus). They found an overall prevalence rate of 54 percent meeting the criteria for domestic violence services. However, only 8 percent met the criteria in all 3 years. Recipients who met criteria for domestic violence services worked fewer weeks in a year, had lower wage income and were more likely to lose employment. Approximately 30 percent of those experiencing any type of abuse sought domestic violence-specific help; while approximately 50 percent of those who had serious abuse/physical abuse sought help.

Lindhorst, T; Oxford, M and Rogers-Gillmore, M (2007) used longitudinal data from a thirteen-year study of adolescent mothers to evaluate the effects of cumulative domestic violence on employment and welfare use before and after welfare reform. Study results found an initially high level of domestic violence and welfare use during adolescence, followed by a sharp decline in adulthood. 68 percent of the sample reported at least one episode of domestic abuse from pregnancy to age 18. 38 percent reported an

episode of abuse in 1992 and just 15 percent reported current abuse in 2000. Researchers found that cumulative exposure to domestic violence can have a direct effect on being unemployed, but this effect diminished over time. Psychological distress was found to be significantly associated with unemployment for women with a history of domestic violence.

Staggs, S; Long, S; Mason, G; Krishnan, S and Stephanie, R (2007) used 3 years of longitudinal data to study the relationship between intimate partner violence, perceived emotional and material social support, employment stability and job turnover among current and former welfare recipients. They found that demographic factors such as age and human capital factors such as job skills affect social support and employment but not intimate partner violence. Younger women had more social support than older women. Higher levels of job skills predicted both increased employment stability and increased job turnover. More intimate partner violence predicted less social support and less job turnover, but social support did not predict job turnover.

Chronister, K; Linville, D and Palmer Kaag, K (2008) conducted a qualitative investigation of the impact of domestic violence on women's career development, and barriers and supports that affect the ability of women to access career counseling services. The study utilized a focus group composed of female domestic violence survivors. Half the participants reported the abusive partner as a barrier to undertaking career-related activities. Women also cited fear of social service providers and group members' judgments as well as lack of trust in childcare as major barriers to accessing

career counseling services.

### *Welfare Recipient Perspectives*

Hildebrandt (2006) reported on data from a qualitative study of women recipients in Wisconsin who exited the TANF program before becoming employed. When the women in the sample were asked to identify reasons for their lack of success in the program, four areas emerged: 1) TANF program issues (caseworker unresponsiveness or insensitivity, difficulties accessing service providers); 2) personal barriers (family problems related to the care of sick, young or teenaged children, physical and mental health issues, and problems with substance abuse); 3) social support system difficulties (unstable relationships and domestic violence) and 4) limited education. TANF-related problems were a major source of difficulty, cited by over 90 percent of women.

Laakso & Drevdahl (2006) conducted ethnographic, semi-structured interviews of female welfare recipients in Washington State. The women interviewed reported having negative experiences of emotional and economic abuse, along with feelings of powerlessness in their relationships with frontline caseworkers. Threats of sanction implementation were seen as forms of economic abuse.

Cooney (2006) conducted focus groups of mothers attending a welfare-to-work job training program. These women identified lack of specific skills, parenting/work schedule tensions and an unstable labor market as key barriers to employment.

As part of a study exploring welfare recipients' views of caseworker performance

Anderson (2001) interviewed 60 pre-TANF welfare recipients. He utilized an interview guide consisting of a series of closed and open-ended questions regarding respondents' views on various dimensions of caseworker performance, as well as their views regarding their own caseworker's performance. Anderson found that a significant number of respondents (53 percent) rated their caseworker's performance as fair or poor, 47 percent rated the performance as good or excellent. Most respondents did not believe that their caseworker helped them obtain the services they needed to get off welfare. Many respondents reported that caseworkers applied rules and regulations in a discretionary manner and were inconsistent in the information they provided clients about rules and benefits.

Anderson also noted that substantive competence was the most frequently offered reason for positive caseworker evaluations. This category focused on caseworker knowledge about available services and work support, caseworker ability to negotiate the service systems in ways that helped respondents obtain needed services, caseworker willingness to share information with respondents.

Other areas of concern noted in Anderson's study included worker accessibility (ease or difficulty of contacting caseworker, caseworker timely response to phone calls and timely follow through on agreed upon actions) and caseworker communication skills (caseworker shows respect, understands client life circumstances and challenges, shows empathy and interest).



### *Summary*

The literature on the effect of sanction implementation in welfare reform described a complicated interplay between political and bureaucratic values, the devolution of authority between bureaucratic entities and the enduring effects of economic and psychosocial barriers. While sanctioning is used as a tool to encourage participant engagement in welfare activities that lead to employment and economic self-sufficiency, recipients' experiences of sanction are often negative, with sanctioned families suffering greater economic hardships than non-sanctioned families. The development of alternative tools of engagement for families who are sanctioned or at risk of sanction might prove helpful in reducing the degree of suffering faced by this particularly vulnerable population.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The research questions posed for this study were: 1) How do welfare recipients who are sanctioned or about to be sanctioned view efforts made to re-engage them in Contra Costa County's welfare-to-work employment services? and 2) What supportive services to welfare recipients regard as most important in helping them meet TANF program requirements? This descriptive exploratory study utilized mixed methods for research comprised of an interview guide (Appendix A) containing closed and open-ended questions. Mixed methods research involves the use of quantitative and qualitative data in the same study and is useful for exploring complex social phenomena where some of the variables are unknown (Bryne & Humble, 2006). This method was an appropriate choice for this type of study because the objective was to explore the experiences and attitudes of welfare recipients.

#### *Sample*

Data were gathered from a potential participant pool of 149 CalWORKs participants who were referred to the county client outreach program because they were, or were about to be, sanctioned for failing to complete CalWORKs program requirements. The human subjects review process was completed and approved

(Appendix B) by Smith College School for Social Work and potential participants were contacted by phone. Interviews were conducted by phone and in participant homes. Because of the mandatory nature of Child Protective Services engagement, participants involved with Child Protective Services at the time of recruitment were not included in the sample. Non English speakers were not included in the sample due to lack of translation services. It was expected that the sample will mirror the diversity found in the CalWORKs population of Contra Costa County; however, because the interview guide was available only in English, non-English speaking populations were not be fully represented in the study.

The informed consent form (Appendix C) was read to each participant over the phone or at the in-home interview. If the participant could not be contacted by phone, the informed consent form was mailed to the participant. Participants were given a copy of the consent form to keep for their records.

### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality was protected by removing names and other identifying information from interview guides and storing them separately. To protect confidentiality, data from this research was used in aggregate form only; and any illustrative quotes or other identifying information was disguised. All data was stored in locked drawers in the researcher's office for three years, as required by federal legislation. After that time the data will be destroyed, or continue to be kept secure for as long as needed. When the data is no longer needed, it will be destroyed.

### *Risks and Benefits*

Participants might have experienced some degree of stress when asked to describe barriers to employment, challenges faced in trying to obtain employment, or experiences related to their interactions with agency personnel. Participants were provided with the number of the Contra Costa County mental health hotline. The hotline provides referrals to county mental health services and is the initial point of contact for all county-based counseling services. Information about the Family Stress Center, a nonprofit family counseling center under contract to Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services (EHSD) to provide services to CalWORKs participants was also included (Appendix C).

Information gathered from this study will be used for research and program improvement purposes only and in partial fulfillment for the Master's degree in Social Work. Participation in the study did not affect any grant or program benefits that participants received. Participants gained no direct benefit from this study beyond any personal satisfaction they may have experienced through the sharing of their experiences in a research study.

### *Data Collection*

#### *Obtaining the Data Sample*

Potential participants' addresses and telephone numbers were obtained from the CalWORKs data system, CalWIN. The researcher made two attempts to contact each potential participant by telephone to schedule an appointment to administer the interview guide. This method resulted in five in-home research interviews. Participants who could

not be reached by telephone were sent a copy of the consent form and interview guide through the mail. Thirteen research participants completed the interview guide and consent form by mail. These two methods (mail and in-home) resulted in a sample size of 19 which was significantly lower than the expected sample size of 50.

Several issues might have contributed to the difficulty in obtaining expected sample size: Participants contacted by mail may have moved and failed to provide the county with updated location information. Ten interview guides were returned by the post office because of incorrect addresses/lack of forwarding address. Many participant telephone numbers were incorrect, out of service or missing. Sanctioned individuals might have been reluctant to respond to mailings from the county, due to feelings of alienation or disinterest.

#### *The Instrument*

Participants were asked to answer a series of Likert-scale structured and semi-structured questions regarding their perceptions of the Contra Costa County re-engagement process, knowledge of CalWORKs regulations, interactions with social workers and other county welfare staff and barriers to employment. Participants were also asked to respond to questions such as “Overall, my experience with county welfare workers has been positive” and “My social worker understands the challenges I face.” The pencil and paper interview guide took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The interview guide was self-developed by the researcher. Questions were drawn from the research questions and the previous literature. An expert review of the interview guide was provided by Ms Sandra Bustillo, an Employment and Human Services

Division Manager. Ms. Bustillo has over twenty-five years experience working with the subject population. Her particular area of expertise has been employability issues among disabled and multiply-challenged low-income workers. The interview guide was then pilot tested by administering it to two social workers experienced in working with the subject population. The feedback from both the expert review and pilot tests were incorporated into the final instrument.

### *Data Analysis*

Gender, race, age, employment status and sanction status variables were gathered from the CalWIN data system. Participant responses to the interview guide questions were collected during face-to-face interviews and through self-administered interview guides that were returned by mail. Interview Guide questions 1-47 were structured, Likert Scale-type questions in which participants were presented with statements and required to respond by choosing one of the following responses: strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree.

A codebook was developed for participant responses to the structured questions in the interview guide (questions 1-47) and the results were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet data was then transferred to SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Content analysis was used to analyze participant responses to the open-ended interview guide questions (questions #48-51). Participant responses were categorized according to 10 different content themes found by analysis of participant responses. Four

themes were related to agency service provision, categorized as transportation services; food/cash aid services; career and work-related programs and program flexibility. Six themes were directly related to the participant/worker relationship: worker does not understand or care about the participant or is too judgmental; worker is unavailable or difficult to reach; worker doesn't complete paperwork in a timely manner; too much worker turnover, worker resources/career planning competence and participant perception of the worker as supportive of the participant, as reflected in the worker being regarded as kind, helpful or supportive of participant autonomy.

### *Discussion*

Based on past research, it was expected that participants will report multiple barriers to participation in welfare-to-work programs and also negative experiences with county welfare workers. As this population is often regarded as un-motivated to participate in welfare to work programs, expressions of motivation toward engagement would have been unexpected.

Several issues limit the generalizability of the study findings including small sample size, the exclusion of non-English speakers and participants involved with Child Protective Services. In addition, the study focused on only one social service agency. Also the fact that I was conducting research within an agency where I am also employed in a supervisory position raises the question of possible researcher bias as well as possible effects of perceived researcher bias (i.e, research participants might have been more reluctant to respond or respond honestly when aware of my position within the agency.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Participants reported unexpected findings in several areas: Over 80 percent of participants reported largely positive experiences with county welfare workers, and largely positive experiences at county welfare offices. Slightly less than 90 percent reported that their social worker was helpful to them, and slightly over 90 percent reported that their social worker treated them with respect. Unlike findings in earlier studies, most respondents (over 80 percent) report understanding noncompliance and understanding why they were sanctioned. Sixty-three percent of participants believed they would be more successful finding jobs on their own rather than going through county employment programs. Transportation continued to be a handicap to participants, with over 68 percent noting significant transportation-related problems over the past 12 months. Spiritual beliefs were reported as a source of support by over 90 percent of participants.

The first section of this chapter presents a detailed description of the sample characteristics. The next section presents the quantitative findings for the close-ended questions on the survey. The third section describes the results of the content/theme analysis of the narrative responses to the final four open-ended questions. I will conclude with a summary paragraph with recommendations for Contra Costa County program



policy.

### *Sample Characteristics*

The sample for this study was drawn from a larger pool of 149 CalWORKs recipients referred to the social work outreach program from October through August, 2008. This recipient pool consisted of mostly women (84.6 percent female, 15.4 percent male). In terms of race, 35.6 percent were Black, 33.6 percent White, 21.5 percent Hispanic, 7.5 percent Asian and 2 percent Mixed. Thirty-nine percent of the recipient pool were in the age range of 20-29, 37.5 percent in the age range of 30-39 and 22.9 percent in the age range of 40-49. A majority of the members were unemployed (62.6 percent, compared to 37.4 percent employed). Most (57.8 percent) were not on sanction during the study recruitment period.

Nineteen participants from the pool of 149 agreed to participate in this study. They represented 12.75 percent of the total sample pool. These participants were also mostly women (84.2 percent). 47.4 percent were White, 31.5 percent Black and 21.1 percent Hispanic. No individuals of Asian or Mixed descent were in the respondent sample. In the participant sample, 21 percent were in the 20-29 age range, 37.5 percent in the 30-39 age range and 22.9 percent in the 40-49 age range. As was the case with the larger sample, the majority of respondents were off sanction at the time of recruitment (57.9 percent) and unemployed (73.7 percent).

### *Quantitative Findings*

Questions 1-26 were closed-ended structured Likert Scale type questions.

Respondents were presented with a statement and directed to respond by choosing from among four possible choices: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The findings are grouped according to eight categories: welfare program knowledge, work expectations/attitudes, relationship with social worker, experiences with county workers, physical health, mental health, spirituality as source of support and satisfaction with county work programs (CAST/WEX).

#### *Welfare Program Knowledge*

The majority of respondents reported understanding the rules governing receipt of cash aid and benefits (52.6 percent agree, 47.4 percent strongly agree). These participants also demonstrated an understanding of why they were sanctioned (36.8 percent strongly agree, 47.4 percent agree, 10.5 percent disagree, 5.3 percent strongly disagree). Finally, respondents stated that they understood the meaning of noncompliance (38.9 percent strongly agree, 56.6 percent agree, 5.6 percent strongly disagree).

#### *Work Expectations/Attitudes*

Approximately one third of respondents reported that they “don’t feel ready to go to work right now” (10.5 percent strongly agree, 26.3 percent agree, 26.3 percent disagree, 36.8 percent strongly disagree). Most respondents, however, expected to be working within the next six months (46.8 percent strongly agree, 42.1 percent agree, 15.8 percent disagree, 5.3 percent strongly disagree). Most believed that they were able to become self sufficient through employment (15.8 percent strongly agree, 42.1 percent agree, 15.8 percent disagree, 26.3 percent strongly disagree). Respondents also preferred to conduct job searches on their own (36.8 percent strongly agree, 31.6 percent agree,

26.3 percent disagree, 5.3 percent strongly disagree) while approximately ten percent reported a preference for job searching with a group (10.5 percent agree, 57.9 percent disagree, 31.6 percent strongly disagree). Over 60 percent believed they would make more money through work they found on their own, rather than going through the county job programs (26.3 percent strongly agree, 36.8 percent agree, 31.6 percent disagree, 5.3 percent strongly disagree).

#### *Relationship with Social Worker*

Respondents reported having a strong, positive relationship with their social workers. The majority agreed that social workers understood the challenges they face (26.3 percent strongly agree, 52.6 percent agree, 5.3 percent disagree, 5.3 percent strongly disagree). Most participants felt that their social workers treated them with respect (36.8 percent strongly agree, 56.6 percent agree, 5.3 percent strongly disagree). Finally, the majority of respondents noted that their social worker was helpful to them (47.4 percent strongly agree, 42.1 percent agree, 5.3 percent disagree, 3.3 percent strongly disagree).

#### *Experiences with County Workers*

Respondents reported having mainly positive experiences with county workers. Most agreed that their overall experience has been positive (31.6 percent strongly agree, 52.6 percent agree, 15.8 percent disagree). When queried on negative experience with staff, (“I am often treated disrespectfully when I go to the county welfare office”) 5.3 percent responded strongly agree, 10.5 percent agree, 42.1 percent disagree and 42.1 percent strongly disagree; thus, negative experiences were minimal.

### *Physical Health*

Respondents reported positive assessments of their own physical health and that of their children. Over 75 percent regarded their physical health as good (57.9 percent strongly agree, 26.3 percent agree, 15.8 percent disagree) and their children as being physically healthy (57.9 strongly agree, 26.3 percent agree, 15.8 percent disagree).

### *Mental Health*

Approximately 50 percent of respondents reported often feeling depressed (15.8 strongly agree, 36.8 agree, 36.8 disagree, 10.5 percent strongly disagree) and approximately one third reported often feeling anxious (15.8 strongly agree, 21.1 percent agree, 57.9 percent disagree, 5.3 percent strongly disagree). Most, however, held a positive view of their lives, with over 60 percent feeling “good about my life most of the time” (15.8 strongly agree, 52.6 percent agree, 21.1 percent disagree, 10.5 percent strongly disagree).

### *Spirituality as Source of Support*

Most respondents agreed that spiritual beliefs were a source of support for them (36.8 percent strongly agree, 57.9 percent agree, 5.3 percent disagree). It should be noted that participants were not asked about specific religious affiliations or spiritual beliefs.

### *Satisfaction with County Job Programs (CAST/WEX)*

Responses to the CAST and WEX programs were mixed, with a majority of respondents responding negatively to “The CAST program helped me prepare for finding a job” (12.5 percent strongly agree, 18.8 percent agree, 50 percent disagree 18.8 percent strongly disagree). However, 50 percent agreed that the CAST program would “help

them get a paid job in the future” (13.3 percent strongly agree, 40 percent agree, 26.7 percent disagree, 20 percent strongly disagree). Approximately 50 percent reported finding the WEX program useful (5.9 percent strongly agree, 47.1 percent agree, 29.4 percent disagree, 17.6 percent strongly disagree). Approximately 40 percent felt that the job skills they gained through the program helped them find paid work in the future (11.8 percent strongly agree, 29.4 percent agree, 41.2 percent disagree, 17.6 percent strongly disagree).

For questions 27-45 participants were presented with event statements and asked to indicate by checking the “yes” or “no” box whether they had experienced the event within the last 12 months. The event findings are grouped according to 11 categories: caretaking, physical illness/death, mental health, violence/domestic violence, material hardship, marital/relationship changes, transportation problems, childcare problems, employment, criminal justice and Child Protective Services involvement.

#### *Caretaking*

Taking care of a seriously ill child was the most significant event reported in this category, with 26.3 percent responding “yes” and 73.7 percent responding “no” to experiencing this event within the last 12 months. A few respondents (11.1 percent – yes) reported taking care of a seriously ill parent (94.7 percent - no). And some (5.3 percent – yes) reported taking care of a seriously ill spouse/partner (94.7 percent no).

#### *Physical Illness/Death*

Approximately half of all respondents reported experiencing the death of a family member or close friend (52.6 percent - yes, 47 percent - no). And 26.3 percent reported

being unable to look for work due to physical illness (73.7 percent no).

### *Mental Health*

About 20 percent of respondents reported feeling too anxious to look for work in the last 12 months (21.1 percent yes, 78.9 percent no). Almost half the participants (42.1 percent – yes) reported feeling too depressed to do so (57.9 percent no).

### *Violence/Domestic Violence*

Eleven percent reported experiencing violence directed at them during the last 12 months (88.9 percent no). Approximately 20 percent reported being hit or threatened at home (21.1 percent yes, 88.9 percent no).

### *Material Hardship*

Approximately one-third of the participants (31.6 percent) reported having their utilities disconnected due to nonpayment (68.4 percent no). Almost half reported experiencing food insecurity (42.1 percent received food from a food bank or community kitchen). A few participants (5.3 percent) reported being homeless over the past year.

### *Marital/Relationship Changes*

Relationship status appeared relatively stable within this sample, with only 5.3 percent reporting getting married or moving in with a partner. No respondents reported getting divorced or having a partner move out of their residence.

### *Transportation Problems*

Transportation problems were a significant occurrence for respondents. Over two-thirds (68.4 percent) reported having experienced transportation problems that kept them “from working, going to school or doing other things you needed to do”.

### *Childcare Problems*

Childcare did not emerge as a hindrance related to employment or other tasks of daily living. Most respondents reported no incidence of childcare related problems that kept them from working or doing other things they needed to do (73.7 percent no, 26.3 percent yes).

### *Employment*

Few respondents reported finding a job within the last 12 months (15.8 percent yes, 84.2 percent no). Thus, job related success did not emerge as a major factor for these participants.

### *Criminal Justice Involvement*

Approximately five percent of respondents reported having family members who went to jail or prison (5.3 percent yes, 94.7 percent no). A few family members were released from prison (5.3 percent yes, 94.7 percent no) over the past year.

### *Child Protective Services Involvement*

Involvement with Child Protective Services was also not a major factor. Almost all respondents (94.7 percent) reported no CPS involvement over the last 12 months (5.3 percent yes).

### *Qualitative Findings*

Interview Guide questions 48-51 were open-ended questions related to the participant's experiences in the welfare program. Responses to Question 48 (What CalWORKs resources were most helpful to you?) were divided into 4 categories: transportation-related services (2 responses), food and cash-aid service (9 responses), career and work-related information, planning and support (3 responses), and career and work-related programs such as CAST/WEX Job Club (4 responses). One participant reported receiving "nothing very helpful" and 2 participants did not answer the question. Most respondents found career and work-related information, planning and support as most helpful.

Responses to Question 49 (What did you find most helpful about your interaction with your social worker?) were divided into 3 categories: worker understanding of participant's work-related needs/challenges: (2 responses); worker knowledge of community resources/career planning competence (8 responses); worker supportive character traits, such as being helpful, kind, supportive of participant autonomy (4 responses). Two participants reported finding "nothing" helpful and 2 participants did not answer the question.

Responses to Question 50 (What did you find most difficult about your interactions with your social worker?) were divided into 4 categories: Worker does not understand or care about participant (2 responses); worker is unavailable or difficult to reach (5 responses); worker does not complete paperwork in a timely manner (2 responses) and too much worker turnover (1 response). Four participants responded to



this question with “nothing” or “none”, 2 participants did not answer this question.

Responses to Question 51 (What changes do you think would make the program more useful to you or your family?) were divided into 3 categories: Worker more understanding/less judgmental toward participant (3 responses); greater program flexibility to fit individual participant need (5 responses); and reduced worker turnover/greater accessibility (4 responses). Five participants responded to this question with “none” or “nothing” and 2 participants did not answer this question.

#### *Summary*

Participants appeared to respond positively so social workers’ attempts to engage them in county employment-related activities. They placed positive value on social worker expertise in employment counseling, resource referrals and support; and appeared to regard the contributions of individual social workers as more helpful to them than their involvement in county job programs.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine how sanctioned welfare recipients view efforts to re-engage them in welfare-to-work employment service and how they viewed county-offered employment services and support. Sample findings confirmed the previous research in some areas and disconfirmed them in others. The following sections will compare and contrast the study findings with the previous research.

#### *Sample Demographics*

The study sample had a slightly higher proportion of African-American respondents than Whites, as well as a larger percentage of young respondents. Both findings are in line with previous research (Klurman & Burstain, 2008; Mathematica Research Group, 2003).

#### *Key Findings*

##### *Knowledge of Welfare Program Requirements/Sanction Procedures*

Unlike earlier studies (Hasenfeld, Ghose & Larsen, 2004; Hildebrandt, 2006; Nixon, Kauff & Losby, 1999; Overby, 1998), few sample respondents reported problems understanding welfare program rules or not knowing why they were sanctioned. And in

contrast to other research (Anderson, 2001; Laakso & Drevdahl, 2006; Lens, 2008)), most held strongly positive perceptions of the social worker-client relationship. And unlike earlier studies, (Cooney, 2006; Hildebrandt, 2006), most participants did not regard childcare as a barrier to work participation.

### *Physical and Mental Health Disorders*

Study respondents' self-perceptions of their own physical health were in line with that noted in previous research. The percentage of respondents in this study who gave a negative assessment of their own physical health was 15.8 percent, close to the 16.9 percent and 20.32 percent found in the Horowitz & Kerker (2001) study that examined the importance of physical health and psychosocial characteristics on employment among welfare recipients and somewhat less than the 26.1 percent negative health self-assessments reported by Siefert, et al. (2001) in their study on the relationship between food insecurity and mental and physical health in low-income women. On the other hand, the percentage of respondents who reported being unable to look for work due to physical health problems was 26.3 percent, less than the 36 percent found in Romero, Chavkin, Wise, Smith & Wood (2002)'s study of the effect of maternal health on employment and also smaller than the 58.4%-56.7% range found by Corcoran, Danziger and Colman (2004) in their study examining the relationship between long-term employment and persistent health problems among welfare recipients.

Study respondents' self-reported experiences of depression (52.6 percent agreeing

or strongly agreeing to often feeling depressed and 57.9 percent reporting feeling too depressed in the last 12 months to look for work) are higher than the 15.5-25.1 percent range reported by Corcoran, et al (2004) and also higher than the 26.39 and 22.03 percent found in Horowitz & Kerker (2001) and the 25.7 percent reported by Seifert, Heflin, Corcoran & Williams (2001). Twenty-one percent of the study sample reported anxiety as a barrier to looking for work, substantially higher than what was found in both Corcoran, et al (6.4-9.9 percent) and Siefert et al (7.3-11 percent).

### *Domestic Violence*

Eleven percent of respondents in this study reported experiencing violence directed at them during the last 12 months, with 20 percent reporting being hit or threatened at home, this finding is within the reported range of physical abuse (25, 19 and 17.5 percent in Stanislaus County and 17.4, 13.7 and 13.2 percent in Kern County)) found in Meisel, Chandler and Menees Rienzi's (2003) study of domestic abuse among respondents in two California counties.

### *Material Hardship*

Over one third of study respondents reported experiencing some material hardship during the past 12 months. This finding is in line with the previous research indicating increased likelihood of material hardship among sanctioned families (Mathematica Research Group, 2003; Reichman, Teitler & Curtis, 2005). The most frequently experienced form of hardship was food insecurity, experienced by 42.1 percent of the sample. This was followed by utility cutoff (31.6 percent) and homelessness (21.1

percent).

### *Transportation and Childcare*

Mathematica Research Group's (2003) meta-analysis of research on sanctions found transportation and childcare difficulties to be common among sanctioned families. This study's findings indicate that transportation continues to be a large problem. 68.4 percent of the sample reported serious difficulties with transportation over the past 12 months. This finding is particularly interesting because at the time this research was conducted, Contra Costa County had extensive transportation resources available to CalWORKs participants, including car mileage and public transportation reimbursements, taxi services, car repair and auto purchase programs. This study's questions did not query reasons for transportation difficulties, so it was not possible to determine why respondents continue to experience significant difficulties in this area. Childcare proved to be less problematic for this sample, with only 26.3 percent reporting problems serious enough to impact employment.

### *Respondent-Social Worker Relationship*

Respondents in this study seemed largely pleased with their relationship with their social workers, with over 80 percent of them regarding it positively. This finding was in contrast to previous research, such as Anderson (2001) who that found approximately half the respondents were dissatisfied with the caseworker-client relationship; and Laakso & Drevdahl (2006) that showed extensive dissatisfaction with the caseworker-client in a majority of their sample. With regard to what aspect of caseworker

performance appeared most valued by clients; this study's respondents were in agreement with those in the Anderson study, with social worker competence in employment counseling and resource referral cited most frequently by both groups.

### *Summary*

Overall, respondents appear to welcome county efforts to engage them in services. Unlike initial expectation, respondents reported largely positive experiences with caseworkers. While employment-related success was low in this sample, work expectation/motivation was not, with most respondents expecting to find work within the next 6 months and a majority believing that they would be able to become self-sufficient through work. Mental health difficulties (depression, anxiety) was higher among respondents in this study, a finding in line with previous research on welfare recipients' who exit TANF without finding employment. Hildebrandt (2006) found that mental health issues were cited by study participants as one of the main reasons for lack of success in TANF employment programs.

### *Implications for Social Work Practice*

Respondents in this study as well as others ((Anderson, 2003) indicated an appreciation for social worker competence in job-related counseling and support as well as social worker communication-related skills (empathy, accessibility, respect for client).

Social workers who provide direct services to this population should become expert in two roles: 1) that of occupational specialist, providing job coaching/counseling and employment-focused support, with a well-developed understanding of the local job market and 2) that of the more traditional agency social worker, providing advice, support and encouragement while helping clients access county and community-based services. Both roles are important. Respondents in this study responded more positively to employment support provided by their social worker than they did to referrals to county related job services.

### *Implications for Program Development*

The intensive casework required by this multiply-challenged segment of county welfare-to-work programs makes the case for increased training for county direct service social workers. Program planners should encourage increased technical training and professionalization among welfare caseworkers by encouraging workers to obtain masters and bachelor level degrees in social work.

TANF program administrators may want to examine ways to reduce labor-intensive documentation requirements of social workers (especially those involved in outreach to noncompliant clients), perhaps by delegating some of these tasks to social work assistants and paraprofessional staff. This change might aid in “freeing up” social workers to respond more readily to this client population’s intensive service needs.

California counties operate in an increasingly difficult fiscal environment. Expansion of social work staff or reduction of staff caseloads is often simply not possible

given limited financial resources. Given this reality, it might be helpful for counties to explore what alternative sources of vocational support might be provided to clients through utilizing faith-based or volunteer service groups who could act as community “work partners” or vocational mentors to welfare-to-work clients who need longer-term coaching/support.

#### *Study Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research*

This study was severely limited by small sample size. Also, the sample did not adequately reflect the diversity of the Contra Costa County client population because it lacked Asian and non-English speaking participants. In addition, the interview guide lacked any questions related to drug and alcohol dependence, a commonly-reported problem among sanctioned families (Mathematica Research Group, 2003).

Future studies on this topic might examine the effect of sanction outreach among a larger population of sanctioned families, perhaps including multiple Bay Area counties. It might also be useful to attempt longitudinal studies that could examine the effects of sanction outreach programs over time and among different ethnic groups with varying employment barriers.



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## Appendix A

### Smith College School for Social Work Approval Letter

August 12, 2008

Maxine Perrier-Morris

Dear Sena,

Your revised materials have been reviewed and all is now in order. We are happy to give final approval to this very interesting study.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished).

Good luck with your project. It should be very useful and could well help the agency do a better job. It is particularly important that you are surveying clients who for one reason or another have not been able to make good use of the program. It will be most interesting to see if you can find out what the obstacles are.

With best wishes,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee  
CC: Jean LaTerz, Research Advisor

Appendix B  
Interview Guide

CalWORK Participant Perceptions of the Re-Engagement Process

Please Check The Box That Most Closely Fits Your Opinion

1. I understand the rules I must follow to receive cash aid and supportive services benefits.				
Strongly Agree		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Overall, my experience with county welfare workers has been positive.				
Strongly Agree		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. I am often treated disrespectfully when I go to the county welfare office.				
Strongly Agree		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. My social worker was helpful to me.				
Strongly Agree		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. My social worker understands the challenges I face.				
Strongly Agree		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. I understand why I was sanctioned.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. I understand what non compliance means.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. My social worker treated me with respect.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. I expect to be working within the next 6 months.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. I don't feel ready to go to work right now.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. I prefer to look for a job in a group, rather than by myself.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. I'd prefer to look for a job on my own.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. I believe I can make enough money from work to be able to support my family without help.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. I think I'd make more through work I found on my own, instead of going through the county's programs.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. Being Sanctioned is not a big problem for me because I can get help from family or friends.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. My physical health is good.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. My children are physically healthy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. I often feel depressed.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

19. I feel good about my life most of the time.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. I feel anxious a lot.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Most days, I'm in a good mood.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. My spiritual beliefs are a source of support for me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. The CAST (Career Advancement Strategies and Training) program helped me  
prepare for finding a job.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



24. The WEX (Work Experience) program was useful to me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

25. I think that the CAST (Career Advancement Strategies and Training) program will help me get a paid job later on.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. I gained job skills through my WEX (Work Experience) job that will help me get a paid job in the future.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In The Past 12 Months Have You Experienced The Following:

27. Death of a family member or close friend?

Yes	No		
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

28. Took care of seriously ill child?

Yes	No		
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

29. Took care of seriously ill spouse or partner?

	Yes	No		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

30. Took care of seriously ill parent?

	Yes	No		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

31. PG&E or phone service cut off because of nonpayment?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

32. Unable to look for work due to physical illness?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

33. Felt too depressed to look for work?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

34. Felt too anxious to look for work?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

35. Family member went to jail or prison?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

36. Family member released from jail or prison?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

37. Been hit, kicked or shoved?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

38. Forced to have sex?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

39. Been hit or threatened at home?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

40. Became homeless?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

41. Got married, or moved in with partner?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

42. Got divorced, or partner moved out of resident?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

43. Had transportation problems that kept you from working, going to school or doing other things you needed to do?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

44. Had problems finding childcare that kept you from working, going to school or doing other things you needed to do?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

45. Got a job?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

46. Got food from a food bank or community food kitchen?

	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

47. Involved with Child Protective Services (CPS)?		
	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

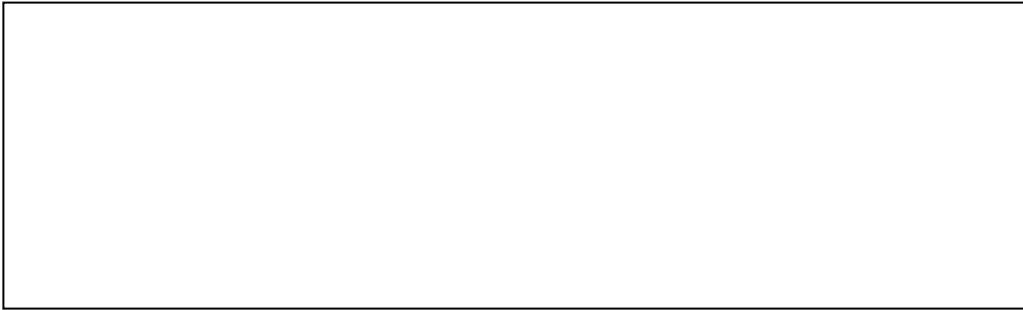
Participant Feedback

List Up To Three In The Boxes Below

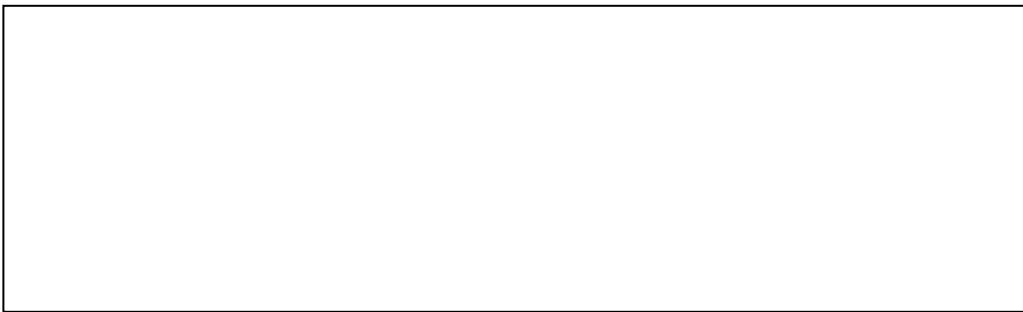
48. What CalWORKS resources were most helpful to you?

49. What did you find most helpful about your interaction with your social worker?

50. What did you find most difficult about your interaction with your social worker?



51. What changes would do you think would make the program more useful to you and your family?



Appendix C  
Informed Consent Form

Dear CalWORKS Participant,

My name is Sena Perrier-Morris. I am an Assessment and Intensive Services Supervisor with Contra Costa County. I am also a graduate student in the Smith College School for Social Work masters program. As part of my master's degree requirements, I am conducting a research study examining the experiences people like you have had with the CalWORKS program.

If you choose to participate in this research you will be asked to complete a questionnaire about your experience as a current or former CalWORKS participant. You may skip any question you do not want to answer. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

You are being asked to participate in this research because you are a CalWORKS participant who is now, or has in the past 12 months, been placed in Noncompliance status; or who is now, or has in the past 12 months, been placed on Sanction.

There are no anticipated risks to you related to your participation in this research. However if you should experience any emotional discomfort or stress related to discussing your experiences as a CalWORKS participant, you will be provided information about services that might help you, including the Family Stress Center, a nonprofit agency that provides counseling and support, and the Contra Costa County ACCESS line, a county-run mental health referral service.

You will be provided with a \$5 gift card as compensation for your participation in this research study. It is hoped that this research will help improve the services that the CalWORKS program provides to families like yours.

All information that you provide as part of this research is confidential. A code number will be used on your questionnaire instead of your name. Your name and any other identifying information will be kept separate from your questionnaire.

My research advisors will have access to the research data after identifying information has been removed.

Data from this research will be used for presentation and publication in group form only. Illustrative and quoted comments will be disguised so that individual research participants are not identifiable.

Data from this research will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office for three years, as required by Federal law. After that time they will be destroyed or continue to be kept secure for as long as I need them. When they are no longer needed they will be destroyed.

**Your participation in this study is voluntary.** If you choose to participate in this study it will not affect your CalWORKS grant or any other benefits and services you receive as a CalWORKS participant.

**If you choose not to participate in this study, it will not affect your CalWORKS grant, or any other benefits or services you receive as a CalWORKS participant.**

**You can withdraw from this study at any time.** If you choose to withdraw from the study it will not affect your CalWORKS grant, or any other benefits or services you receive as a CalWORKS participant. If you withdraw from the study any documents pertaining to you will be destroyed.

You can withdraw from the study by calling me at (925) 706-4779 and telling me that you want to withdraw from the study. You can also send me a letter or leave me a note telling me that you want to withdraw from the study. If you wish to mail your letter, it should be sent to Sena Perrier-Morris, #C4FO, Employment & Human Services Department, 4545 Delta Fair Blvd, Antioch, CA 94509. If you wish to leave a note, you should address it to Sena Perrier-Morris, #C4FO and leave it at the reception desk at 4545 Delta Fair Blvd, Antioch.

If you have any questions about this research, or any concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, please call me to discuss them. You may also call the Human Subjects Review Committee of the Smith College School for Social Work, at (413) 585-7974 or Employment and Human Services Division Manager, Sandy Bustillo, at (925) 313-7704.

If you want to participate in this research study, please sign below. **Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and that you have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, your participation and your rights and that you agree to participate in the study.**

---

Signature

---

Date



## Appendix D

### Participant Counseling Referral Resources

**Family Stress Center**

315 G Street  
Antioch, CA  
(925) 706-8477

**Contra Costa County Health Services Mental Health Access Line**

(888) 678-7277  
2500 Alhambra Avenue  
Martinez, CA 94553

Appendix E



Contra Costa County  
**Workforce Services**

A Bureau of the Employment & Human Services Department



March 13, 2008

We help  
job-seekers,  
workers and  
businesses  
meet their  
employment  
needs in order  
to ensure  
a strong,  
vibrant  
economy in  
our County.

Smith College  
School for Social Work  
Lilly Hall  
Northampton, MA 01063

To Whom It May Concern:

Contra Costa County Workforce Services Bureau, Employment & Human Services Department gives permission for Sena Perrier-Morris to locate her research in this agency. We do not have a Human Subjects Review Board and, therefore, request that Smith College School for Social Work's (SSW) Human Subject Review Committee (HSR) perform a review of the research proposed by Ms. Perrier-Morris. The Employment & Human Services Department will abide by the standards related to the protection of all participants in the research approved by SSW HSR Committee.

Sincerely,

Wendy C. Therrian, Director  
Workforce Services Bureau

Wendy C. Therrian  
Director



40 Douglas Drive • Martinez, CA 94553 • (925) 313-1500 • Fax (925) 313-1575