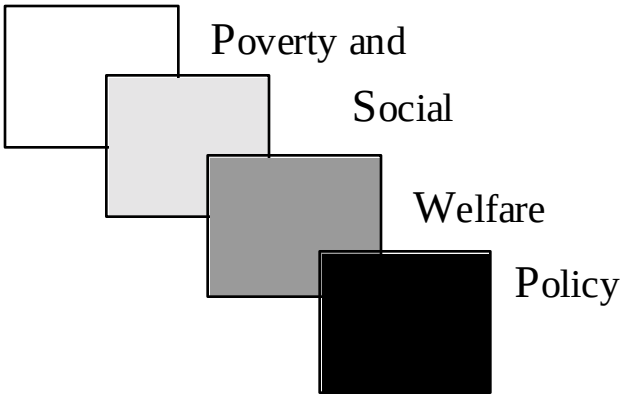
Michigan Program on



Poverty and Social Welfare Policy

# Inside Michigan Work First Programs

**April, 2000**

**Report prepared by**
**Nathaniel Anderson and Kristin S. Seefeldt**

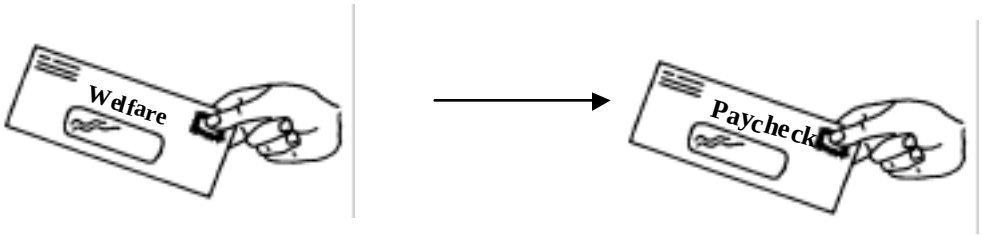
We would like to thank all the Work First providers who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in this study, share their experiences with us, and review an earlier draft of this document and Vicki Enright of the Michigan Department of Career Development who provided additional comments. Also, we very much appreciate the numerous Work First participants who let us observe the programs.

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# WELFARE REFORM AND WORK FIRST




Both federal and state welfare reforms seek to transform the welfare system from one based on maintaining families through cash assistance to one that is temporary and focused on work. In 1994, Michigan began operating a program for welfare recipients called Work First, which emphasizes job search as a means to enter the labor market quickly. However, at that time, many clients continued to participate in other education and training programs. As of late 1996, though, participation in Work First became mandatory for all but certain types of clients (e.g., the disabled, mothers with children under 3 months of age, and those already employed and fulfilling the work requirement). Failure to comply with work requirements without good cause results in a 25 percent grant reduction for four months followed by case closure. New applicants are not eligible for assistance beyond 60 days if they fail to cooperate.

Clients are referred to a Work First program through their welfare office, called Family Independence Agencies (FIA) in Michigan. A variety of organizations are under contract to provide Work First, but the welfare system does not contract directly with these providers. Instead, Work First is administered at the state level by the Michigan Department of Career Development and locally through 25 Workforce Development Boards and their staff, called *Michigan Works! Agencies* (MWAs). Twenty-five Boards and their MWAs act as fiduciaries for public employment and training funds, including Work First monies. They then contract with one or more agencies to operate Work First in their service delivery area.

As a job search program, the primary outcome of concern is moving clients into jobs. Individual Work First contractors use a variety of approaches to achieve this outcome, ranging from pre-employment workshops and assistance in job placement to client-directed job search. However, as cash assistance caseloads decline, those left on the rolls may have more personal issues and barriers to employment (see page 10). For these individuals, workshops and job search alone will not be enough to help them enter and stay in the labor force.

In the late summer and fall of 1999, researchers from the University of Michigan's Program on Poverty and Social Welfare Policy conducted program observations and interviewed staff in nine organizations with Work First contracts throughout Michigan. The purpose of these site visits was to obtain detailed information on the types of services provided by local Work First programs and to identify innovative practices in the field, particularly services or strategies to help clients resolve barriers to employment.*

The remainder of this document highlights our findings by describing:

1) the organizations in this study;
2) the general design of the programs;
3) innovative practices in preparing clients for job search and in helping clients find employment; and
4) strategies for serving clients with barriers to employment.

First, we provide an overview of past research on Michigan's Work First program.

*Because of the nature of the study and the small number of sites visited, we cannot ascertain whether certain program models or service delivery strategies are more "successful" than others in terms of placing clients in jobs and helping them maintain employment.

# WORK FIRST IN MICHIGAN-- PRIOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

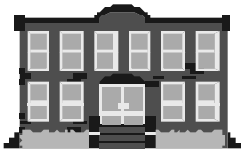
Since late 1996, the University of Michigan's Program on Poverty and Social Welfare Policy has been tracking welfare reform in Michigan, including development of the Work First program. In the next two pages, we provide a context for our case study results, by highlighting findings from our prior research. For more details, see "What Contractors Have to Say about the Work First Program" and "Moving Toward a Vision of Family Independence: Local Managers' Views of Michigan's Welfare Reforms," (both available on our website, see page 14).

## Work First Agencies

For program year 1997-98, we identified and interviewed over 100 providers that had Work First contracts and had served clients during the year (94 percent response rate).

Of the organizations interviewed:

- 46 percent are nonprofit agencies
- 33 percent are school-affiliated organizations
- 19 percent are for-profit agencies
- 2 percent are public agencies







Although for-profit agencies do not predominate, most of them hold contracts with multiple *Michigan Works! Agencies*. Additionally, most for-profits serve the Southeastern portion of the state, where more than half of the caseload resides.

## Contractual Arrangements

- The majority of agencies are reimbursed for actual costs.

- About one-fifth of organizations are paid based on performance outcomes (e.g., payments at placement and 90 day retention). Overwhelmingly, organizations with these types of contracts serve urban areas. For-profit agencies are more likely to be under performance contracts than are nonprofits and school-based organizations.



## Provider Backgrounds

- Almost half of providers have had Work First contracts since the program started in 1994.

- A little more than a fifth of the organizations interviewed in 1998 had not operated Work First in the previous program year (program year 1996-97). Most of these providers either serve areas of the state where *Michigan Works!* staff previously ran Work First (beginning in 1997, MWAs are required to contract out for services) or they are located in and serve Wayne County.

- The majority (62 percent) of provider agencies offer other employment and training programs or services. Far fewer providers (just over a tenth each) primarily offer social services or traditional education services. A small number (less than a tenth) provide a wide range of services, including employment, training, and some social services. The remaining few providers are other types of organizations such as local economic development corporations or corporate placement agencies.

# WORK FIRST IN MICHIGAN-- PRIOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

Although Michigan's Work First programs vary in terms of services provided, the contractors do share similarities on a broad level in terms of the types of services they provide clients, the sequencing of those services, and the assistance provided during job search. Based on those dimensions, we developed four typologies to describe the variation of service delivery. Of the four, most providers used some form of the Job Seeking Support Model; less used the Job Search Preparation model, and far fewer used the Labor Market sorter or Client Responsibility models.

## Job Seeking Support Model

**Approach**: Arm clients with skills and tools needed to look for work and *pro-actively place them into jobs*. Typical activities include workshops on resume preparation, interviewing techniques, application preparation.

Clients have access to job postings, internet, phone banks, newspapers. Staff develop jobs/job leads with employers, bring employers on-site for interviews, and/or take clients to job fairs

## Job Search Preparation Model

**Approach:** Arm clients with skills and tools needed to look for work so that they can *look for work in a self-directed manner*. Typical activities include workshops on resume preparation, interviewing techniques, and application preparation.

Clients have access to job postings, internet, phone banks, newspapers. Job search is self-directed.










## Labor Market Sorter Model

**Approach:** Pro-actively attempt to place clients into jobs and *let labor market determine who needs more preparation*. As first activity, staff develop jobs/job leads with employers, bring employers on-site for interviews, and/or take clients to job fairs. Clients also have access to job postings, internet, phone banks, newspapers.

THEN, clients not successful at finding work initially attend workshops on resume preparation, interviewing techniques, application preparation; repeat job search activities.

## Client Responsibility Model

**Approach:** *Clients have the primary responsibility* to look for and find work. Clients get assistance from staff in preparing resumes, using resources.

Clients have access to job postings, internet, phone banks, newspapers. Job search is self-directed.

# THE WORK FIRST CASE STUDY SITES

The nine Work First agencies included in this study are not representative of all Work First agencies throughout the state. However, they do reflect much of the diversity (described above) in terms of organizational status (e.g. nonprofit vs for profit), organizational background, size of program, and service delivery structure. Additionally, the nine sites cover several geographic areas with diverse economies, clientele, and community resources.



## Detroit/Wayne County (4 agencies)

**Three for-profit firms**:

- Work First contracts with multiple MWAs (2 of 3 firms)
- Similar contracts in other states (2 of 3 firms)
- Background in providing vocational education (1 firm) and employment-related services (all)
- More than 50 Work First staff (2 of 3 firms); other firm has less than 10 staff*
- Majority (2 of 3 firms) to half (1 firm) of their funding for services in Michigan programs is from Work First

*staffing size is a function of how many FIA offices the firms serve-- the two larger firms serve multiple offices.

## Outstate Urban Area (3 agencies)

**Two nonprofit agencies**:

- Work First contracts with multiple MWAs (1 of 2 agencies)
- One vocational rehabilitation agency; one research institute
- One agency with approximately 15 staff, the other with 5*
- Work First represents about half of one agency's funding; about 20 percent for the other

*5 staff serve one outstate site; the agency has more staff in other offices.

**One nonprofit agency**:

- Community based provider
- Prior experience providing vocational/technical education programs
- Approximately 10 Work First staff
- Nearly all agency funding from Work First

**One school-affiliated agency:**

- Community based provider
- Prior experience providing employment and training services
- Less than 10 Work First staff
- About 75 percent of agency funding from Work First





## Rural/Mixed Areas

**Two nonprofit agencies**:

- One agency has Work First contracts in multiple MWAs
- Both agencies serve multiple FIA county offices
- Agencies' overall focus is social services, but both have prior experience running employment and training programs
- Both have approximately 5 Work First staff*
- About half of funding from Work First









*these numbers reflect staffing totals at one site; both agencies have more staff in other offices.

# JOB SEEKING SUPPORT PROGRAM DESIGN FEATURES

All four of the program models were represented in our case study sites (Job Seeking Support, Job Search Preparation, Labor Market Sorter, and Client Responsibility). Consistent with what we found in earlier rounds of data collection, two thirds of the agencies (6 of 9) used a Job Seeking Support model of service delivery. Through our case studies, we were able to explore further program differences, particularly differences within the Job Seeking Support category. The following diagram illustrates these differences in the two program components offered by all 6 of the Job Seeking Support Programs: workshop topics and job development. The workshops varied in terms of time spent, topics covered, and the messages emphasized to clients. The job development strategies used by these sites varied by the staff performing job development activities (specialized vs. generalist) and the approach to job development (providing general job leads vs. developing leads for specific clients).

The two programs that cover the widest variety of topics (and have clients spend the most time) in workshops also have specialized job developers and are more proactive in placing clients into jobs. However, due to the scope and nature of this study, it cannot be inferred that "more" is necessarily "better." Good facilitation and job matching skills are essential attributes of staff running these types of programs.

**Job Seeking Support Sites**

**Workshop Topics/Time**

**Job Seeking Skills**

- 10-12 hours on job seeking skills including: resume & cover letter, filling out applications, interviewing skills
- Emphasis on finding employment quickly
- 3 of 6 programs

**Job Seeking & Retention Skills**

- 10-12 hours on job seeking skills
- Limited coverage (7-10 hrs) of topics such as: career planning, problem solving around employment issues, conflict management in the workplace, budgeting.
- Emphasis on finding and retaining employment
- 1 of 6 programs

**Job Seeking, Retention, & Self-Improvement Skills**

- In-depth coverage (24 - 30 hours) of self-awareness topics including: self-esteem building, managing difficult emotions, goal-setting (career and life goals)
- 10-12 hours on job seeking skills
- Emphasis on self-improvement generally; steady employment viewed as a component of this larger goal.
- 2 of 6 programs

**Job Development Type**

**Generate Job Leads/ No Specialized Staff**

- Generalist staff with job development responsibilities or full-time job developers serving other employment programs in addition to Work First
- Contact employers for job leads, maintain a book or bulletin board of leads
- Client responsible for contacting employer
- 4 of 6 programs

**Proactive Placement/ Specialized Job Developers**

- Full-time job developers
- Actively pursue and maintain personal relationships with employers
- Develop job leads for specific clients, advocate on client's behalf
- 2 of 6 programs

# JOB SEEKING SUPPORT WORKSHOP FEATURES

Staff and managers of Work First programs frequently note that being able to handle conflict in the workplace is a skill some clients need to learn in order to maintain employment. Additionally, research on job search programs indicates that *practice* and *active learning* environment are important parts of helping participants find jobs. Workshops that are primarily lecture may not help clients as much as ones that are interactive in style.

Below we highlight three exercises used in the programs– two on anger management and one on concrete examples. All three actively involved participants in the discussions; and the anger management exercises address "self-improvement skills."

## Workshop Exercises: Anger Management



By definition, the two Job Seeking Support Programs covering "Self-Improvement Skills" (in addition to job seeking and retention skills) present more varied topics during the workshops. Anger management is a topic covered by these two programs.

One of these programs uses a curriculum developed by a publisher of human resource development tools (Carlson Learning Company) whose stated goal is "to increase self-awareness and improve personal effectiveness, thereby improving organizational performance." A particular exercise on anger management poses a scenario in which a staff person is wrongly accused by her employer of not performing her job duties. After reading through this scenario, the instructor facilitates discussion among participants about how they would handle the situation if they were the employee, focusing specifically on how angry they would feel and how not to let their anger control the situation.

The other program uses a similar exercise. The stated purpose of the activity is to develop decision-making skills. Clients read and discuss several challenging interpersonal scenarios in workshop handouts. One of these is a "real world" example of a former participant who had been fired after an argument with her supervisor escalated into a shouting match in front of customers. The facilitated discussion focused on how and why the client should have handled the situation differently and the importance of controlling anger.

During observations of these exercises, clients were active in the discussions and worked together to develop strategies managing their anger.

## Prove It!

One of the case study sites uses a technique called "Prove It" to help participants discuss their skills and strengths when they are in a job interview. The steps in this process call for participants to: 1) choose a skill; 2) develop a story about this skill (e.g., where they learned the skill); 3) provide numbers to give a clear picture of how they used the skill (for example, the number of children a client babysat); and 4) state a positive outcome from using this skill (in the babysitting example, keeping children safe and happy while parents worked). Participants repeatedly practice the "prove it" exercise throughout the workshop so that they can provide employers with concrete examples of their skills and responsibilities during an interview.

Research conducted by the University of Michigan's Prevention Research Center finds that this type of exercise-- both the content and the repetition-- is effective in job search programs for two reasons. First, employers are dependent upon interviewees to present themselves effectively, and part of that process is presenting the relevance of skills and strengths in a convincing and impressive manner. Second, identifying skills and continually practicing talking about these skills helps participants gain self-efficacy, which in turn is an important factor in securing employment. (For more information on this research, contact the authors).

# OTHER PROGRAM DESIGN FEATURES

On the next two pages, we provide an overview of the other three programs included in this study. These sites each represent an example of the other three program models highlighted on page 3-- Job Search Preparation, Labor Market Sorter, and Client Responsibility.

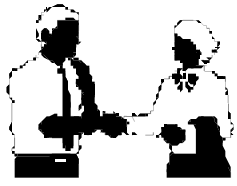
**The Job Search Preparation Example**

One of the case study sites follows this model. Clients spend the first week in a workshop, covering topics ranging from finding job leads, filling out applications and resumes, and negotiating a job offer. Clients also do mock interviews, which are videotaped and critiqued by the instructor and fellow workshop participants. The last day of workshop is spent discussing job retention strategies. Toward the end of the first week, clients move into job search. On these days,clients meet for one hour and share job leads with each other, and the staff person running the session gives a presentation on topics such as budgeting and goal planning. After that hour, clients use a phone bank to contact employers and set up interviews. They may also do other job search activities on their own, including going off-site to a local employment agency to obtain job leads.

This type of job search is almost exclusively the responsibility of the client, and this may be beneficial in that clients may be more committed to stay in a job they find on their own. However, a program using this approach should ensure that assistance is available to clients who may need more direction in sorting through job options. For example, this program provides individualized assistance to clients who have not been able to find a job after 4 weeks in the program. Staff may accompany clients on job interviews (as a way to bolster confidence) and provide clients with feedback after the interview.

**The Labor Market Sorter Example**

The organization using this model does not necessarily do so by design. Their program is set up to have a week-long job readiness workshop followed by job search. In practice, though, it operates more like a labor market sorter program. This organization has developed relationships with many local employers and frequently has employers on-site to conduct interviews. Additionally, the program is located in close proximity to frequent "job fairs," attended by numerous employers with open positions.



During the course of the first week of the program, clients may be excused from the workshop to interview with employers or to attend job fairs. Clients are told to dress well so that they can go to interviews. One staff person estimated that by the third day of the workshop, half of the clients are already hired or are actively interviewing.

A strength of this approach is that clients who already know much of the information presented in a workshop can move quickly into the job search phase. On the other hand, certain clients, if pushed too quickly into interviewing, may become discouraged or scared and drop out of the program.

# OTHER PROGRAM DESIGN FEATURES

**The Client Responsibility Example**

One of the case study sites uses this model. In this particular site, group activities are minimal. Clients are expected to spend the majority of their time searching for work and applying for jobs. At the program orientation, clients are told about the various resources available to help them in their search, for example, postings of jobs maintained at the local Michigan Works Service Center (which provides a variety of employment and training services and programs and is co-located on-site). At this time they are also instructed in how to complete job search logs to get credit for their job searching time and the process by which they can be reimbursed for gas and mileage costs during the job search.



One afternoon a week clients convene at the Work First site for a job readiness workshop, but the activities during this time are less structured. Instead, staff generally provide one-on-one assistance to clients on a variety of tasks (resume preparation, further job search) depending on the needs of the individual client.

For programs serving fewer clients, this type of program model may be preferable, since running a workshop with only a handful of participants may not be cost-effective nor useful for the client. Additionally, staff in this site noted that they used to do more group activities, but since many clients had been through the program before, the group exercises became repetitious. On the other hand, high proportions of clients repeating the program may suggest that a program needs to build in some types of "readiness" activities, whether those be exercises or instruction in finding a job or keeping a job. In fact, staff in this site were working on ways to incorporate more of these activities into their program.

# JOB DEVELOPMENT AND PLACEMENT STRATEGIES

All of the Job Seeking Support examples, as well as the Labor Market Sorter example, do job development for Work First clients. The two general strategies they use, generating job leads and proactive placement, are described on page 5. The former strategy is less labor intensive, and often reflects an underlying organizational philosophy focused on teaching self-reliance; one manager noted that their agency had scaled back the job development efforts of case managers because "their time is better spent making sure clients are able to find a job on their own." The latter strategy involves specialized staff who both generate job leads and work closely with clients and employers to match up client skills and any special needs with employer requirements. Below we describe some specific practices described by job developers in the case study sites. Additionally, we highlight a placement strategy unique to one of the sites.

**Developing Positions**

Networking with employers to find out about job openings is done through a variety of methods. Programs with full-time job developers use a combination of strategies for initiating contacts: calling businesses ("cold calling"), taking inventory of "Help Wanted" signs in the area, and making contacts with employed friends, relatives, and other acquaintances. Once the initial contact is established, the job developer sets up a time to visit the employer and gives a short presentation about the Work First program and the benefits of hiring a welfare client (e.g. potential tax breaks or wage subsidies). Because job developers face dual pressures of placing clients into jobs as well as building rapport with employers, some initially send one, capable client to interview with the firm. Job developers who use this practice believe that if the employer is impressed with and hires this client, the firm may be more willing to take on Work First clients in the future.

**On-Site Interviews**

Half of the job seeking support programs invite employers to do on-site interviews with their clients. One of these programs has incorporated a weekly presentation by a recruiter from a local temporary staffing agency into its workshop. The recruiter gives clients tips for filling out applications and interviewing and presents job openings (including job description, pay rate, and benefit availability). If clients are interested in any of the positions, the recruiter can pre-screen them that day.

**Breaking Down Stereotypes**

A couple of job developers and other staff mentioned that some employers have negative impressions of welfare recipients. Research on employer hiring preferences (conducted by Harry Holzer, see page 13) confirms that this can be a problem. For some job developers, a major goal of employer contact is trying to dispel preconceived notions about welfare recipients. One job developers tells employers that:

> "Work First participants want the same things as everyone else--success. They are energetic, enthusiastic people who want the opportunity to prove themselves."

**"Fast Track"**

A number of Work First staff and managers noted that, over time, an increasing proportion of clients coming through Work First have been through the program before, in part because some drop out of the program and/or lose jobs and are re-referred.

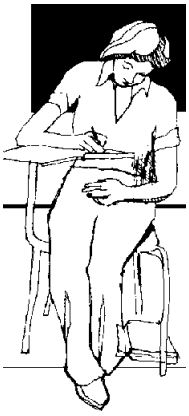


One site developed a "fast-track" program in conjunction with the local welfare office to break this cycle. Under this system, recipients who had been referred to Work First more than three times are assessed for possible barriers, provided with support services, and then sent directly to work with a team of job developers on their job search. Clients are guaranteed an offer of employment, so if they are unable to locate a position within two weeks, they may be put in an On the Job Training (OJT) position. In OJT, a participant is placed with a public or private employer, and wages are subsidized. The employer is expected to hire the client as a regular employee after a specified amount of time. If the client refuses the OJT, the case is sent back immediately to the welfare office for possible sanctions.

# HARD TO SERVE CLIENTS

As welfare caseloads around the nation continue to decline, there is a concern that people remaining on assistance will face greater difficulty in securing employment, even in this good economy. Recent research from an ongoing survey of current and former FIP recipients in Michigan shows that of those on FIP and not working: a) just under 1/2 lack a high school diploma or GED; b) 1/4 experienced domestic violence in the past year; c) approximately 1/4 meet diagnostic criteria for major depression or other mental health problems; and d) a very small proportion (1 in 20) meet diagnostic criteria for alcohol or drug dependence (University of Michigan, Poverty Research and Training Center, unpublished data, January, 2000; see page 14 for reports from this study). Additionally, in a survey of employers, more than 2/5 of those who had hired welfare recipients reported having some problems with absenteeism and more than 1/5 cited problems with these recipients' attitudes (Holzer, 1999). Agencies serving these clients need to be aware of such problems and find ways to screen clients so that appropriate services can be provided.

## Current Assessment Strategies



Within Work First agencies, assessment of client skills and barriers to employment typically takes two forms-- 1) assessment of education levels through math and reading tests (in most cases, using the TABE test) and 2) assessment of barriers to employment ranging from child care and transportation problems to experiences with domestic violence or mental health problems. At a minimum, these types of barriers are assessed using an Individual Service Strategy (ISS)– a form with questions asking about education, previous employment, and barriers to employment.

Some of the Work First providers examined in this study conduct further assessments beyond the testing and the ISS. For example, most of the organizations administer interest inventories or career exploration tests, not just to help clients focus their job search efforts, but also to start them thinking about longer-term career goals. Additionally, one of these contractors also tests clients on "workplace competencies": clients participate in a workshop covering topics such as appropriate dress and workplace behaviors. Before they can start searching for work, clients must demonstrate their knowledge of these work norms by taking and passing a "competencies" test.

Identification of potential barriers to employment, though can be more challenging. In most cases, staff rely on client self-disclosure, either on the ISS or during subsequent interactions, to determine if there are underlying issues that may affect the client's ability to find or keep a job. Without formal training in social work, counseling, or other human service-related fields, staff may have difficulty recognizing a problem such as mental health needs or family stressors like domestic violence.

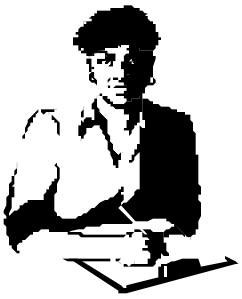
The next several pages describe examples of available assessment tools and efforts, both in Michigan and across the country, to identify and work with "hard to serve" clients.

# HARD TO SERVE CLIENTS

## Assessment Tools

Reliable instruments do exist for systematically identifying specific problems that could hinder employment and welfare exits. For example, some welfare offices use previously tested paper assessments that can screen for alcohol and drug problems. These include the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI), Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (SMAST), the Addiction Severity Index (ASI), and the "CAGE" test. The latter consists of only four questions and could be integrated into the ISS or other initial activities. For more information, see Kramer, Fredrica. (1998). *"The Hard-to-Place: Understanding the Population and Strategies to Serve Them."* WIN Issue Notes, 2:5, March, 1998. http://www.welfareinfo.org/hardto.htm)
For more information on the CAGE and MAST, see http://www.health.org:80/survey/7k.htm

In Oregon, staff working with welfare clients use a screening and assessment tool to help identify domestic violence victims. For more information about this tool, contact Shirley Iverson, Field Services Manager, 503-945-6902, or Carol Krager, Domestic-Violence Lead, 503-945-5931.



According to information gathered by the National Governor's Association, the University of Kansas, as part of a project sponsored by Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, developed an enhanced screening tool to identify adults with learning disabilities. It is currently being administered by TANF caseworkers.
For more information, contact: Katie Evans, Employment Programs, Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, 785-296-6756

## Other Innovative Approaches

Recently, the National Governors' Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices convened two meetings of state and local policymakers to discuss strategies for serving low-income families with a broad range of health and/or skills-related barriers to employment. From these sessions NGA compiled a listing of innovative state and local practices and initiatives that attempt to address these issues-- including programs that deal with domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health, and physical limitations.



Profiles of these initiatives, along with contact information, can be obtained from NGA's website: http://www.nga.org/Welfare/SeriousBarriers.asp

NGA intends to update this information as they receive more information from other states and localities.

# HARD TO SERVE CLIENTS

**Case Study Site Strategies for Serving Clients with Barriers**

**Bringing in Outside Expertise:**

A couple of the Work First contractors included in this study regularly include speakers from a community organization in their workshops. In one program, a representative from a local social services agency spends two hours a week with clients, leading group discussions on issues such as anger management and other personal and family issues.



In another program, a staff person from the area's child care resource agency conducts a parenting workshop once a month. Clients can discuss issues they face in balancing work and family, including child care. Child care resource staff are also on-site once a week at the Work First agency to help clients complete the forms needed to get the child care subsidy and/or prepare a set of questions for clients to ask when interviewing a child care provider. These staff are even available to accompany a client on a visit to a provider, if the client requests this service.

**Hiring Staff with Specialized Training:**

Several of the Work First organizations in this study employ staff with Master's in Social Work or with degrees in counseling. One site has a social worker on staff, and clients with multiple barriers are referred to her. She works with them to develop problem-solving skills and coordinates referrals to other agencies. In another organization, the staff person who runs the first week of job readiness classes has a master's in counseling and has his own private practice as a clinical psychologist. Because of this staff person's training, he can assess clients' responses during workshop exercises and begin to appraise some of the underlying issues they may be facing. A key part of this process, the staff person notes, is being able to get clients to feel comfortable in the classroom so that they start discussing some of their problems. If he believes that a client needs treatment or counseling, he can refer her to a licensed psychologist contracted by the organization to provide this service.

**Referrals to Community Agencies**

Several of the Work First providers are social service agencies providing an array of other services job placement. In one of these organizations, for example, clients with low reading/writing skills can make use of the organization's literacy program; clients with young children can be enrolled in WIC (also overseen by this organization); and clients with inadequate housing may have some of their needs met through a weatherization program.

However, none of the providers offer all of the services potentially needed by clients. The majority of staff interviewed make referrals to a wide range of outside service providers within their communities including substance abuse treatment centers, and food and clothing banks. In most cases, though, staff do not follow-up after a referral is made. In some cases, though, follow-up may be appropriate– for example, for a client with a substance abuse problem who is in denial and not attending treatment. Even if the client desires treatment, negotiating this system may be difficult for both client and staff. In Oregon, local welfare offices have integrated substance abuse treatment into their work-based system by developing partnerships with local treatment providers. These relationships involve no contracts; rather, staff from all agencies meet to discuss ways to increase communication as well as ways to deal with client privacy issues. For more information, see "Integrating Alcohol and Drug Treatment into a Work-Oriented Welfare Program: Lessons from Oregon," G. Kirby et al, 1999; available on line at: http://38.150.5.70/oregon.pdf

# HARD TO SERVE CLIENTS

## High School Completion and Basic Skills

As noted earlier, recent research conducted by the University of Michigan uncovered that many current recipients lack a high school diploma or GED. A survey of employers indicates that having a high school diploma or GED is an important credential for entering the low-wage labor market (Holzer, 1998). In the past year, changes in state policy make it easier for clients to combine work with classes to obtain a GED. Clients in high school completion courses may count up to 10 hours of classroom time toward their federal work participation requirement.*



However, for adults without a high school degree, returning to a classroom environment may evoke feelings of past failures or discouragement with the education system. In recent years, a number of programs throughout the nation have attempted to address this issue AND to link adult education instruction more closely with work. The National Institute for Literacy has highlighted a number of these approaches and profiled "exemplary programs" in its report, "What Works: Integrating Basic Skills Training into Welfare-to-Work" (G. Murphy and A. Johnson, 1998, available online at: http://www.nifl.gov/whatworks.htm). Several of these programs use basic skills instruction applied to the world of work. For example, one program run by the Cleveland Public Schools system uses a curriculum based on development of "SCANS competencies." These competencies were identified by the U.S. Department of Labor as those needed to succeed in the workplace.**

Another program elsewhere in the nation teaches academic skills in the context of what clients need to "fulfill their roles as parents, workers, and citizens" as identified in the National Institute for Literacy's "Equipped for the the Future" standards. These standards focus on applying skills, rather than just learning skills. For more information on Equipped for the Future, contact Sondra Stein, (202) 233-2041 at the National Institute for Literacy.

*Time in a GED program is limited to 6 months.

** According to the report, SCANS involves five competencies: resources (how to allocate time, money, materials, space, and staff); interpersonal skills (how to work on teams, teach others, serve customers, lead, negotiate, and work well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds); information (how to acquire and evaluate data, organize and maintain files, interpret and communicate, and use computers to process information); systems (how to understand social, organizational, and technological systems), and technology (how to select equipment and tools, apply technology to specific tasks, and maintain and troubleshoot equipment).



## Child Care: An Ongoing Dilemma



Child care continues to be a major hurdle for many Work First participants. Work First staff frequently noted that some clients are nervous about leaving their children with a stranger, even if the person is a licensed child care provider. Instead, many of these mothers rely on family members to care for their children. Unfortunately, they may not have a back-up child care plan. When the family member is sick or otherwise unable to care for the child, the participant may miss or be late for the Work First program. If the problem persists once the client becomes employed, she could lose her job.

To help with this problem, the majority of case study sites are working closely with the local child care referral agency. Representatives from this agency provide referrals to child care providers with openings and information about how to interview providers and ensure the child's safety. At one site,clients are given a week to research and put child care arrangements into place before they begin Work First activities (in other locations, clients are expected to start immediately after referral from the welfare office). And another provider has an on-site daycare center which greatly facilitates the participation of the agency's clients in their program.

# SUMMARY AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

As Michigan's Work First program has evolved in the last several year, staff and program managers have noted that though the program seems to have worked well for job-ready clients, the current caseloads are comprised of individuals with more barriers to employment. While policies are changing to meet some of the needs of these clients (e.g., more opportunities for high school completion and training), providing services to address other issues may be more challenging because the issues themselves are hard to detect. The strategies highlighted in this document may prove useful in serving the current generation of welfare recipients.

In addition to the reports and resources cited throughout this report, the University of Michigan's Program on Social Welfare Policy and Poverty Research and Training Center has produced a number of reports related to various aspects of welfare reform. Free copies may be downloaded from:

**http://www.ssw.umich.edu/poverty/pubs.html**

or contact Kristin Seefeldt at (734) 998-8514 or kseef@umich.edu for hard copies of these and other reports mentioned in the document.

**General Welfare Reform**:

*Welfare Reform Policy From Nixon to Clinton: What Role for Social Science?* Sheldon Danziger, 1999.

*Child Poverty, The Labor Market and the Welfare State in the Industrialized Counties.* Giovanni Andrea Cornia and Sheldon Danziger, 1997

**Welfare Recipients**

*Work, Income, and Material Hardship After Welfare Reform*. Sandra Danziger, Mary Corcoran, Sheldon Danziger, and Colleen Heflin, 1999.

*Barriers to the Employment of Welfare Recipients.* Sandra Danziger, Mary Corcoran, Sheldon Danziger, Colleen Heflin, Ariel Kalil, Judith Levine, Daniel Rosen, Kristin Seefeldt, Kristine Siefert, and Richard Tolman, Revised, February, 2000.

*Welfare Reform, Substance Use, and Mental Health.* Rukmalie Jayakody, Sheldon Danziger, and Harold Pollack, Revised 1999.

*Getting Jobs, Keeping Jobs, and Earning a Living Wage: Can Welfare Reform Work?* Ariel Kalil, Mary Corcoran, Sandra Danziger, Richard Tolman, Kristin Seefeldt, and Yunju Nam, 1998.

**Welfare Reform Implementation and Policies**

*What FIA Directors Have to Say about Welfare Reform*. Kristin Seefeldt, Sandra Danziger, Nathaniel Anderson, 1999.

*What Contractors Have to Say about the Work First Program*. Kristin Seefeldt, Sandra Danziger, Nathaniel Anderson, 1999.

*Moving Toward a Vision of Family Independence: Local Managers' Views of Michigan's Welfare Reforms.* Kristin Seefeldt, Jodi Sandfort, Sandra Danziger.

**Welfare Reform and Employers**

*Employer Demand for Welfare Recipients and the Business Cycle: Evidence from Recent Employer Surveys*. Harry Holzer, 1998.

*Will Employers Hire Welfare Recipients: Recent Survey Evidence from Michigan*. Harry Holzer. 1998.