

**SUCCESSFUL REENTRY INTO THE WORKPLACE: A CASE STUDY OF THE  
EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE WELFARE RECIPIENTS PARTICIPATING IN  
TWO JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS**

A Dissertation

by

JO B. TUCKER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2005

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

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## ABSTRACT

Successful Reentry into the Workplace: A Case Study of the Experiences of Female Welfare Recipients Participating in Two Job Training Programs. (December 2005)

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This case study investigated eight welfare recipients and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the job training programs in which they participated in an effort to understand the domains in which welfare-reliant individuals exhibit a commitment to work. Specific issues addressed by this qualitative study included the individuals' perceptions of (1) the program effects on escaping poverty and becoming self-sufficient; (2) the impact of the program focus on the participants' achievement and empowerment; (3) employment and the prospects of getting off welfare, both before and after program completion; and (4) recommendations for improvement in designing such programs. It is clear that all participants in the study found resolution to the tensions in their lives through the programs. Life skills training was critical in enhancing the self-esteem of the participants, providing them the tools necessary to overcome their fear of independence and allowing them to experience their own definition of success. Each participant in the study wished for more time in the program. Most participants felt the program was a gift and verbalized the value of supportive services on-site.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Whenever Americans are polled about social welfare policies, two consistent themes emerge. Two-thirds of those surveyed say they support policies that help “the poor” who cannot help themselves – especially the elderly and the disabled. And about two-thirds say that they do not support “welfare.” Americans agree that government should lend a hand to those who cannot provide adequately for themselves – but only if it can do so without discouraging work and promoting dependence. (Berlin, 2003)

For over 30 years, there has been a tug-of-war between those trying to protect children and those who believe receiving welfare benefits is worse for families than is poverty (Berlin, 2003). In the early 1990s, many began to believe that welfare was discouraging work and marriage, and with surging welfare rolls, politicians became alarmed (Berlin, 2003). With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996, an attempt was made by then President Bill Clinton to salve the wounds of both sides: the Act discouraged out-of-wedlock childbearing, encouraged marriage and sustaining two-parent families, and emphasized a “work-first” strategy to move individuals from welfare to work (P. L. 104-193).

With PRWORA, states were given block grants and were given much flexibility in designing and implementing welfare programs, although there were a few very strict requirements with no latitude (Greenberg & Savner, 1996). Most states emphasized job search and employment (so-called work-first programs) and deemphasized education

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The style and format of this dissertation follow that of the *Human Resource Development Quarterly*.

and training (so-called human-capital development programs). They quickly found that although caseloads were reduced remarkably, those leaving the welfare rolls were making no financial gains (Berlin, 2003).

While it is tempting to infer that welfare reform explains the trend of reduced caseloads, “welfare leavers,” we must be aware that other changes have taken place during the same period that could have also contributed to the observed outcomes (Karoly, 2001). The Earned Income Tax Credit, increases in the minimum wage, and a robust economic expansion likely explain at least some of the outcomes, rather than welfare reform alone (Karoly, 2001). Even with the decline in the number of Americans on cash assistance, many people have not made a successful transition from welfare to work. Some long-term recipients have been unable to benefit from welfare-to-work programs, even with the help of a very strong economy (Brown, 2001). Others are “cyclers,” those who are on and off welfare, unable to maintain steady employment. Some welfare-to-work programs attempt to identify and ameliorate the difficulties faced by these individuals (Brown, 2001). Although much of the *policy* focus of recent years has been on long-term welfare recipients, it may be that cyclers are the key group on which to focus if we are to achieve true success in welfare reform (Bauman, 2000).

Though we have learned much about what has happened to welfare recipients, we hear very few of their own words, almost nothing of their thoughts, how they judge life and struggle for meaning (Munger, 2002). Those who were previously dependent on welfare realize that work not only has its economic rewards, but personal awards as well. When people within the welfare system feel their claims to the attention of others lie

solely in their problems, in the fact of their neediness, inequality intrudes. In order to earn respect, they must not be weak and must not be needy (Sennett, 2001).

In spite of the drumbeat of rejection, the United States is, to a considerable degree, a welfare state. “Moreover, a welfare ideology is so deeply woven into the institutional, economic, intellectual, and political fabric of the United States that even the most individualistically minded cannot extract it” (Levine, 2001, p. 734). Damning the welfare state is a staple in American politics, and not only within one political party. Studies of welfare, poverty, and low-wage employment that rely on the perspectives of those in poverty have an important role to play in creating a more effective welfare reform policy debate. “The voices of those who are struggling at the margins remind us that work and prospects for work shape perceptions and interpretations, and as a consequence, identities and choices for economic survival” (Munger, 2001, p. 20). The power of firsthand interpretation to make intelligible to others the experience of poverty and the actions of those who live within it cannot be underestimated (Munger, 2001).

### **Basis of the Study**

*Statement of the Problem.* Federal and state policymakers continue to look for new and better ways to increase the employment of welfare recipients. The challenge faced by educators and policy-makers is how to design such programs to best achieve the goal of welfare reform: fostering adults’ long-term economic self-sufficiency. Some programs are strongly employment-focused, while others emphasize basic education and soft skills (Midgley, 2001; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). The espoused goal of all programs is to foster the self-sufficiency of welfare

recipients through increased employment and decreased welfare receipt (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2002); however, the debate rages on as to how best to move individuals from welfare to work. Some research has been conducted examining “best practices” (United States General Accounting Office, 2002; Angel & Harney, 1997; Boushey, 2002; Stevens, 2000; Morgen, 2001; Kramer, 1998), but more research is needed to determine which strategies are most effective. Most of the research that has been conducted has focused mainly on the perspectives of policy-makers and educators. Very little research has focused on the participants themselves.

Research into key features of self-sufficiency programs and the perceptions of program participants will begin to establish some best practices from which other programs may draw (Kingfisher, 2001). It is critical to listen to the voices of the participants themselves in order to develop positive programs that increase participation of welfare recipients, programs that impact welfare dependency, produce larger gains in employment and earnings, and benefit the families and households of participants. Since welfare recipients are required to reenter the job market, it is imperative to discover what approach works best to motivate these individuals to learn and improve skills, to see themselves as successful and confident with job retention and self-sufficiency as the goal. Welfare reform can become a ladder of opportunity for welfare recipients, providing a living income and benefits such as health insurance if research can help discern which program elements give power, strength and competence to those seeking job reentry and sustainability (Edelman, 2002).

***Purpose of the Study.*** The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of welfare recipients, and the effectiveness, as perceived by the participants, of two different types of job-training programs in order to attempt to determine what are the perceived motivators that contribute to the completion of the program and job retention. The two programs in this study are categorized by the approach to moving women from welfare to work. One program focuses on soft skills, team-building, and self-confidence, along with mentoring and traditional occupational training. The second program utilizes little basic and soft skills training; the focus is on job training for a non-traditional occupation.

***Significance of the Study.*** While current efforts to promote the transition from welfare to work are promising, they are in their infancy and continued effort is needed to develop effective program strategies, especially options that are not tied directly to the welfare office (Cancian, Haveman, Meyer & Wolfe, 2001). States are required to serve all welfare recipients, those with self-perceived barriers to work and those with recognized barriers to work. Since state programs are only beginning to address the complex set of personal and family-centered issues, or those issues deriving from barriers such as extremely low skill levels, substance abuse, or family violence, the pool from which to draw “best practices” is relatively small (Kramer, 1998). Understanding the domains where welfare-reliant individuals exhibit commitment to work may help policy makers, trainers, program administrators, and employers design and implement interventions that enhance chances of success for these individuals in the formal, paid workforce (Monroe & Tiller, 2001).

The approach of finding “what works” rather than what impedes the transition into the workplace will go a long way in helping these individuals become economically self-sufficient for the long term. Welfare-to-work program administrators can be alert to motivators for successful reentry into the workplace, and can design programs that address interventions perceived by the participants to increase their employability and success on the job. This study will contribute to the on-going dialogue about welfare, self-sufficiency, and poverty. This study will examine how the availability of supportive services and other program elements affect the perceived well-being of the participants and their subsequent participation in the job training programs and labor market activities.

Establishment economists believe that in time, wages will rise along with productivity, jobs will be ensured, corporate strategies will include long-term investments in improving skills of individuals, poverty will be decreased and individuals will be empowered. In the meantime, wages are stagnant and inequality continues to grow. “The choice, then, is between an increasingly unequal society – more poverty with its attendant ills (crime, suffering, urban decay, and impoverished urban underclass) and policies that improve the returns from labor. The stakes for our country are very high” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p. 13).

***Research Questions.*** The research presented attempts to set the experience of program participants in a broader context than that shown in previous research. In so doing, it addresses the following questions:

1. What were the effects of the program on escaping poverty and becoming self-sufficient as identified by female welfare recipients completing a job training program?
2. What was the impact of the program focus on the perceived achievement and empowerment of welfare recipients completing a job training program?
3. At the beginning of the program, how did welfare recipients completing a job training program view employment and the prospects of getting off welfare, and how did their attitudes change after completing the program?
4. What insights or recommendations for improvement in designing welfare-to-work programs were identified by welfare recipients completing a job training program?

***Operational Definitions.*** The following definitions will assist the reader throughout this study:

**Achievement:** Completing a welfare-to-work program and securing employment.

**Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC):** Non-contributory federal-state program, funded through general revenues (i.e., at taxpayers' expense) (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001) intended to provided a minimal income to poor families with children deprived of parental support or care because their father or mother is absent from the home continuously, is incapacitated, is deceased, or is unemployed (Wickizer, Campbell, Krupski & Stark, 2000).

Family Support: Helping networks of primary groups who assist participants with housing, providing general care, material and emotional support, and encouragement for participants and their children (Monroe & Tiller, 2001).

Poverty: Money income before taxes not including noncash benefits that is less than the threshold set by the U.S. Census Bureau; varies by family size and composition (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

Self-Sufficiency: The state in which a family is economically self-supporting based on income derived from employment (Morgen, 2001).

Successful Reentry into the Workplace: Leaving welfare, entering the workplace, and earning a wage that leads to self-sufficiency (Texas Workforce Commission, 2002).

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): A federally-funded block-grant program requiring that all adult recipients work or perform community service, and placing limitations on the amounts and duration of welfare payments, with a goal of welfare recipients achieving and sustaining employment at the level necessary to provide adequate economic support for themselves and their families (Wickizer, et al., 2000).

Welfare-to-Work Program: A highly-structured training program designed to provide skills necessary to assist individuals in leaving public assistance and gaining employment, moving in a planful way toward a job goal (Lent, 2001).

***Assumptions.*** The assumptions below are made in reference to this study:

1. The participants interviewed will understand the scope of the study and the interview questions asked, will be competent in self-reporting, and will respond objectively and honestly.

2. Interpretation of the data collected accurately reflects the intent of the participant.

***Limitations.*** The limitations to this study are:

1. The study is limited to a selected number of welfare recipients participating in two job training programs.
2. The study is limited to the information acquired from a literature review and interview questions.

***Contents of the Dissertation.*** The dissertation is divided into five major units or chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction, a statement of the problem, a need for the study, specific objectives, limitations and assumptions, and a definition of terms. Chapter II contains a review of the literature. The methodology and procedures followed are found in Chapter III. Chapter IV contains the analysis and comparisons of the data collected in the study. Chapter V contains the researcher's summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

“Throughout history there has been a dynamic relationship between self-reliance on the one hand and societal responsibility for individuals on the other” (Macarov, 1993, p. 131). From the ancient Greeks who held that every man was the architect of his own fortune, to the mediaeval Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, who suggested that the highest degree of charity consists of making someone self-sufficient, and to the United States government’s efforts to reduce spending on social welfare programs, a message has been sent to the public that the moral and functional duty of all citizens is to work in order to support themselves and their families (Macarov, 1993; Daugherty & Barber, 2001). Bill Clinton, as a presidential candidate in 1992, noted that the government has “failed us” and that one of its worst failures has been welfare. He stated, “I have a plan to end welfare as we know it – to break the cycle of dependence. We’ll provide education, job training, and child care, but then those who are able to work must go to work...It’s time to make welfare what it should be – a second chance, not a way of life” (Cabe, 2002, p. 1).

Americans are more than eager for a revamped welfare system. Bane (1997) notes that “the public, rightly, wanted welfare reform that expected work and parental responsibility” (p. 1). However, the public’s perception of the typical welfare recipient was truly atypical. Americans viewed the welfare recipient as a young, unwed mother, bearing more and more children to increase her monthly assistance, and who was

probably a drug addict who refused to work (Cabe, 2002). Another perception was that welfare recipients were simply “lazy scam artists, people who found a way to rip off the government – and taxpayer dollars” (Cabe, 2002, p. 3). Without the necessary resources (i.e. job training, career development, child care) it appears impossible that welfare-reliant individuals could be anything else. While government officials and lay persons debate and criticize welfare reform, they are not necessarily the ones struggling to survive in a poverty-stricken community (Winston, 1996). In light of this fact, it seems only appropriate to profile "real" welfare recipients, to understand the attitude of those outside the welfare system, and to familiarize oneself with both the history of welfare and the attempts at welfare reform.

***Who Is the Welfare-Reliant Individual?*** The percentage of the U. S. population on welfare since the 1960s has ranged from just under two percent to over five percent, with the peaks at 1975 and 1995 (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). The typical welfare recipient is enrolled in Medicaid, is 31.3 years old, a United States citizen, and is head of household with two children. The adult recipient is single and female (10% are male), and not only receives TANF benefits, but food stamp assistance as well. Thirty-nine percent of welfare-reliant individuals are African-American, with white following at 30%. Hispanics comprise 26% of the families, Native Americans make up 1.3%, and 2.1% are Asian (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

The typical welfare recipient does not have a high school education. This individual may have numerous barriers to employment, including mental health issues,

lack of affordable, quality child care, lack of transportation, or serious health issues with children. A lack of soft skills and job experience are also barriers to economic success the typical welfare recipient will experience. The typical welfare recipient has no health insurance, a high family attachment, and little locus of control (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997).

As the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2003) indicates, thirty-seven percent of families receive welfare assistance for children only. Seven percent of adults receiving assistance are teenagers. Thirteen percent of teen recipients are parents. A quarter of TANF recipient adults have earned income. Their average monthly earned income averages \$668. Seven percent of adult recipients have unearned income averaging about \$315 per month. Three percent of recipient children have unearned income of an average \$176 monthly. One in ten TANF families receives child support in an average monthly amount of \$179. Twelve percent of TANF families have some cash resources (e.g., cash on hand, bank accounts, or certificates of deposit) with an average amount of \$244. Such family cash resources are defined by the State for determining eligibility for and/or amount of benefits (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

Of TANF families, 99% receive cash and cash equivalent assistance, with an average monthly amount of \$351. Monthly cash payments to TANF families average \$288 for one child, \$362 for two children, \$423 for three children, and \$519 for four children or more (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

Taking into consideration the earned and unearned income received by TANF families still leaves the families in deep poverty. As the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2004) Federal Register delineates in Table 1, the typical welfare recipient, as described above, still finds himself/herself below the poverty level.

Of welfare recipients who go to work, the most successful group will be the most educated with the higher skills levels (Martinson, 2000). Low basic skills literacy and low math scores are typical in the welfare-reliant individual.

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**Table 1. 2004 HHS Poverty Guidelines**

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<i>Size of Family Unit</i>	<i>48 Contiguous States and D. C.</i>	<i>Alaska</i>	<i>Hawaii</i>
1	\$ 9,310	\$11,630	\$10,700
2	12,490	15,610	14,360
3	15,670	19,590	18,020
4	18,850	23,570	21,680
5	22,030	27,550	25,340
6	25,210	31,530	29,000
7	28,390	35,510	32,660
8	31,570	39,490	36,320
For each additional person, add	3,180	3,980	3,660

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An individual with a high school diploma as opposed to a GED is the most successful in sustaining employment, along with those who have a recent work history (Martinson,

2000). Additionally, when the typical welfare participant works, the lack of basic and soft skills hinders success, and therefore, motivation.

The typical welfare recipient is on welfare for a relatively short period of time but most remain quite poor. This may account for their children being more likely to have welfare spells when they are older than do children whose parents did not experience welfare (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). There is a higher likelihood of welfare receipt among women with welfare backgrounds; although there is a relationship between intergenerational welfare, there is no solid evidence that welfare causes welfare dependence in the next generation. “What is probably happening is that the powerful effects of poverty and single parenthood are making it more likely that daughters growing up in these conditions will be poor themselves” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p. 47).

***Blaming the Victim.*** “Welfare policy ignores the lives and the actual experiences of the poor. In short, welfare programs are more interested in blaming the victim than in disturbing labor markets or redistributing income” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p. 5). “Poverty has been a fairly consistent part of the contemporary political landscape and a focus of national attention since Michael Harrington and Oscar Lewis popularized and gave intellectual respectability to the term in the 1960s” (Caputo, 1997, p. 5).

Brought to public consciousness and acted on in times of crises, our concern for those in poverty remains an unresolved issue in society (Daugherty & Barber, 2001). Americans often hold people accountable for their socioeconomic condition, particularly

if it is deemed one has willfully contributed to one's situation. "Lack of employment or lack of ability to live on the fruits of employment are not considered legitimate needy circumstances, except in times of widespread social distress..." (Daugherty & Barber, 2001, p. 666). Handler and Hasenfeld (1991) contend that in America's past, providing welfare has been a moral issue, based on the assumption that the poor are not self-sufficient and do not participate fully in society.

Many have long claimed that social welfare programs harm economic development. It is alleged that these programs depress work incentives, divert scarce investment resources to "unproductive" social services and create a large underclass of dependent individuals (Midgley, 2001). Others note that economic events, such as changes in household composition, disability status, and labor market supply cause entrance to poverty (McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2003), and it is the duty of society to respond to the needs of those who have entered poverty. Still others suggest that the lack of literacy and skills, along with declining educational levels of Americans are the bases for the unemployment of individuals, and that public schools are to blame because of the rising tide of mediocrity within the public school system (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Former President Jimmy Carter once stated that "the welfare system is anti-work, anti-family, inequitable in its treatment of the poor and wasteful of the taxpayers' dollars" (as cited by Freeman, 1987, p. 12).

Over the years, trends of "victim blaming," increased single-parent, female-headed households due to divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing, and the success of rehabilitation efforts promoting the development of work capabilities among the

mentally and physically disabled have influenced American social policy theorists to espouse that personal moral failure and the policies of the welfare system cause poverty and dependency. These theorists also suggest that the number of truly deserving poor is inordinately lower than the current welfare rates suggest, and reducing welfare benefits in order to force those who are able to work to do so is most effective (Daugherty & Barber, 2001). Discourse includes the belief that some welfare-reliant adults resist efforts to move them into the formal workforce. Some employers call this problem a lack of “willingness to work” or absence of a work ethic, described as responsibility, dependability, pride in a job, loyalty to an employer, and commitment to work (Monroe & Tiller, 2001). The welfare-reliant population is stereotyped as uniformly deficient in its work ethic. Such stereotyping is the basis of the stigma radically changing the way individuals view themselves and are viewed as a person.

Research shows that locus of control has a considerable impact on the typical welfare-reliant individual. Such individuals often feel they have no control over their lives and expect external motivators to assist them along the way (Martinson, 2000). Vaughan (2003) notes that individuals often rely on external assessment and reward. Vaughan (2003) suggests that we are not only biological beings that respond to external stimuli, but also rational and spiritual beings who use our minds, reason, intellect, and emotions to survive. The rational side of us looks at theory, co-operation, innovation, learning and intrinsic motivation. As Vaughan (2003) states, the work of McGregor, Herzberg et al, and Maslow show that the humanistic approach, allowing an employee to be the primary judge of their own performance and to perform to his/her best. With a

lack of job experience, low self-esteem, and other barriers to work, the typical welfare participant has difficulty judging his/her own performance. As Vaughan (2003) suggests, this inability to judge one's own performance robs individuals of a sense of responsibility for their own work performance and reduces the quality of both process and output. Hence, welfare-reliant individuals often cycle on and off welfare as they find it difficult to maintain employment.

“Some argue that even under the best of circumstances, the economy cannot provide enough jobs, and therefore what is called for is a basic citizens' income regardless of work effort; others object to proposals because they are universal rather than targeted on those most in need; others argue that the low-wage labor market is inherently degrading and discriminatory” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p. 14).

Throughout the century, it has been tempting to classify the poor as functionally and morally different from mainstream Americans. Distorted images of the poor help to justify society's actions toward them, which play out into public policy decisions (Monroe & Tiller, 2001). The argument is that a successful and humane social welfare policy must recognize the pathway to poverty, the challenges of poverty, and must respond in an effective and efficient manner to assist welfare-reliant individuals in moving from welfare to work and to be as economically secure as possible in today's economically insecure society. In order to work toward a social welfare policy that responds appropriately to poverty and the individuals in poverty, we must understand the history of public assistance.

### **Public Assistance: The Beginnings**

Because that many valiant beggars, as long as they may live of begging, do refuse to labor, giving themselves to idleness and vice, and sometimes to theft and other abominations; none upon said pain of imprisonment, shall under the color of pits or alms, give anything to such, which may labor, or presume to favor them towards their desires, so that thereby they may be compelled to labor for their necessary living (Ordinance of Laborers, 1349).

The above Ordinance, followed in 1351 by the Statute of Laborers, was legislated by King Edward III of England in the aftermath of the Black Death and unstable economic conditions (Tuchman, 1978). At the time, begging was widespread and was an accepted form of behavior. The purpose of the ordinance was to force beggars to seek work by preventing the giving of alms, or, in other words, cutting off welfare.

Begging eventually became a social problem. Employed labor was replacing serfdom, and during periods of unemployment, the unemployed migrated to towns looking for work; these individuals were blamed for crime. Not only were the landlords losing control over their labor, but they began to worry over their safety and property. The Statute of Laborers was precipitated by the acute labor shortage caused by the Black Death and a period of famine. “The Statute sought to restrict movement, require work, and fix wages; thus, the first statute dealing with ‘social security’ was not about poverty and destitution, but about forcing individuals to seek work rather than welfare” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p. 21).

The sick, feeble, and lame were considered “worthy” poor and were outside the labor market. The public gathered alms for these individuals so they would not have to beg. Children caught begging were apprenticed; the able-bodied were required to work.

These provisions were codified into the Elizabethan Poor Law (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997; Tuchman, 1978).

American social welfare policy traces its roots back to the Elizabethan Poor Laws of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Gowdy & Perlmutter, 1993). By the mid-seventeenth century, several colonies had enacted poor laws patterned after the English legislation. These laws established the first work incentive programs with apprenticeships, job placement (or imprisonment) for the “able-bodied,” and home care for the ill and incapacitated. It was believed that everyone could work his or her way out of poverty and the need for public aid since America had such a great demand for labor (Gowdy & Pearlmuter, 1993). “The English Poor Law Report of 1834 asserted that poor relief in general was a bad thing, for if people found that they could live without working they would do so and would be ‘pauperized’”(Levine, 2001, p. 734), a moral measure noting the individuals would lose their character and self-respect. As a result of the “principles of ’34,” the Poor Law Commissioners of 1834 declared unlawful all relief whatever to able-bodied persons or to their families other than in well-regulated workhouses, an assumption that poverty was simply unwillingness to work, that charity created pauperism, not the reverse (Levine, 2001).

“These principles had greater force in the United States, both as rhetoric and reality, than they did in their country of origin” (Levine, 2001, p. 734). At first, the responses to poverty included auctioning off the poor, placing the poor in private homes at public expense, outdoor relief, and the poorhouse (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). Communities responded to the needs of friends and neighbors, but were not generous to

strangers. “Strangers were asked to post bond as a condition of settling. Those who were thought likely to become dependent were told to leave; if they returned, they were severely punished” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p. 22).

There was a clear distinction between those who were able-bodied and those who were unable to care for themselves. Religion, keeping taxes low, and the need for labor meant that those who could work, should work (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). It was generally believed that God intended for people who were idle to starve; there was a clear difference between a pauper and being poor. Being a pauper was a moral issue; those who were idle, yet able to work, “were viewed as criminals, as threats to themselves as well as the community” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p. 22). But the line between who were paupers and who were the poor soon became foggy. Volunteer Charity Organization Societies took it upon themselves to specialize in poverty and charity. They collected enormous amounts of data on the poor and those who sought charity, and as they did so, their rigid principles began to weaken (Levine, 2001). They found that the statistics showed some three-quarters of poverty in the United States was caused by “misfortune” and only about one-quarter by “misconduct.” This reassessment, along with publications by Jane Addams and Henry Demerest Lloyd, led to the “quest for social justice” (Levine, 2001).

Reform in the United States consisted of trying to clear away barriers so that everyone could enjoy the fruits of labor. States began to categorize the poor; those who were morally blameless (the blind, the deaf and mute, the insane) were provided separate institutions (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). Children were placed in orphanages. Indigent

veterans of the Civil War were morally excused from work. Since mothers and their children were not differentiated from the general mass of the poor; they had to work and if they could not support their families, the children were placed in orphanages. Not only did these women carry the stigma of the pauper, but they were also criticized for not staying home and taking care of their children. The double stigma of being poor and leaving their children placed these women in a no-win situation. They were all but outcasts. Finally, the public began to consider that poverty was the problem with the children, and the White House endorsed this idea (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). A “mother’s pension” was considered to be the answer. Tiny beginnings in 1911 included aid to widows with small children, the roots of the Aid to Dependent Children program.

*Aid to Dependent Children.* Title IV of the 1935 Social Security Act established the Aid to Dependent Children program. It began with children of women who were widowed. Later, it was expanded to embrace children of mothers who were divorced, deserted, or never married. Those without a “breadwinner” were provided support (Gowdy & Pearlmutter, 1993). Support was considered temporary and was to be used for the care of children, not to meet the needs of the mother. Later, parents caring for the dependent children were also covered and the program was renamed the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. The previous practice of exclusion collapsed. This program was the nation’s principal safety net for poor families (Gowdy & Pearlmutter, 1993).

The program was supplemented by food stamp vouchers, housing assistance, and medical treatments. The cost of the AFDC program, including food stamp assistance but

excluding medical treatment and housing, increased from \$3 billion in 1952 to \$55 billion in 1978 (Midgley, 2001). In 1965, approximately 400,000 people were served by food stamps; by early 1990, 26 million people were receiving food stamps (Midgley, 2001). The AFDC caseload increased from 2.3 million in 1950 to 14.2 million in 1994. During the '50s and '60s, the rationale for assistance programs was that of advocating government intervention to provide social services to all citizens who could not afford but had a right to an adequate income, health care, education, and housing (Midgley, 2001). As a result of the expansion of various programs, federal government expenses for welfare were greatly increased, and such drastic change could not occur without creating a reaction (Levine, 2001). "When welfare rolls and costs rise – or when the electorate *thinks* they are rising – welfare comes under attack. It's not the amount of money that is being spent, it's what the money is being spent for" (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p.8). It is the specter of the welfare recipient. Welfare is no longer there to assist single mothers and their children during a bad period, but instead encourages and perpetuates dependency and becomes a way of life (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). When mothers began entering the workforce in large numbers – both middle class and working class – and utilized child care instead of acting as stay-at-home moms, when they had to pay for the child care and health care without support from the government, when they were required to pay taxes, resentment was fueled (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997).

During the '50s and '60s, dramatic changes occurred in the AFDC program. With the inclusion of poor single mothers, the divorced, separated or never married, and those of color and their children, the welfare rolls increased steadily. Political elites

became more responsive to antipoverty measures; with welfare rights activists and War on Poverty lawyers forcing open the gates, welfare became a “right” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). Liberals and conservatives began a battle over entitlements and rights, over responsibilities and rights of the social contract. Finally, the liberals changed their stance and began to admit that AFDC mothers should be expected to work (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997).

*Opposition to Welfare.* Opposition to welfare began in the early 1970s with high unemployment and rampant inflation, and continued through the 1980s. Caputo (1997) notes that the Nixon administration vainly sought support for its Family Assistance Program, but not until the 1980s did poverty and use of public assistance programs come together in the form of study findings from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). Findings from this study showed that there was no evidence that initial attitudes regarding achievement motivation, sense of personal efficacy, or orientation toward the future affected subsequent economic success. Further, changes in wage income often accompanied continuous labor force participation. Changes in family composition accounted the most for variations in income (Caputo, 1997). Separation and/or divorce drove women into poverty, whereas marriage enabled them to escape. Between 1969 and 1978, the study found that the majority of the population (74.8%) received no welfare income; however, of the 25.2% who did, about half received welfare for only one or two of the ten years (Caputo, 1997).

From information in the same study, Duncan (1984) noted that the welfare system has touched a surprisingly large fraction of American society. One of every four

individuals between 1969 and 1978 lived in a household that received income from one of the major welfare programs at least once over that period. Duncan (1984) also concluded that the welfare system did not foster dependence. The greater share of recipients did not come to rely on welfare as a means of support for the future. Goodwin (as cited in Caputo, 1997) found in his research that as individuals fail to achieve economic independence through work, their expectations of achieving such independence are lowered, in turn lessening their pursuit of employed work. Goodwin also suggested the observed apathy among welfare households headed only by mothers emerged from the inability of these persons to locate jobs (as cited in Caputo, 1997).

During the Reagan years, conservatives became increasingly concerned over the perceived connection between welfare and the lack of work ethic. It was during that period that the idea was popularized that welfare induced people to quit work and to break up homes. The very idea of an entitlement was seen as a corrupting influence on recipients; citizens have *responsibilities*, not *entitlements* (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997).

***Changes in Policy.*** Following a twenty-year assault on welfare by conservatives, Congress passed the Family Support Act in 1988. This Act altered the 50-year AFDC program, focusing on reform of poor mothers by mandating employment or basic education and job training for welfare recipients (Morgen, 2001). This policy shift intensified with the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which introduced self-sufficiency as a major goal of welfare reform (P.L. 104-193). This act ended the federal guarantee of cash assistance to low-income families and replaced the AFDC program with the

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Throughout the past 69 years, the rules and philosophy of the social policy as it relates to welfare have changed significantly. Funding for block grants for TANF programs totaled \$16.5 billion in fiscal 2002 (Fagnoni, 2002).

The PRWORA gives states a fixed block grant, places a five-year lifetime limit on the receipt of federal welfare benefits, and requires most recipients of welfare benefits to go to work within two years of entering the program (Greenberg & Savner, 1996). The PRWORA changed welfare to a work-based program, reflecting a belief that welfare should be a temporary support until families find employment. Within the framework of the act, states must require adult recipients to work or perform community service; mothers who are under the age of 18 years will not be funded (Stevens, 2000). No state is allowed to pay extra for additional children, and may not support women who fail to cooperate with legal efforts to establish paternity. There are no cash payments for mothers who remain unemployed after two years, and no provisions to help families for more than five years over a lifetime (Stevens, 2000).

PRWORA outlines the major themes of the new legislation as follows:

- The “entitlement status” of welfare was ended when the program was folded into block grants to the states. States will be free to manage welfare with no intrusion from the federal government. States can move funds from one program to another, reducing the amount spent on welfare programs. States are free to determine which families receive assistance, how much, and under what circumstances. There is no longer a guarantee of aid.

- There are now time limits on receipt of welfare and work requirements have been established. The new legislation sets a two-year time limit for participating in work activities; in the first year, twenty-five percent of the states' caseload must participate in work activities. This number increases to 50% by FY 2002. There is a cumulative lifetime five-year limit on welfare.
- A cluster of provisions deal with "family values." Aid cannot be provided to children who are conceived while the mother is on welfare or to minor parents unless they are attending school and living at home. Aid will not be provided to families if they do not cooperate in the establishment of paternity and obtaining child support. Aid may be denied to mothers under eighteen years old.
- Aid is denied to immigrants, both legal and illegal. Supplemental security income and food stamps end for non-citizens now receiving benefits. Unless a state opts out, people convicted of drug felonies cannot receive assistance.

***Work First, Education Second.*** Welfare-to-work programs are intended to resolve the tension between helping children and demanding parental responsibility by changing the culture of the welfare system from eligibility determination to helping families become economically self-sufficient (Blank & Blum, 1997). This shift in policy gives bonuses to states that reduce welfare caseloads, and penalizes those states that fail to move set percentages of recipients into employment (Page & Lerner, 1997).

It used to be thought that mothers should stay at home and take care of their children. Welfare was designed so that poor mothers could do the same; but times have changed. Today, the argument is that since more women are now in the paid labor force,

which includes mothers of young children, welfare-reliant mothers can no longer expect to stay at home and take care of their children (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). Welfare recipients must now move from welfare to work. It is interesting to note that as is customary in American politics, the current reforms designed to enforce work by limiting welfare are being hailed as new, when in fact they are painfully old. These reforms perpetuate beliefs as to the cause of poverty and the remedies date back almost 650 years. Poor mothers always were required to work, and welfare policies are heavily laden with moral judgments (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997).

Innovative welfare-to-work programs have been designed by states under the provisions of PRWORA in an effort to encourage applicants to work, increase personal responsibility, and restrict eligibility for welfare assistance. “Work First” strategies include mixing funding sources and coordinating with service deliverers, including parallel public agencies and other providers (Kramer, 1998). With the funding available, states must make choices on how best to accommodate this population and assist in sustained employment. Zidan (2001) suggests that we should feel compelled to “keep in mind that the workforce discussed here is not merely an abstract concept or simply a form of capital or a resource to be used for the planned and targeted ends of countries and corporations. This labor force comprises individual human beings who have their own goals, desires, and aspirations” (p. 442).

TANF block grants expired in October 2002. However, President George Bush recently announced his welfare reform agenda which included continuing the block grants through 2007 (White House News Release, 2002). The President’s objectives

include increasing the required number of work hours for welfare recipients to 40 hours per week, 24 of which are to be “direct” work activities, leaving 16 hours for counseling, rehabilitation, work-related education, training, or job-readiness assistance. The percentage of clients that must hold jobs has been increased to 70% from 50% in the earlier legislation (White House News Release, 2002). Tighter limits and tough sanctions for welfare recipients demand that welfare-to-work programs make the most of the opportunity to enable participants to successfully reenter the job market (Piven & Sampson, 2001).

*Education First, Work Second.* The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 allows for Welfare-to-Work or Self-Sufficiency Grants, administered by the U. S. Department of Labor (generally through the state) and provides approximately \$3 billion per year to place welfare recipients into jobs. Welfare-to-Work is an intensive program of close contact between a client and those operating the program, and includes training and job placement. The funds can be used for a variety of job related activities, including training in soft skills, basic skills, vocational skills, and supportive services such as child care and transportation (Kramer, 1998). It is clear that there is a decline in basic reading and math skills; academic skills have not kept pace with job requirements (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997).

The economic impact of education and job training for welfare-reliant individuals cannot be underestimated. In an article on the human resource development and economic development, Zidan (2001) states that “there is general agreement that human capital formation is one of the critical causes of economic development.

*Human capital* is defined as the productive investments in humans, including their skills and health, that are the outcomes of education, health care, and on-the-job training” (p. 437). Zidan (2001) further suggests that “training is an integral part of the economic system, whether we refer to it as being part of the organizational microsystem or a national macrosystem” (p. 438).

No matter the ideology, everyone, including welfare recipients, agrees that in general, basic skills and educational credentials are critical for labor market success, particularly if individuals are to find higher quality jobs and experience substantial earning growth (Midgley, 2001). The American Psychological Association’s Task Force on Women, Poverty, and Public Assistance (1998) states that “Welfare is not the problem – poverty is the problem” (p. 1). Ending poverty and ensuring living wages and self-sufficiency for welfare recipients without continued government assistance has for years represented the espoused goal of welfare reform programs.

### **Welfare Reform**

Today we face challenges with welfare reform in regard to the conflicting paradigms of work-first and education and training, between personal responsibility for one’s economic condition and outside forces driving one’s economic status (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997). Several long-standing assumptions are behind today’s political consensus about what is wrong with welfare and what to do about it. “Dependency,” as used in the welfare context, is not about simply being poor or out of work; it is a problem of attitude, a moral failure to have the proper work ethic. It is a way of life (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997).

The assignment of moral fault is rarely unidimensional. People like us who fall on hard times have “bad luck” or “misfortune.” “Moral condemnation is reserved for those who are not only poor but different – in terms of race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, or who violate patriarchal norms” (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997, p. 9). The poverty of an elderly widow is different from the poverty of a young black mother. Welfare reform is directed at individual behavior rather than the environment; changing a mother will achieve self-sufficiency as opposed to changing the labor market or making arrangements institutionally that contribute to successful, independent lives (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997).

Some argue that lower welfare spending and lower taxes reinvigorate work incentives and promote a dynamic, prosperous economy (Midgley, 2001). Others suggest that welfare recipients must have help in balancing familial responsibilities so they can concentrate on, and maintain employment. Research shows that the most successful welfare-to-work programs include education and training, as well as other services (Martinson & Strawn, 2003; Melendez, Falcon & Bivens, 2003; United States Department of Labor, 2002; Boggs, 2001).

***The Well-Being of Welfare Recipients.*** In Bauman’s (2000) examination of welfare, work and well-being, he found that recent research has begun to cast doubt on the assumption that obtaining work or improving wages are desirable goals for welfare recipients and their families. Single parents and their families are not always better off in the labor force, according to Bauman (2000). Bauman (2000) cites an example of research by Lein and by Edin that showed that the material well-being of single mothers

does not increase when they are in the workforce, even when their income is higher.

“Mothers generally found it more difficult to make ends meet when they worked than when they collected welfare” (Danziger, Heflin, Corcoran, Oltmans & Wang, 2002, p. 671). Bauman (2000) cites Beverly’s research that provides additional evidence supporting the idea that hours of work directly decrease the well-being of single-mother families.

On the other hand, Bauman (2000) also found that poverty was greatest among those with the strongest attachment to the welfare system and among those with the weakest attachment to the labor force. Interestingly, controls for insurance status, complying with program rules, daycare, and other barriers showed no conclusive significance as mechanisms by which work creates hardship, which proves the point that there are other major forces at work (Bauman, 2000).

“The success of welfare reform depends in part on how efficiently programs move recipients from welfare to work and on whether those receiving welfare can keep jobs once they begin working” (Kalil, Schweingruber, & Seefeldt, 2001, p. 705).

Hershey and Pavette (1997) note that the challenge is not “putting welfare recipients to work,” but rather removal of barriers to work and the lack of technical and personal skills which causes the hold on a job to be tenuous. They further contend that jobs welfare recipients find generally do not last very long, and returns to welfare are common.

Herr (1996) states that welfare reform must take into consideration the people whose lives are affected by social policy; historically these individuals have had high

stakes in, and little power over, social policy. Herr asserts that “A poor person is not simply a rich person without money” (p. 7), but rather individuals whose prior experiences and learning related to social class have formed a context within which individuals try to access the world of work. Knowledge of how human capital works is as much a resource as is human capital itself; analyzing the enablers and motivators that help develop human capital and move individuals from welfare to work is critical to the success of welfare reform (Kingfisher, 2001).

***Barriers to Employment.*** Many, if not most, welfare recipients are considered “hard-to-employ” (Butler, 2002). The characteristics or barriers that can assist in predicting whether or not an individual will be successful in employment are difficult to define. Other working people face the same barriers but maintain employment. The complexity of the relationship between a barrier and employment is determined by factors such as “the severity and persistence of the barrier, the number of problems someone faces, as well as an individual’s counterbalancing strengths, motivations, and supports” (Butler, 2002).

Research conducted with both current and former welfare recipients found that 30 to 40 percent of welfare recipients had a serious mental health problem, primarily depression (Butler, 2002; Cummings & Davies, 1994; Stouffer & Jayakody, 1998; Downey & Coyne, 1990). Substance abuse, learning disabilities, and domestic violence are potential obstacles experienced by this population. Forty to 50% had less than a high school education. Limited work experience and low basic and math skills results also challenge employment (Sawhill, Weaver, Haskins & Kane, 2002). Seventy-eight

percent of welfare recipients had more than one barrier to employment; the more barriers, the less likely they were to become employed. Certain barriers tend to co-occur. A study by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2001) showed that 49% of the sample had severe to moderate depression and 32% had been victims of sexual abuse. Situational barriers such as housing instability or transportation access and caretaker responsibilities, and human capital barriers such as low basic skills or lack of a GED are also associated with a reduced likelihood of employment (Butler, 2002).

The severity and persistence of a condition are also critical factors in determining how a barrier will effect employment. Zedlewski (1999) found that welfare recipients experiencing either health or behavioral barriers to employment in conjunction with situational barriers are less likely to work. Only 3% of recipients with three or more barriers were working compared to 22% with one, and 50% with no barrier (Zedlewski, 1999).

Programs assisting welfare recipients to leave public assistance and gain employment are well-established throughout the United States. However, most of these programs are created and delivered by professionals of higher socioeconomic class backgrounds, but most participants are of lower social class status (Lent, 2001). This situation can create cross-class difficulties in the design and delivery of the programs. The change in the landscape of these services since the requirements for work have changed, a new contextual awareness and theory-based choices on the part of policy makers and service deliverers are critical (Lent, 2001). Herr (1996) reminds us that

social policy is mostly designed by those higher up in the class structure with agendas and assumptions that may reflect only a partial knowledge about the individuals being served.

***Motivators.*** For years, research has focused on the barriers to employment for welfare recipients. In this study, the focus will be on motivators, and will include a person-centered perspective. Having been mandated to enter job-search and/or training programs, participants in job training programs may be fearful of administrators' agendas, may hesitate to describe their needs, and may resist attempts of assistance (Lent, 2001). Welfare time limits increase the urgency of working with this population, and it can be difficult to identify barriers to employment. Individuals are not defined by simple characteristics. Employability depends on a variety of factors, not the least of which is an individual's own motivation.

### **Summary**

As has been shown in the review of the literature, throughout history Americans have remained divided and attitudes are forever changing as to what society requires of its members in supporting those in poverty. To date, although political rhetoric would argue otherwise, the cycle of dependence is not yet broken. Economic factors affect the success of any program, and welfare reform was implemented in the midst of the best economic expansion this country has had in years. As a result, jobs were available for many welfare-recipients, but the low wages kept those low-skilled individuals in poverty and job retention was problematic. Larger forces underlie poverty; research shows that improvement in basic skills, reading and math skills, soft skills, and training in

occupational skills will go a long way to increasing the income of those leaving welfare for work. The literature reiterates the barriers to education, but little research has been done to find what motivates welfare-reliant individuals to overcome those barriers, to complete training opportunities, and to retain jobs resulting from training. As the clock winds down toward time limits for receipt of government assistance, it is urgent that researchers utilize every tool at their disposal to define what these motivators are and what works to enhance them.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of welfare recipients, participating in two different types of job-training programs. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What were the effects of the program on escaping poverty and becoming self-sufficient as identified by female welfare recipients completing a job training program?
2. What was the impact of the program focus on the perceived achievement and empowerment of welfare recipients completing a job training program?
3. At the beginning of the program, how did welfare recipients completing a job training program view employment and the prospects of getting off welfare, and how did their attitudes change after completing the program?
4. What insights or recommendations for improvement in designing welfare-to-work programs were identified by welfare recipients completing a job training program?

This chapter will describe the methodology used in the study. The following sections include discussion on the pilot study, research design, sampling and selection criteria, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and reliability and validity.

#### **Overview**

***Pilot Study.*** A pilot study was conducted in the preliminary phase. The study consisted of interviews with three female participants in two job training programs.

Each was at least halfway through the training programs. Each was receiving government assistance. Two of the interviewees were attending a training program that provided numerous support services, such as transportation, child care, emergency stipends, clothing, and counseling. The program included technical training and placement into traditional clerical jobs in the healthcare industry. One interviewee was participating in a program with few support services, but with an outcome of a non-traditional job with high wages and expanded benefits.

The women in the study have been able to find their way around the barriers and begin pursuing a course that will put their lives on a track leading to each woman's perception of success. Among the emerging themes identified were that these women have begun to understand that they are "somebody," that they can make it on their own and support their families without the assistance of a significant other. They have begun to find an identity and self-respect, and see themselves as achievers. Support from their cohort and the bonding that takes place among the group is perceived as the backbone of the program.

The findings also demonstrate how these women, through the two job training programs, experienced a radical change in their view of themselves and in their futures and those of their children. These women were all eager to support their families and to be someone their children could depend on; through their program participation, they believe they have been given the opportunity to do so. All were looking forward to being placed in a job and utilizing their new skills. The study found that the individuals interviewed had already begun to view themselves as leaving the welfare system, yet

each believed it was necessary for the system to exist for women who find themselves in temporary situations of financial setbacks. With chins held high, the interviewees were proud of their opinions, felt they added something to the study, and wanted others to share their experience. The participants each saw themselves as successful, defined in their own terms as raising “good” kids, the ability to provide for their children, and in some cases, leaving the world a better place than it was when they entered it. The participants in the pilot study all perceived and verbalized their greatest motivators as being their children and the well-being of their children.

**Research Design.** Merriam (1998) states that “case studies, especially qualitative case studies, are prevalent throughout the field of education” (p. 26). Descriptive case studies can illustrate the complexities of a situation and show the influence on the issue of legislation, cessation of funding, and passage of time (Merriam, 1998). Dooley (2002) notes that “case study research is one method that excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue and can add strength to what is already known through previous research” (p. 335). Dooley (2002) further states that “the advantages of the case study method are its applicability to real life, contemporary, human situations and its public accessibility through written reports. Case study results...facilitate an understanding of complex real-life situations” (p. 344). The use of the qualitative case study research methodology in this study is necessary in order to understand the subjective interpretation of the participants’ experiences. In the qualitative paradigm, “the context and the meaning of that context to the people in it are of utmost importance” (Merriam, 1991, p. 10). “A case study design is employed to gain

an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved...the interest is in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

In our increasingly pluralistic society, the world can be experienced in multiple ways. I have selected the qualitative method of research, specifically, the case study, in order to get a first-hand sense of what actually goes on in job training programs for welfare recipients. Through the case study, I am attempting to explore aspects of the programs and the experiences of the participants that are not familiar, to make vivid what has been obscured (Eisner, 2001). As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state, qualitative research methods “turn data ‘soft,’ that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (p. 2).

Morgan and Casper (2000) note that “participant reactions are by most accounts the principle means by which organizations evaluate training programs” (p. 301). Morgan and Casper (2000) suggest that “although participant reactions to training are clearly not the sole indicator of its effectiveness, it is possible that their reactions represent one variable that is part of the larger nomological network of variables that influence training effectiveness” (p. 302). Further, Yamnill and McLean (2001) state that assigning high priority to learners as full stakeholders in the design and implementation of training pays off in terms of transfer of training. As systems theorist Jerry Weinberg once observed, we should “listen to the music. It is often different than the words.”

***Population.*** The population of interest for this study was 132 welfare recipients participating in two job training programs, both convenience populations. One program,

which will be called the “Clerical Program,” offers participants training in medical clerical occupations and general office occupations. Program participants are able to access numerous support services with the assistance of program staff, including counseling, job placement, emergency utility assistance, child care, car repairs, bus passes, free lunches, and other assistance necessary to eliminate barriers to the program for participants. This is a seven-week program, nine hours per day, including lunch.

The second job training program, which, in this study, will be called the “Mechanic Program,” offers training in a traditionally male occupation as an aircraft mechanic. The program does not provide support services, but rather refers participants to agencies outside the program that may be able to assist individuals with supporting services. The program is a forty-hour per week program, of six months’ duration.

Program administrators identified individuals who successfully completed the training program and who were placed in a job after training. The researcher, through purposeful sampling (Gall, et al, 1996), selected one individual from each program to participate in the study who was believed to be able to add the most fertile and knowledgeable insights to the context of the study. The first participant led the researcher to the second participant, and so on, utilizing purposeful network sampling. At Merriam’s (1998) suggestion, the number of participants increased based on reasonable coverage until redundancy was reached. Redundancy was reached at the eighth interview. All participants met the following criteria: 1) they were identified by program administrators as welfare recipients prior to entering a job training program, 2) they have completed a minimum of 210 hours or 1200 hours of training, depending in

which program they are participating, and 3) they were working toward job placement or had already been hired either in the healthcare, business, or aviation industry as a result of a partnership between the employer and the job training program.

***Instrumentation.*** One interview was conducted with each participant in the study. For the interview, the researcher developed an outline of topics (Appendix A) to be explored with each of the eight respondents, allowing for expanded responses so the researcher could obtain more information based on a response, clarify vague statements, and ask additional questions as the situation evolved. The researcher probed for details and encouraged the participants to elaborate in order to produce richer data that truly revealed the respondents' perspectives. This interview focused on their life and family history, including their families' attitudes toward welfare dependence and work. It also addressed the participants' experiences and attitudes as a welfare recipient. The interview also focused on the participants' transitioning from welfare to work, soliciting examples and stories of experiences within the exchange.

As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note, the qualitative researcher gets to know the subjects, earns their trust, and enters the world of the participants. As Dooley (2002) states, "a good case is generally taken from real life and includes the following components: setting, individuals involved, the events, the problems, and the conflicts" (p. 337). The researcher observed participants in a natural setting and where possible, in the work setting. Through naturalistic inquiry, the researcher's insight became the instrument for analysis.

***Procedures.*** Once permission to proceed was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Texas A&M University, the researcher contacted the first two selected for participation in the study. The procedure for completing the project included an initial meeting with each prospective participant to explain the study and to ask for their cooperation and participation. A letter was given to each individual that explained the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and the importance of honest, genuine responses (Appendix B). The participants were reassured the identity of subjects would not be revealed and that no one other than the researcher would listen to or transcribe the audiotapes. Anonymity was assured. Respondents signed an informed consent form (Appendix C) and a consent/refusal to be taped form (Appendix D). The researcher then completed the interview. The interview included only the participant and the researcher. The researcher made an appointment for the second interview if necessary. When interviews were complete, a letter was sent to each participant, thanking them for their participation in the project.

For accuracy, data was recorded both electronically and manually, and later transcribed by the researcher. One participant asked not to be taped, so data was recorded manually only. Summary sheets were prepared on each participant interview. Salient points were noted in order to guide subsequent data collection in the group interview. A peer review technique was utilized to verify findings and conclusions, and as a method of investigator triangulation.

***Data Analysis.*** The data gathered was examined using naturalistic, qualitative procedures. The researcher utilized the constant comparison method to analyze data

while the data collection was still in progress (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1990). Recurrent themes or key events became categories, developed in writing as new material was obtained and incorporated into the categories. Each segment was coded by category and examined as a group that provided the basis for analysis (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1990). From the unitized data, working hypotheses emerged, and from these hypotheses the researcher attempted to prove or disprove them by using standard qualitative procedures. No data was assumed trivial; as Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note, “everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (p. 5).

A picture emerged as data was collected and examined (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The researcher took care to capture the participants’ perspectives accurately. Validating the researcher’s reconstruction of the individuals’ emic perspective was corroborated by member checking. Member checking ensured the accuracy of the data obtained in interviews and allowed for correction of any mistakes or misunderstandings. Respondents were furnished with copies of the document that reflected how the researcher constructed the context of information gathered from interviewees. Before final submission, all of the subjects interviewed were asked to read the entire document for feedback on the accuracy of the study.

Merriam (1998) and Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest that documents related to the programs being studied also be analyzed. Recruiting documents, program handouts, and other internal documents were utilized to gain information about rules and regulations of the programs, and to provide insight into various aspects of the programs,

such as daily schedules, entrance requirements, completion requirements, and supportive services available to participants. Relevant lesson plans, reports, news releases, and the like were included in the analysis. As Dooley (2002) suggests, these items will further benefit the process by enhancing the validity of case study findings through triangulation.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

For me, looking back, and even at the time I knew what I was doing, but you know, you get to the point where you are beat down so much you can choose to lay down and let people continuously keep you there, or you can make decisions, be they the best or worst, to get out and do better and that was my escape. And I just knew I was gonna die if I didn't.

Aurora

Aurora's statement is typical of those articulated by the women interviewed for this study. As in the pilot study, the majority of women in this study have found their way around the typical barriers experienced by this population and have reached out to the hand that was offered, forcing themselves to grasp the opportunity presented to build a better life for their children and themselves. What are the elements of the programs in which these women are participating that empower them, allowing them to overcome the stigma of welfare and giving them the confidence required to make such life changes? Or is it something outside the program that buttressed the individuals and gave them the strength necessary to maintain the courage to get to the next step? It is critical to listen to the voices of these women and examine their world in order to impact welfare dependency. These women have made, what are to them, enormous changes and sacrifices in their lives to meet the challenges before them.

The participants in this study welcomed the researcher and challenged me to move beyond my boundaries and the limits of my own experience. As noted, the purpose of this study was to find what motivated these individuals to move forward, while dragging their baggage behind them and carrying their children on their backs. It

was not a difficult task to encourage individuals to participate, since most of those participating felt they “owed those coming behind them” and would do whatever they could to help pave the road for others who shared their experiences. Change is difficult and requires much from those with many resources, yet these individuals with few resources had the courage and determination to effect change in their own lives. Not only was the change situational, but the family culture and the people enmeshed in the lives of these women were affected by change as well. Each participant in the study has a unique story; the factors that led them to poverty, however, are not so unique.

Eight individuals were interviewed; conversations became redundant after the seventh interview. One individual was selected from each program, and, where possible, these individuals led the researcher to others in the cohort of which they were a member.

### **The Participants**

Two participants were interviewed in the workplace, two were interviewed in the researcher’s office, two in their homes, and two at public meeting places not related to either the researcher or the interviewee. It is very interesting to note that the two individuals interviewed on the job appeared to be very self-confident about their job skills. Rather than being the “odd man out” as they initially anticipated, the women seemed indistinguishable from their coworkers. Each gave the researcher an impression of being knowledgeable, participatory, and certainly, a team player among the group of employees.

Six of the individuals interviewed continue to receive welfare benefits in one form or another; Neci and Samantha are the two exceptions. All interviewees have

children, ranging in number from one child to five children. The children are ages 10 months to 18 years. Wages earned by the participants range from \$6.50 per hour to \$10.13 per hour. Virtually all those interviewed now have benefits, and in particular, health insurance. Half those interviewed have educational benefits and have begun or plan to take advantage of those benefits.

*Aurora.* Aurora is now working for the program in which she participated. It is highly unusual for the administrator of the program to hire participants once they have completed the Clerical Program. However, the timing of the program internships and the need for a program intern coincided and allowed the interviewee the opportunity to utilize her new skills. Eventually, she was hired full time and is now assisting women who, like herself, have experienced or are experiencing a difficult time in their lives and are attempting to find their way in what they perceive as a bureaucratic world that is difficult to navigate without assistance.

Aurora was interviewed in a spare office at her place of employment with permission of her supervisor. She took charge and found an office for the interview when the intended meeting room was taken over by an unscheduled event. She was comfortable in her environment, was very welcoming to the researcher, and was glad to participate in the research.

Aurora is a thirty-one year-old white, single mother. She has three children, two girls and one boy, all three in daycare. Aurora is the youngest of four children. Her father is an alcoholic, and her parents are divorced. Her family was on welfare throughout Aurora's years living at home. She notes: "There is nothing like knowing

your birthday cake was purchased with food stamps. Even to me it was a little...it was disheartening. It was disheartening.” She remembers going to the store with her father when food stamps were “paper monies,” where her father sold the food stamps so he could buy alcohol and cigarettes.

When Aurora married, her mother finally received her General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and continued her education, becoming a Licensed Practical Nurse. Aurora’s father did not complete high school and has never received his GED. Aurora was very attached to her mother; although she received a scholarship to attend college, she did not take advantage of the opportunity because, as she states:

...my self esteem was down here, and I was told I was getting dropped off and would never see my mother again if I went. I’m not going because I was so connected to my mother!

Aurora is clear on why she married: “He was my escape route.” She was married for ten years, until her husband took the family to Disneyland and there told her he was leaving her. For the last two years, she has been on her own with the children, and has grown from a stay-at-home mom to the breadwinner, from a “comfortable married life” to finding herself on public assistance. She believes that her ex-husband, finding that he is losing control as he watches her grow, is punishing her by withholding child support.

**Mary.** Mary completed the Clerical Program and is now employed at a public school. She is convinced she is not only an asset to the vice principals she serves, but also to the young people with whom she interacts daily. She feels *needed*:

And I ended up having a lot of kids that when I first came was in a bunch of trouble. But now I know them by name, I know what they can be. Just looking at them, they're in trouble for a reason. It's a personal thing. They think gangs, this whole "get 'em up gangs"...I tell them gangs is not love; love don't do that. All that gun shootin'; I say y'all want to go to Dominguez jail? I been there. I can take you there. I know people. You come with me and I'll show you what it's like and it's not a happy place to be.

Mary is African-American, the divorced mother of one young son, who hopes someday to be a motivational speaker. She is vivacious, leaves a great first impression, and is overall a lovely woman. At the time of the interview, she was well-dressed, friendly, and excited to be interviewed.

Mary left the city that was her home and left a "good" job, relocating so she could build a relationship with and get to know her biological father. Early into the process, she began to wonder if the decision she had made was a wise one; she found out she had 17 brothers and sisters who were all hurting the way she was, anxious to have a relationship with their father but having little luck. Although he had been welcoming in the beginning, Mary found that he expected her to support him financially, along with his current wife and teenage son. She watched her siblings suffer from his lack of attention and caring, and things finally became heated. Mary's father "put her and her son out on the street" after she determined that he was "cruel and not a man."

Mary and her four year-old son entered a homeless shelter. At one point while visiting her caseworker, she saw a promotional flyer for the welfare to work program, applied, was accepted, completed the program, and is now in an administrative assistant position at a local high school. She has given up on her father, is slowly getting to know

her siblings, and stays in close touch with her mother. Her son is in day care. She continues to receive some assistance which is directed at the day care costs for her son.

***Meredith.*** Meredith works in a medical office and utilizes not only the clerical, but also the medical, training provided by the Clerical Program. Meredith notes that “we probably trained for about a week (referring to filing) because it was only a seven week course, but that training really made the difference because it prepared me.” She began the job part-time at \$6.50 per hour and in less than two years has been hired as a full time employee at \$9.00 per hour, and has been promoted.

Meredith was interviewed in her home, a modest, very neat, well-maintained house that had recently been painted. The yard had a manicured look, and the interior of the house was immaculate. When the researcher arrived, Meredith was relaxing, still in her medical uniform, listening to music, after a long day at work. It was cool and quiet, and three apparently very well-behaved daughters spent the evening in their bedrooms so as not to disturb the interview.

Meredith is Hispanic, 35 years old, and has three daughters – one in elementary school, one in middle school, and one who graduated high school in three years and is now in college. Meredith participated in the researcher’s pilot study, and at the time of the previous interviews, she was depressed and scared, but very focused on her daughters. She had recently separated from her husband, and had hopes that perhaps as a long-time married couple, they could “work things out.” However, in her words, “he didn’t have any intentions of coming back.” So, discouraged and disappointed that he blamed her religion and chose a lifestyle that did not value his family, Meredith

attempted to hold her chin up long enough to move forward under the circumstances as they were.

Just days after completing her job training program, Meredith received a phone call that indeed changed her life. Upon arriving home from church, she received a phone call from her mother that there had been a robbery at her soon-to-be ex-husband's place of employment. She rushed her girls in the car and headed to the scene. Unfortunately, she and her children saw their husband and father, lifeless, in the parking lot. As Meredith suggests to her daughters,

That, it happened...it brought us closer...I never...I tell my girls that things happen sometimes, and we can't dwell on those things, we just have to keep on to see him again. 'Cause we believe in resurrection, so I tell them that's our goal, to go forward and we'll get with him. And that's what we've been doing. I love my kids.

Meredith is receiving Social Security benefits for her children since the murder of her husband. Because of those benefits, she was able to accept the job she has now that offered her only \$6.50 per hour as a new hire. As the children grow older, the benefits decrease, but her wages are increasing.

*Neci.* Neci has two daughters, ages nine and four; she gave up her first child, a son, for adoption. She is an African-American woman in her late twenties, working as an aircraft mechanic at an aerospace company. She earns \$10.13 per hour in a traditionally male occupation and receives excellent employment benefits.

Neci seems rather defenseless to the researcher, albeit her persona appears to be that of a very confident woman. Neci was somewhat different than others interviewed, in

that she seemed to feel more alone than the others. Although she has a family near her and has support from several family members and friends, and although she exuded confidence, she nevertheless seemed slightly defenseless. Neci is participating in the Mechanic Program; this program offers no counseling or other supportive services. When such assistance is required, participants must seek such services outside the program through community-based organizations like any other community member.

Each time she has been in the researcher's presence, she is "with" another man. It appears that her attitude about her job changes based on the man with whom she is having a relationship at the time.

Over the last year, the researcher has noticed that her view has changed from that of pride in her job, a woman truly "bringing home the bacon" as a result of a non-traditional, generally male-occupied job, to one of a woman who feels harassed and taken advantage of by her employer because of her gender. Neci says:

I'm kinda pissed. But nobody else want to do it and I don't plan to be here that long. I can get paid a whole lot more someplace else for doing what I'm doing sitting on my butt at that computer. The last three months I worked out there [on the plant floor] like twice.

Neci's occupation requires her to use her hands in a repetitive manner, and has apparently caused a condition (tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome) that resulted in her filing two worker's compensation claims. As a consequence, her employer has placed her on light duty where she utilizes a computer and works on the company quality manufacturing plan. When the interview ended, her boyfriend suggested that she was assigned the duty because she was a woman, totally negating the on-the-job injury and

the resulting worker's compensation regulations. He suggested that "you notice the company didn't ask a man to sit at the computer and work on the quality plan, but instead a woman because in their view, it's a woman's job." It is apparent to the researcher that Neci has taken his opinion as her own *outwardly*, but *inwardly* she is proud of her work skills.

As we walked out of the researcher's office where the interview was conducted, the researcher encouraged Neci to take advantage of the company's excellent educational benefits and continue her education. Her boyfriend immediately spoke up and stated that she would not do well because he had "noticed" that both she and her oldest daughter had learning disabilities. Neci seemed hurt and powerless at that moment; her facial expression belied shame, embarrassment, and sadness. The interview overall showed that Neci was proud of her computer skills related to lean manufacturing; when the researcher noted that lean/quality manufacturing is an emerging practice of great importance to manufacturers, Neci's eyes showed her pride, although the words did not leave her mouth, as though she did not want to comment in front of her boyfriend. About her computer work, she states:

Neci: One, because if they tell me to do something, I'm gonna do it. I can do it. I can refuse it, but nobody else is gonna do it. Matter of fact, yesterday the manager walked in and asked me how long I was on the computer and I asked her why and she talked about how well I worked on the computer. I was just sitting there talking to her and she said she just wanted to know. They see me sitting there all the time and the same computer.

Researcher: Maybe it's because they're looking to place you somewhere.

Neci: I doubt it. I went to HR and talked to the lady there, and she said it's my education. I don't have any college, so...as far as the jobs I've noticed that I would be able to do, the education is keeping me back. She doesn't want me on the floor, but because of my education I have to stay on the floor.

The company where Neci is employed is planning a layoff in the near future.

Neci is not sure if she will be one of those laid off, but it is clear her defenses are already up. In the meantime, she has promised her children that the family will be in a house within two years.

*Samantha.* Samantha is an unmarried Hispanic female with two children, ages eight and thirteen. She, too, is an aircraft mechanic, receiving \$10.13 per hour for her efforts, and considers this a "really good job." Samantha completed the Mechanic Program. She was interviewed at her workplace on her lunch hour with permission from the employer. During the interview, Samantha did not look the researcher in the eye, but rather her eyes were constantly darting around the very large company cafeteria as though she was embarrassed to draw attention to herself. No audiotape was recorded since the machine would be conspicuous; the researcher took notes instead.

Samantha notes that she experienced no distractions during her training program other than her children. Contrary to Neci's perceptions, Samantha sees her job as a wonderful opportunity, and frequently volunteers for company-sponsored community activities. She is also an officer in an organization at her place of employment, and, as she states, "applies herself" to her job. Samantha intends to attend classes held on-site in her workplace. She has begun to give back to the community that provided her the

opportunity for training which has led to an excellent job with benefits for her family, and further educational benefits for herself.

*Liz.* Liz was interviewed in the researcher's office. She wore a floral print dress, rather old-fashioned glasses, and the first impression of the researcher was one of a young but matronly-appearing woman who was scared of her shadow. She was at first quiet, but as the interview progressed, she became more sure of herself and responded with thoughtful statements.

Liz is a Hispanic, thirty-something divorced mother with three children, ages two, five and seven. After completing the Clerical Program, she is working as a receptionist in the insurance industry, and has been in the same job for over two years. Her husband divorced her with what seemed to her to be little regard for her and the children and how they would survive with her not having worked in ten years. She was severely lacking in any job skills and had few social skills. Liz sees it as fate that a flyer advertising the job training program stuck to her shoe as she walked out of a local one-stop center; she can now bring home her own paycheck, independent of a man. Liz realizes that the program in which she participated was an intense one; she feels she had "taken things for granted", but is now happy and has a reason to get up in the morning.

*Sarah.* Sarah is a 35 year-old single mother with five children by three different fathers. Sarah is white, tall and thin, and leaves the researcher with the idea that Sarah could use a long nap. She seemed tired but anxious as she was interviewed in a public library. She rushed into the interview, kept a close eye on her watch, and although she

was talkative and seemed pleased to be interviewed, she appeared to be on a tight schedule and intended to end the interview precisely as planned.

Sarah completed the Mechanic Program and now works at an aerospace company as an aircraft mechanic. She is allowed to dress casually for work which helps her save money. She has four children in day care. She earns slightly over \$10.00 per hour and continues to receive some governmental assistance which helps with day care expenses. She also receives child support regularly for one child, and sporadically for the others.

Sarah is the product of divorced parents, and she herself was married once and later divorced. Her father “fooled around” on her mother, and throughout her life, it seemed to Sarah that her mother neglected her children in order to gain the attention of men. Sarah is extremely independent, and puts one foot in front of the other in an attempt to make it through the day, both financially and emotionally. She is absolutely not interested in men; she is simply focusing on her goal of getting her kids through school “on a full stomach” and hoping to be able to give them opportunities she lacked.

***Belinda.*** Belinda is a self-described “successful woman” who, against the odds, has not only been able to complete the Clerical job training program and secure a job as a clerical assistant in an accounting firm, but is also continuing her education as well. She is a twenty-six year-old single, Hispanic mother of two, with another on the way. The expected baby was fathered by a man who is not the father of the other two children. Belinda plans to marry the father of her baby and has moved in with him in anticipation of the marriage.

Belinda has never met her biological father face-to-face. Her mother raised her alone and has never married. Belinda has a large extended family and does not feel she is lacking in any way due to the absence of a father. She appears to be a very strong, independent young woman with the goal of supporting her children with a degree in computer science. Under her current circumstances, she has no intention of depending on the father of her baby, her future husband, but instead hopes to develop a healthy relationship with him, with both contributing to a marriage that will last a lifetime.

The interview with Belinda took place in her home. The house was a rental, two bedrooms with wood floors throughout. Numerous boxes had not yet been unpacked, but the house was comfortable. The children were with their grandmother and would not arrive until the interview was completed. Belinda showed the researcher pictures of her children and her family, and pointed out her program completion certificate hanging on the wall. It was interesting to the researcher to see unpacking yet to be done, while the certificate hung alone on the wall.

## **Results**

Many women who enter welfare remain in that situation for years. They are often distracted by day-to-day living and do not have, or do not take, the opportunity to step back and look at their lives from a different perspective. In the case of poverty, it is apparent that no one event or disruption triggers the desire to loosen the bond of welfare, but rather a series of events leading to a turning point, a larger process of change in the lives of welfare recipients. In the cases of the women studied, numerous required trips to the local workforce centers, numerous visits to human services case managers, dealing

with the bureaucracy of welfare and frequent changes in the rules and requirements (all part of PRWORA), and the inability to provide their children with a future caused these women to seek opportunities to improve their lives. Shame and simply knowing that life could be something different than it is also played roles in changing the lives of these individuals.

Liz: And it was kinda weird, the way I found the flyer. Because I couldn't find a job because I didn't know Excel and Word, and I...hmm...you know, and I stepped on the paper and it stuck on my shoe. And I took it off and read it, and I said, ooh, this looks good...

Researcher: That would be fate, wouldn't it?

Liz: (Laughs) So I took it and called...But I don't have too much history because I only worked for a while, and I told her my situation, my job history, the healthiness, make it sound good, because when you have just a little to work with...

Mary notes:

Because if it weren't for me, looking up on the wall and seeing that flyer, I would have never known. I looked up and said, I'm all that, I need more training,...the guy there was telling us about taking a test to see what we had education-wise and grade-wise, and he didn't mention it. Me and this other lady we were sitting there and we both were looking at walls, and I had went to [her case manager], and said, can I get in this program? And she said sure! So from there...the rest is history.

Aurora's decision to change her life came about in much the same way.

Because I had lived a pretty comfortable life while I was married, and I found myself on public assistance, relying on food stamps to feed my children. And that was very hurtful. And when I would go to the food stamp appointments, it was like, I don't belong here. And I knew I wouldn't be on them for very long. I knew that was not an option because I didn't belong there. It was different...I wasn't used to that. And I learned how to toughen up, to move forward, and not look back so much.

Now finding themselves engaged in a program that offered opportunity for life change, the participants entered a college environment that would be the first step to change. In the view of the participants in the Clerical Program, they entered a warm learning environment, with important program components which they would not fully appreciate until halfway through the program. This program was constructed to respect the students' experiences and to honor the meaning the individuals bring to their work in the program. The learner-centered approach was enhanced by the program's predictable sequence of activities, and participants were encouraged to control their own learning.

The participants in Mechanic Program entered an environment where they were treated like any other college student, with the exception that the group was a cohort throughout the program and the participants were not mixed in class with students other than those within their cohort. In addition, the program was customized for the group; rather than the traditional college program, the program was an intense, all day, five days per week, six-month activity. Participants were expected to take responsibility for their learning like any other college student, and apply their new technical skills where required.

Participation in either program gave the individuals in this study the technical tools required to take their first step on the road to self-sufficiency. However, one of the programs provided additional tools that were critical to success, not the least of which was on-site counseling. Counseling allowed the participants to understand, accept and appreciate change in their identity and a change of perspective. In addition, life skills activities, which included "learning to learn" exercises and help with building self-

esteem of the participants, were significant components of the Clerical Program. This leads to the first research question.

*1. What were the effects of the program on escaping poverty and becoming self-sufficient as identified by female welfare recipients completing a job training program?*

Mary states that not only did the program give her computer skills, but she also learned *how to learn*. She states that “the program helps me in going out to interview...teach me how to interview, and it helps me get my resume together, get my cover letter together, and add some things I didn’t know I had”. Further, Mary notes:

And it helped me that I can do, I can succeed, and I can go back to school. Where I had doubted myself about going back to school because of my past experience, I had test anxiety. Where I didn’t know it but I went to college and they said that’s what you have. I get so hyped up for the test, and when I take the test and I know I’m timed, I can’t do it. But when they test me without timing me, I aced it [snaps fingers]. But it was too late for me then, but it’s not too late for me now. I was shy...a shy person. I was..I wasn’t motivated like I am. I put myself on the back burner, because I always put my son before me. Your son comes first. ‘Cause that’s what my Mom did for me and my sister. But the time come for me...’cause if I burn out, my son ...but it helped me to speak up for myself.

Aurora views the program as one that gave her a jump-start to help herself learn.

Researcher: How do you feel like this program prepared you for a job?

Aurora: It did, it really did. I had no computer skills. When I started the...program, I did not know how to turn on a computer. Funny as it may sound, I literally sat there and said, “How do you turn this on?” I didn’t realize there were two buttons. I could not type. And so it really gave me the opportunity to learn about that stuff and then it just snowballed. Before someone showed me, I began to figure it out myself. Different mechanisms to make myself learn it myself. But it really

opened up another world... I mean, just in my mind, I didn't know all this, and it really did, it prepared me for what I do.

In addition, Aurora states that, "Two years yesterday that I was a shell of a human being. I just didn't have the opportunity to grow. The training program gave me that opportunity. This is a fabulous program. I brag about it to everybody."

Neci, on the other hand, did not perceive her program as being of much assistance to her. She states that, "If I had of done what I wanted to do, I would have been through school right now. So I wasted my time. And that's the way I feel. And the only reason I went to the program in all honesty is because my dad wanted me to. I shouldn't have listened to him." Yet, later in the interview, when asked how well the program prepared her for a job, she notes:

As far as [her current employer] goes, I don't think good enough. As far as what we should have learned, we didn't learn enough. But I got a job. I went from making what I was making to making more, and I've gotten raises each year since then. I get the medical benefits, I get full tuition for school, I get retirement. My kids aren't on welfare no more. I don't have to worry about that no more. If something happens to them I just take them to the doctor.

In contrast, Samantha, who completed the same program and works for the same employer, is excited about her job and sees the opportunities as limitless. Samantha believes the program opened a door for her that would otherwise have remained closed. She involves herself in company-sponsored activities, and sees herself as well-prepared for the job for which she was fortunate enough to be hired. All of the courses she completed – electrical, aircraft structures, math, among others – brought her "from the gutters" with the new belief that she was capable and intelligent.

Other interviewees appreciated the job skills learned in the program. Meredith remembers:

Well, it prepare me...well, it was basic skills. Because in seven weeks...we touched about the medical terminology and transcript and all that, and it was just the basics. It's not until you get there that you start learning more. I mean, I've been there [on the job] close to two years and I'm still learning every day. But it prepares you for what you're going into. So...it really does. It helped me a lot.

Further, she states, “but that training really made the difference because it prepared me. I had a knowledge of what I was going to be going in doing. I mean it was totally different coming from a fast food restaurant and it really did help me; it was like an eye opener.”

Like Meredith, Liz suggests that she would still be on welfare with no job skills had she not entered the training program. She was “prepared to fail” because she has had so few worthwhile educational opportunities, but was pleasantly surprised to find that program staff anticipated such anxiety and were able to provide the tools that would take her through the program. Sarah is grateful to everyone who played a role in her successful completion of the program; all things combined – the training, support services, even the provision of lunch – were not within her reach prior to the “fateful” day she had the opportunity to enter the program. Belinda sees herself as a “determined” person, one who will “plow right through” any opportunity given her. She believes her case manager’s “kick in the butt” provided the impetus she needed to take advantage of a learning opportunity that gave her the skills to move toward self-sufficiency. As she

notes, “The program got me to understand what it is I really want. And I really wanted off welfare.”

A predictable part of change includes changing relationships to family, friends, and even themselves (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Every participant feels their life shifting as a result of the program. Each feels themselves drifting away from old friends and finding new ones.

Mary: It gets you ready for the employment part, it gets you ready for school, it helps you find the kind of friends that can motivate you, who you can call up and say, hey, I’m down at this time. Like I talked to Amy, we used to talk all the time. Like we were on the Internet, and I’d find a job for her, I’d tell her, and she would find a job for me and tell me.

Aurora: I’ve learned how to deal with people, and how you can either look at someone and see...everybody has something to offer you, and I’ve learned more than anywhere in my life, I learned in that class that you take what you can get from people, you take what they have to offer, and not necessarily be so judgmental on what they don’t offer. You can’t necessarily click with everybody. And it all comes back around to that self-esteem and who you surround yourself with. And if you surround yourself with people who will beat you down, they will beat you down.

Sarah: It’s funny...I feel educated. I don’t have time to sit around and talk trash with uneducated people. I want to talk to someone like me. It probably sounds snobby, but I know there’s more...people talk sense.

Each finds herself very busily working her way around obstacles.

Meredith: There’s a lot of obstacles. They’re going to interfere, but you have to work around them to get, in order to get where you hope, and that’s what I’m doing.

Aurora: I was a stay at home mom, so I didn’t know when we got up in the morning how to get things going, how to ...my oldest child started kindergarten right when I started the program. So we had all

these different things to get done. My kids would...what we would do, they would get bathed and dressed and they would go to bed in their clothes for school, so that when I got up in the morning they could sit and enjoy breakfast.

Sarah states that “Basically, I just cross a bridge when I come to it. I can’t worry about stuff in advance. I just move around whatever’s in the way and keep goin’.” Mary offers the following:

Life is a struggle. Everyday is a struggle. And like they say at the women’s conference, “They’s gonna be things, you can overcome because there’s gonna be someone there that can help.” You might need childcare and somebody might know where there is child care. You might need it to go to school or work. I had that but I kept pushing.

As Lofland and Stark (1965) note, there comes a time in a person’s life when the tension of the background breaks and there is a turning point. The tension is typically “a felt discrepancy between some imaginary, ideal sort of affairs and the circumstances” in which people see themselves (p. 864). Social, family, and political conditions beyond the control of the participants in this study have contributed to the persistence of these individuals in tension (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). But these individuals, in one way or another, found resolution to this tension through the job training programs. New possibilities opened for the study participants when they were thrust into change as a result of PRWORA.

2. *What was the impact of the program focus on the perceived achievement and empowerment of welfare recipients completing a job training program?*

Upon reflection, most participants in this study realized there was one program component that had the greatest impact on their achievement. All participants in the Clerical Program referred to feelings of self-worth and self-esteem gained through their participation in the job training program.

Prior to entering the program, Aurora describes herself:

If you were to look at me, I would say six years ago, I would not answer the door, I would not talk to people. That if you are in a situation where you have no self-esteem, you don't go better yourself, so you don't go get a job that pays better, so therefore, you are on welfare. And so I think that's where it kind of boiled down to where welfare was just kind of a product of the low self-esteem, the inability to be accountable, not following through, all of those....

Further, she states:

I was overweight, I was miserable, I had been...I had three children in about four years so I was always nursing, pregnant, or taking care of an infant all the time and I didn't know who I was.

After completing the program, entering a job, and now responding to the researcher's questions, it is clear that Aurora has made some important discoveries:

Oh, I'm wonderful! Um...more self-confidence. I am able to sit here and talk with you, whereas before I probably wouldn't of...I was scared to death to go and talk to anybody. But I am much more confident, much more confident. I realize everything I want in my life doesn't have to happen right now, right this very minute. It will take time. I just want to say, "You choose it. Misery is a choice." And if you choose to be miserable, you will be miserable. So I think I have a more positive outlook.

And they kinda help you fill in, helped me fill in, where I feel a little more content, a little more able to pay them forward. Because uh..there are so many women who walk around who are just shells of women; they don't know that they are loved, that they are beautiful, they don't know

any of this. And I was fortunate enough that I could participate in this program.

When asked to describe herself before entering the program, Mary stated:

“Where I couldn’t see myself back then speaking to you, I can see myself now, just the point in me not dictating...but telling my story. Where I come from, where I am now.”

Mary also realizes she was so wrapped up in her son that any transformation of her own self was not even a consideration: In addition, Mary’s goal is to be a motivational speaker. She intends to complete college and earn a degree, and is already making plans related to “investing money.” She remembers an individual in her program and her own struggle:

We had one lady in there, her husband had left her. All of us had stuff, husband left or died, divorces, single parent...we all...we had one lady...she’s a powerful lady, but she did not think she would make it. She didn’t think she would graduate from the program because of the way she had been talked down to, the way her husband treated her after so many years of being married. ‘Cause this program motivates women. It motivated me by saying you can do it, you can go back to school, you can get a high paying job, you can get your self-esteem back. You can pick a positive.

Meredith, too, suggests that the program helped her in ways other than with the increase in marketable job skills.

Sometimes our personal life, what it’s going through, you have no self-esteem. You have no self-esteem. You think very little about you. But when you go in there and they, I mean, when we talked about the self esteem and everything it just rises you up. And they make you see that you are somebody. You are important.

Unknowingly, Sarah gives insight to the lack of life skills training in her program:

Well, I just feel like my kids can depend on me. But I don't have anybody to depend on. I keep thinkin', what is it about me that is not acceptable to men? Sometimes I think I am so independent that it scares 'em. I'll be glad when I just don't care anymore.

Belinda still has not come to grips with the change in herself as a result of her participation in the program. "I hardly recognize myself," she says. She used to eat all the time - "high-carb, junk, sugary food" – and understands now she was feeding what she describes as her "worthlessness."

Liz sees the same value in learning life skills and feels she has come a long way:

Liz: I feel comfortable talking and I'm not ashamed of anything that happened to me or anything that I'm going through right now. I thought I was the only person. I didn't know because like I said, I kept to myself. I was my own friend, so...

Researcher: So have you made more friends since you have been in the program?

Liz: Yes, I've met people on the bus, at the bus stops, here in school.

Researcher: That's great.

Liz: Yes, I didn't know what I was missing!

Neci, on the other hand, who, like Sarah, participated in the Mechanic Program without the intense support services and counseling interventions of the Clerical Program, appears to lack the belief in herself that others have gained while participating in the latter activity. As noted earlier within this document, Neci seems dependent upon

men for her self-worth. This is one case where the individual would probably have been much better served by participating in a program with the intensive support services such as those provided in the Clerical Program. The life skills portion of the program, perceived by the participants to be the tool that led them to believe in themselves, could be extremely beneficial to someone like Neci.

Samantha, too, participated in the Mechanical Program. However, her descriptions of her background and the family support she received in entering/completing the program, leads this researcher to believe that receiving welfare benefits did not negatively impact her self-esteem and perhaps, her perception of herself was healthy throughout her life.

Belinda was fortunate to receive on-site counseling and life skills training. She notes:

I was just so depressed, and I took it out on my kids. I could sit in a corner and cry every night. I kept thinking my kids' father would finally take care of us but he didn't. I kept thinking we would get married...he asked me but I couldn't do it. These people helped me realize I didn't need him and I am so much better off! It was a big deal to get through it, but I did and I am proud of me.

It is noteworthy that in really listening to these individuals, it is obvious from their comments that they have been trained and encouraged to see themselves as valuable people. To the researcher, it was as though they have finally had someone tell them, in a way that truly reached them, that they are whole and have potential. In Meredith's own words, we see this new perspective:

Um, in the life skills, it helped me value myself as a person, especially after going through situations where you are like, well, maybe I...I don't know how to explain it but maybe at a point where you're like well, what's worth trying if you never accomplish anything. But what I learned is not to do it for nobody else, just do it for yourself, to better yourself. Better your education, so that is the part that's helped me a lot.

Likewise, Liz exhibits an understanding of herself not before realized:

And the life skills, it builds up your self-esteem. That's what it does. Because it's hard when everything else is going wrong and you think it's mainly your fault, but you find out it's not your fault. It's just something that happens and you just have to accept it and keep going instead of, you know, oh, well, that's all I can do.

*3. At the beginning of the program, how did welfare recipients completing a job training program view employment and the prospects of getting off welfare, and how did their attitudes change after completing the program?*

All eight individuals interviewed indicated they were very motivated to “get off welfare” as they considered entering either job training program. They were all eager to learn and begin earning a living without depending on government assistance. All were very willing to assume full responsibility for themselves and their children, and were ready to do whatever was necessary to move forward. Fear of losing benefits, however, made several of the interviewees very anxious.

Researcher: When you first began this program, were you scared at all?

Aurora: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Because when you're receiving that kind of assistance, I think most people need it to feed their children. It wasn't what could I get; my kids need to eat. And whatever I needed to do to make that happen, I needed to do it. And for me, it was just they needed to eat. And to be able to provide that myself for them is a good feeling. It is a good feeling knowing that they....we don't eat

steak and potatoes or anything like that, but they're happy, healthy, wonderful little children. And my ex-husband would make comments to me about, you're just a welfare mom. When I was going to school, he was just, why don't you go to work? You need to go to work.

Mary makes it clear that she was excited to support herself and her child.

No, I wasn't scared. I was more motivated. I wanted to get off. I wanted to get off. I didn't want it to be the rest of my life. The program did a lot for me. It helped me, knowing that I can get that ultimate job that I want. I'm used to getting paid a certain amount, and I had left that job in Georgia paying \$11.50 an hour to come here to start off at \$9. But in know I can get back there. I had a job that was less stress, teamwork, oh you believe it, teamwork, helping people. I'm a people person, and I know I can get back to that point, having a less stress and teamwork.

Neci was frightened when she thought about losing the Section 8 benefits that pay for her housing. At the time she entered the program, she was working but, as is true with many individuals receiving welfare benefits in one form or another, the wages she brought home each month did not begin to meet her family's needs. Upon completion of the training program, Neci would be expected to pay her own rent which amounted to one of her two full paychecks. She now earns more money that she did prior to entering the program, and has learned to budget her money in such a way that the rental cost does not leave her without food for her family.

And how do the women interviewed feel about the welfare system at this point in their lives? Each of the individuals participating in this study is a proponent of the welfare program, within limits.

Mary: I believe in welfare. But I believe welfare is not where you stay on it. It's a starting point. Like my mother...it's a starting point for her. But she didn't stay on it. And welfare is just for us to start. If you're

homeless..if you lose your job, it's a start. It's not a stopping place. It is to grasp what you're getting, it's for you to get an education, get in some program while you're in there to be able to move forward, whatever you want to do, education or employment, but it is not a stop. It is not for us to beat up on all the time. It's just a stop. And then it's for the next person. And the next person to use. Not for us to be greedy. I've seen people be greedy and stay on it, and it's just a crincher, and you won't get nowhere like that. And it ends up on it like that, then you cut that program out, and they do not need to cut that program out at all.

Aurora shares her thoughts about receiving governmental assistance. She has strong opinions about individuals receiving benefits and being required to do nothing other than show up at the office of a case manager on occasion:

Well, I think what it is, if you tell someone you will give them this oppor...well, money; I'll say money because that's really what it is. And you say, "I expect nothing of you." As a parent would we ever do that to our children? Would we say, go to school, I expect nothing of you? Because you will have a child who will fail every time. We give our child homework. "Here's your homework." Ok, see what happens; will it get done? I think you have to give them an opportunity, and maybe not an opportunity, but maybe just that push. This is a gift; this is an opportunity. You can make it grow. I'm going to take the opportunity or you can be like...like a little tornado pulling you down. People pulling you down. And you can go or not. And you don't pay a copay! You can go to the pharmacy and the doctor will write you a prescription for ibuprofen! And you take it...I don't have the money right now. And they give you a bottle like this big [stretches her hands about 8" apart]! That I can still use. So it's there. Why would you want to give that up? What could be better than that? And there's a history.

Liz believes it is "hard to be on there [welfare]." Further, Liz states: "I don't think anybody wants to be on there. I don't know that many people so I don't know the reason why they're getting help, if they need it or they don't." But welfare, to Liz, is a necessary evil.

I think they go on it because they need it. I don't know; situations change from one day to the next and you don't know where you're gonna be or

what will happen to you...we'll do anything, or go anywhere for our kids and ask for help when you need it. I don't know about people, if they don't need it. Well, because if I didn't have any children, I probably would go work at McDonald's or anywhere because it wouldn't matter, just money to keep me going. And when you have children, you have to have money coming in. Because you have to...you know, kids need a lot more than just one person. You need...your kids need...you need diapers and baby food and formula. We don't need that. Just need to eat, sleep...

Neci, who was so very determined to stop receiving welfare benefits, is none too pleased about individuals who work the system and try to maintain benefits for as long as possible. It angers Neci to imagine the abuse that later causes others in need to be denied assistance for lack of funding. She states:

I been on welfare...my daughter's nine years old. I've been on welfare all her life and now I've been off for two years. I've been on and off some kind of assistance all those years.

After completing her training program, Neci immediately lost her child care and food stamp benefits. Although she qualifies for some housing benefits, she refuses to take advantage of those benefits.

Neci: It's better for me. I don't have nobody in my business. I don't have anybody from Section 8 comin' over to inspect my house, who lives there. All around it's just better. I don't have to go to no appointments. If I need food I go buy it. If I have money in the bank I go get it. And I know I'm getting a check, a nice check that I can go shoppin' with. I don't have to budget so much as far as their clothes go. It's a lot better...it's a lot better. The kids are happier, except for they don't have as much food in the house as they used to.

Sarah and Belinda are simply pleased to avoid the bureaucracy of welfare. As Belinda says, "The lines, the waiting, the people, the mean caseworkers. I don't miss

any of it and I hope I never have to experience all that again.” Belinda continues to receive food stamp assistance. Sarah suggests that it is no accident that the system is very difficult to navigate and also very time-consuming for the recipients. She “truly” believes that the system is designed in such a way to discourage people, to “get them off of welfare as quick as possible.” Sarah, too, continues to receive food stamp assistance.

As they work toward the independence for which they all strive and are able to visualize themselves free of government assistance, these participants have developed a belief system that includes reframing of negative attitudes about being on the welfare roll into a more positive belief that their status is only temporary.

Meredith: I think they’re great programs because they help you when you need it. And I needed it and they’re helping me right now. I’m still qualifying for it. But...I think it’s just, um, it’s great when you need it, the help’s there. But I don’t think somebody should depend on it, because when things are learned it’s that anybody would do anything to succeed, and depending on it, it’s like uh, you’re surviving because they’re giving you that help, but if they take it away, what are you going to do? In my opinion, I think also it’s, um, like there are a lot of people out there they need it, but there are people that take advantage. So, just don’t depend on it. They will take advantage of it. It’s just the same as a person that’s an alcoholic or addict, they just depend on it to survive. It’s not gonna be successful.

Liz: Oh, I knew I would eventually get off welfare. It helped me for a while when I needed it, but now I am working my way off and I am dependin’ on me. Nobody’s gonna tell me what to do and when to do it anymore.

*4. What insights or recommendations for improvement in designing welfare-to-work programs were identified by welfare recipients completing a job training program?*

Participants in this study were very definite in their perceptions of the program design. They are discovering that they have valuable opinions on how such a welfare to work training program should be built. Those in the Clerical Program at first suggested that the program be extended past the seven-week design. However, with welfare rules now requiring “work first”, training over extended periods of time is believed by the interviewees to be very difficult since participants have so many other responsibilities. In a perfect world, the participants of the Clerical Program would like to see an “education first” philosophy, and would prefer an intense program of at least six months’ duration.

Mary: The length. Especially the computer part. Because the computer part you can’t rush. Because he had to...to point out certain things, but like the students in my class, you had students don’t know anything about typing, don’t know nothing about computers, and just touching on certain things, it’s not gonna work. But like me, I’m real fast and some of us, mostly me and Amy, were able to help our classmates. So we ended up helping them, how to do Word, how to do whatever, how to go on the Internet. So we were able to interact with them. But it needs to be a little bit longer.

Belinda: I wanted more time. I hope they make it longer now ‘cause it was so much in a short time. I don’t think...I think I would have got really, really tired, though.

The participants in the Mechanic Program, too, felt the program was too intense and should be longer. Most of the participants in this program were also working at least part-time and attended school full-time. Sarah notes:

It was really hard to cram all that studying in, going to school, working. I wish it would’ve been longer. But I don’t know how I would’ve made it any longer under so much stress. So I guess it’s a Catch 22.

Overall, however, the participants perceived the Clerical Program as one that changed their images of themselves and changed their lives. They believe the program administrators planned it well. Although the majority wanted more time in the program, they understood the reasons for the design and feel fortunate to have participated. Mary is unaware that the program administrators track program participants:

Mary: There is nothing that they need to improve because it's fine the way it is. It really is. It's just undescrivable. It's words that I can't explain. It's that they need to follow through on the women, see where they are, what they did. Get them to tell their story. That will help to motivate the students because you can do word of mouth, but if they see it and they just didn't make this up...Aurora, she got that job while I was in the program. There's another lady here I was in the shelter with her and she got a job. We was talking bout school and she ended up talking about school! I see the women that have been in the program that have moved up. And it's happy; it's joyous.

Both Neci and Sarah, participants in the Mechanic Program, suggested in their interviews that there was little counseling available to them on-site during the term of the program. Although neither indicated they would have utilized the counselor's expertise, the very fact that they brought up the subject leads the researcher to believe they actually felt the need for support during the program. Further, both have made substantive life changes, but both seem to be waiting on something, as though they are simply passing time until that "something" comes to them. It is interesting that it appears Neci has never been without a relationship with her father; conversely, Sarah does not maintain a relationship with her father. Neci seems to be dependent on men for her fulfillment, while Sarah appears to be very independent. Yet their statements and

behavior belie the fact that both participants are waiting for a knight to carry them away so they can become whole. The researcher relates this ideology to the lack of supportive services in their training program; it is as though both women do not know what to do with their new abilities without some significant other telling them how proud they are of the women's accomplishments.

All those interviewed had plenty to say about the good of the programs in which they participated. Neci states that the teachers "put them further ahead than they need to be" by informing them of "things besides just what they need to know for a particular course". She stated that from a student's point of view, the program was very challenging, and that "if you can't hang, then you're gonna quit." When asked what she would change about the program, Sarah said, "I wouldn't change anything... All I would say is thank you, thank you for the opportunity I am given...the chance to do this." Mary is also grateful for her opportunity:

It was nothing in the program I liked the least. I liked it all. I wish that the Women Center...I wish in Georgia they had this in their colleges. And people that are at the Women's Center, they are positive. They have so much advantage here that I didn't have in Georgia. Where here you can come and talk. It doesn't matter what's going on in your life...they're here to listen, where you want to be. They give you ideas, like you might not have thought about. And they give you good ideas...like in Georgia, they don't have a program like this. I wish I could take this idea back to Georgia to the colleges.

Meredith is convinced that the benefits of her program far outweighed the cost:

Definitely. Because this program is gonna help you to...first, to better your education. Let's say you continue your education after this program. The college is gonna benefit from it. Say you get a career...say you have a three or four year career or something. The public? Yes, because let's

say you are able to get off public assistance. That means less taxes are going for those programs, and you benefit from that. And your family. And your personal life, too, because you're more professional, and the career is gonna help you grow in a professional way. And all the family benefits, everybody.

It is very interesting to note that the administrators of the Clerical Program require interviews in order to be accepted into the program. The administrators have consciously made it seem as though one must earn their way into the program by preparing for the interview, making all the correct comments, and thereby convincing the participants that being in the program is a privilege that is not to be taken lightly. The result is that the participants feel obligated to work hard to meet expectations, to complete the program, and to look forward to succeeding in a job:

Liz: When you first sign up, you have to go through three interviews before they can tell you, yes, you're accepted in school or no, you're not. So I did my first one, and please, let the next one be okay. And then the third one. And then she said, "I'll call you tomorrow and let you know if you got in." And I was, oh...I hope I got in. I really need this right now, and you know, this will help me. You know, get my feet wet, I guess, which is what I'm gonna do for the rest of my life, to work for my baby.

Researcher: And so, obviously, you got the call.

Liz: Yes. And then I got the call. When I got home, I got home at 2:00, and then Abbey called, and she said, "I couldn't wait till tomorrow, but you got in." 'Cause I told her, "I really, really want to get in. I really need the help. I want to get off the food stamps and I don't want nobody telling me what to do and when to do it." I want to do it on my own.

Meredith perceived acceptance into the program as very competitive:

Researcher: It's kind of like entering Harvard!

Meredith: It's the same! Like she said, entering the program itself, it's like, um, like a challenge, I guess. I got the call for the interview, too, and it was like, "We're gonna go on Christmas break." So they were not gonna let me know until they came back from Christmas! And January 7<sup>th</sup>, I think it was, that I was gonna receive a letter... when I came from my first interview, when I called, I just left the program. I talked to my supervisor and told her I might not come back, but I wasn't sure yet because I needed to wait and see if I was gonna be accepted to the program... so I called Abbey and she said, "You know what, the letter just went out today and you're gonna be accepted."

When asked to define success, all the participants indicated success had nothing to do with money. Each saw peace of mind as success, which gives some indication as to their experiences prior to entering the programs. The overriding meaning of success to these individuals was independence. Liz stated that success would be the ability to "be able to make it on my own, to support my family and to be somebody. It would be nice to be somebody. Instead of being somebody's daughter, somebody's wife, I want to be somebody; that would be my success." Neci noted that she considered independence as success. She defined independence as "taking care of yourself and your family, basically." She clarified that she did not find this as "anything financial," but as long as her children were happy and "we're makin' it, doin' what we have to do, that's successful."

Further, Meredith states:

Yes, I can say I have heard a lot of people measure success by how much money you make, but I think success is what you do in life, and that's how I measure success. What you can learn, who you can be, that's no money...it's what you can achieve in life. Being able to keep your job. Meeting the expectations. Dependability. Own your own. Keeping a job.

Mary notes:

I think success is ...there's nothing wrong with succeeding but now I am going to succeed. I'm gonna do the things I've always wanted to do. I've always wanted to model, I did that. I've done it three times since I've been here. Uh...I'm getting ready to speak in Debbie's class...that's succeeding. I'm going to succeed.

Aurora says it best:

Oh, I think everybody's success is different. I don't think it's money. I think success is a little girl who didn't think she was worth much. And who was told if she went to college she would never get to see her mother again. I think that little girl is now a success. If someone were to ask me if I were successful, I would certainly say yes. I have three wonderful, sweet, kind children who certainly aren't afforded all the luxuries of today, but they are three great kids. And I hope when I walk through the gates of heaven, I will look back and see I left the world three sweet, good kids.

These women, who are eager to learn, eager to work, and eager to be handed their first paycheck, have been given the opportunity to do just that. Ensuring job placement upon successful completion of the program has given the women a goal, with objectives along the way as steps toward that goal. The clerical job training program is providing the participants with more than job skills; the participants are being provided with soft skills and work skills training which allows them to be more aware of the requirements in a world of work, and most importantly, making them aware of themselves. Additionally, the Clerical Program provides support through the program administrators, but the greatest support comes from the classmates in both cohorts as they move through the program.

Neci: We're strong women. We're strong bonded. And nothing's gonna

get in our way. And if you take us out, you have to deal with all of us. We're like a big family in there.

Sarah suggests that it is "Everybody. It's everybody. The teachers, everyone in the class." She states:

You know, you hear people, you talk to people, and you thought you had it bad but somebody had it worse and they did it. You know, they got through this and they did everything. And then you feel like well, if...I can do it, too. And I have to do it. And they help you out a lot.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The interviewees see these programs as opportunities. Most believe this is the first step into a life of their own, unhampered by the unreasonable demands of a significant other in their lives and the negative effect on their children of such a relationship. All visualized themselves as now having some structure in their lives which they were unable to build on their own. They are proud of themselves for making it through the program, and see themselves as role models for their children.

What absolutely comes to the top in all the interviews as the greatest motivators perceived by the individuals participating in these programs are their children. Their shield is motherhood. Not only did the participants indicate that they are anxious to draw their first paycheck, to “step up to the plate and get off welfare,” and to control their own lives, but they noted time and again that their children are the reason they made every move, every day.

Researcher: Some people say that women on welfare don't have any motivation to get a job. What would you say to these people?

Liz: Well, they're wrong because children are the motivation... Most of them have children, single parents, that should be your motivation, that's your motivation right there. They asked everybody why they wanted to get into this program. I told them I want help finding a job that's gonna be a long term job because I have to take care of my babies because we depended on their dad all the time. I never worked. He said, “Oh, you don't have to work. I'll take care of you.” So I did. I did everything he asked me to, and he still didn't. So now it's my turn. Now they're depending on me. Now it's all up to me.

She is determined to finish the program because “our kids...they...they’re the motivation for it. We have to keep on going. You have to keep on going for the best.” I learned from my interview with Neci that she had given a child up for adoption and regretted the circumstances that required such an action. We cannot discount the counseling that the women in the Clerical Program have received. It has been my life experience that no matter what language a woman speaks, no matter what her culture, women understand each other clearly when the subject is their children. It is as though Neci, now with two children, is bound and determined to improve her own and her children’s lives in order to avoid ever being faced with such a challenge again.

Personal growth appears to be a critical key to self-sufficiency. Five of the women verbalized that as a result of the program they were in, they have begun to understand that they are “somebody,” that they can make it on their own. They believe they can support their families independent of a man. They have begun to find an identity and self-respect, and to see themselves as achievers.

I found that the women participating in these programs were grateful for the opportunity and they had *hope*. They viewed the chance to participate as a gift of a future for themselves and their children. With the exceptions of Neci and Sarah, all those interviewed appear to have made major improvements in their perception of self-worth. Not having experienced much of what they perceive as success in life, the promise the participants see is, as Aurora states, “taking a moment to bask in the glory of it.”

As a result of this study, it became clear to the researcher that each woman, no matter which program was her choice, has taken a journey that can be compared to that of a river running its course. Each, in the journey toward self-sufficiency, has flowed forward slowly, occasionally standing still when circumstances blocked their way. Staying within their boundaries to an extent, these individuals have come upon obstacles that may cause their lives to come apart, but like the river, they have gone around the rocks and the pieces of their lives join again as they pass them, gradually wearing the rocks down or reshaping them over time. Well-designed programs that address motivators and self-esteem issues, and those that provide a buffer by combining wages and other benefits, reducing benefits as wages increase, will go a long way in assisting individuals on their path to self-sufficiency and in reducing welfare caseloads.

Supportive services that provide financial help to the participants, such as bus tokens, emergency stipends, meals at school, and incentives such as grocery coupons are critical to the success of the participants in the programs. However, it appears that no financial incentive can override the necessity of addressing self-esteem, confidence, self-worth, and other personal issues that inhibit the success of women. The literature addresses the lack of child care, lack of transportation, the lack of structure, and the lack of soft skills as barriers to success for welfare recipients. In my review of the literature, I have found no reference to the lack of confidence and self-esteem of economically disadvantaged women, and perhaps this is why many welfare to work programs are not constructed to include a heavy dose of training in this area.

## **Conclusions**

This study provides a glimpse inside the lives of the women participants, exploring how they found themselves supported financially by welfare, their experiences in job training programs and the formal labor market as they work toward self-sufficiency. While each has unique life experiences, they share similarities in their perspectives on the assistance provided by welfare receipt and the opportunity to overcome the need for such assistance, the elements of the job training programs which gave them the wherewithal to move forward in their lives, and the challenges they faced along the pathway to self-sufficiency.

*What were the effects of the program on escaping poverty and becoming self-sufficient as identified by female welfare recipients completing a job training program?*

Having been thrust into change due to revisions in legislation, most women in this study felt the program taught them how to learn. Their statements showed the program gave them a key to the door of a new life, one that had been waiting and a life they knew was there, but one for which they lacked the key. The job training programs gave these women the courage to face change and to break the tension they had been experiencing due to political and social conditions beyond their control (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997).

Far from being lazy scam artists who had intentions of ripping off the government and the taxpayers (Cabe, 2002), these women were caught in a web they found difficult to escape due to work-first requirements when they lacked job skills. As

noted by Martinson (2000), low basic skills literacy and low math skills are typical of the welfare-reliant individual. Martinson (2000) states that the lack of basic and soft skills hinders success, and therefore, motivation. In all but one case, the participants felt the program prepared them well for the jobs which they eventually secured and gave them the skills they lacked to help them retain a job. Feeling as though they carried the appropriate tools, the participants felt confident and motivated when searching for a job.

*What was the impact of the program focus on the perceived achievement and empowerment of welfare recipients completing a job training program?*

The women participating in this study have discovered themselves. The programs have given the women the tools to see themselves as having potential, having what it takes to support a family, retain a job, and depend on themselves. As Handler and Hasenfeld (1991) contend, there is an assumption in America that the poor are not self-sufficient and do not participate fully in society; this perspective requires further study. It is true that the women in this study were not self-sufficient and did not participate fully in society. However, we must look at the facts behind the statement.

These women had very low self-esteem and saw themselves as worthless; hence, the behavior leading to a lack of social participation. Several of the women discussed their fear of contact with others, their desire to stay inside their homes and avoid the outside world. In addition, the women's circumstances led them to poverty, and without the skills necessary to obtain a job, they were not, in fact, self-sufficient although they all did desire to become independent of welfare assistance.

With the exception of one individual interviewed, all women voiced the change in their view of themselves which came about as a result of their participation in the job training programs. Support from one another, counseling provided by the program, and mentors who had walked in their shoes allowed these women to overcome their feelings of low self-worth. As Monroe and Tiller (2001) note, the welfare-reliant population is stereotyped as uniformly deficient in its work ethic. Such stereotyping is the basis of the stigma radically changing the way individuals view themselves and are viewed as a person. Rising above such stereotypical assumptions is a huge accomplishment for these women.

*At the beginning of the program, how did welfare recipients completing a job training program view employment and the prospects of getting off welfare, and how did their attitudes change after completing the program?*

Without exception, each study participant had a strong desire to remove themselves from the welfare system. All were anxious to enter a job, but all had a fear they would not be able to feed their children. As Danziger, et al (2002) show, single moms generally found it more difficult to make ends meet when they worked than when they collected welfare. The majority of the women in this study continue to receive welfare assistance by way of either food stamps or child care. The hope among the participants is that they will continue to progress in their jobs which will bring increases in pay so there will no longer be a need to rely on assistance in any form.

*What insights or recommendations for improvement in designing welfare-to-work programs were identified by welfare recipients completing a job training program?*

Each participant in the study wished for more time in the program. Since welfare recipients are required to be in either job search or working for 24 hours per week, only 16 hours per week remain for counseling, education, and other activities. Child care assistance is not provided outside the 40 hours per week. Therefore, most were not only participating in the program, but were working as well, depending on the age of their youngest child. Both programs required attendance of 40 hours per week; those in jobs were away from home for anywhere from 64 to 80 hours per week. A program of a longer duration or of more hours in the day presents a hardship to those that work since child care is limited, children are young and need their parent at home, and participants simply do not have the energy to maintain an 80+ hour pace for too long.

The women in this study felt the program in which they participated was a gift, and outside the desire to extend the program, none had suggestions for improvement other than tracking the program participants as a motivator for others planning on entering such a program in the future. All appreciated the knowledge and skill of the program staff. The Mechanical Program participants would like to see more support within the program, such as the support services received by those in the Clerical Program. On-site counselors were especially important to those in the Clerical Program, and were craved by those in the other job training program.

## **Recommendations**

While current efforts to promote the transition from welfare to work are promising, they are in their infancy and continued effort is needed to develop effective program strategies, especially options that are not tied directly to the welfare office (Cancian, et al., 2001). States are required to serve all welfare recipients, those with self-perceived barriers to work and those with recognized barriers to work. Understanding the domains where welfare-reliant individuals exhibit commitment to work may help policy makers, trainers, program administrators, and employers design and implement interventions that enhance chances of success for these individuals in the formal, paid workforce (Monroe & Tiller, 2001).

The approach of finding “what works” rather than what impedes the transition into the workplace will go a long way in helping these individuals become economically self-sufficient for the long term. Welfare-to-work program administrators can be alert to motivators for successful reentry into the workplace, and can design programs that address interventions perceived by the participants to increase their employability and success on the job. This study will contribute to the on-going dialogue about welfare, self-sufficiency, and poverty.

It is important to do further research into what causes these women to have such a low self-esteem in the first place. Perhaps the welfare program is a contributor, based on comments made by the interviewees as to how they perceive their treatment by caseworkers and employees of the Human Services office in general. Most are second generation welfare recipients, so their experiences as children of welfare recipients may

also have contributed to the low self-esteem. Future research should address issues related to the contributions of welfare receipt on the self-esteem of the women. Further research should be done on a larger sample size, whether qualitative or quantitative, which will address the characteristics of programs versus the outcomes of the participants. Continued research will either underscore the need for confidence-building and self-esteem-increasing elements in welfare-to-work programs or bring to light other program elements that will increase the success of these individuals as they transition from welfare to work.

Individuals entering such programs should be assessed early on so program administrators can understand as much as possible about the experiences, priorities, and work-related skills of the participants in order to better meet their needs (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Further, such assessments could identify key supports in the lives of the participants as well as issues that could impede progress toward self-sufficiency which could be addressed within the program. Elements of the program could build on the women's motivators, and address the challenges that limit employment prospects. Program administrators must understand the individuals they are serving in order to help them enter and retain jobs.

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**APPENDIX A**

### Interview Questions

Suppose you had a friend who had never been in this program before, but she was thinking about joining. She wants to know what it's like here. What would you tell her? How would you describe the program to her?

What do you do in the program?

What kinds of things do you learn?

What activities do you do?

Describe the person you were before entering the program.

Describe the person you are now.

Describe the person you will be when you leave the program (or since you have left the program).

How do you feel this program is preparing you or did prepare you for a job? How well do you feel this program is doing that or has done that?

How did this program affect your welfare status? How did this program affect your views about welfare?

Where do you see yourself in five years? What kind of job do you see yourself having? What do you picture yourself doing? What will your personal life look like?

What were some of your goals when you entered this program? How has this program helped you achieve these goals?

When you first began this program, how did you feel about getting off welfare? How did you feel about getting a job? How did your attitude change after completing the program?

Some people say women on welfare don't have any motivation to get a job. What would you say to those people? What motivated you?

If you could change anything about the program, what would that be? Think of the perfect welfare-to-work program; describe what it would look like.

What did you like best about the program? The least?

If you could tell the program administrators anything about the program, what would it be? What should they know about you or the other women in this program? How could they improve the program?

How do you define success?

**APPENDIX B**

**SAMPLE**

April 5, 2005

Ms. Jane Doe  
125 Any Street  
Anywhere, USA

Dear Ms. Doe:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study related to welfare recipients participating in job training programs. The purpose of this study is to examine your experiences in, and the effectiveness of, the job training program in which you have participated. This study is significant in that program administrators need to know what works best for you in your efforts to move from welfare to work; the results can assist them in designing programs that contribute to your success and to the success of others like you.

It is very important that your responses are genuine and honest in order for this study to be valid. As you will note on the consent form, your personal information will be held in confidence, and will be known only to me.

I appreciate your taking the time to assist me in this study. I will be in touch with you shortly to schedule a time for our interview. Again, thank you.

Sincerely,

Jo B. Tucker,  
Researcher

**APPENDIX C**

**Successful Reentry into the workplace: A case study of the experiences of female welfare recipients participating in two job training programs**

**Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Jo B. Tucker, a doctoral student at Texas A&M University, who is doing the study to meet the requirements of her program. I understand that:

- I will be one of approximately 12 people being interviewed.
- my participation will help Ms. Tucker gather information about my experiences in a job training program and what parts of the program worked best for me.
- Ms. Tucker will not identify me by name in any reports using information I gave her or anything I said, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
- my participation in this project is voluntary; I don't have to participate if I don't want to. If I am uncomfortable with anything (questions, location of interview, length of interview, or any other reason) I can end the interview.
- I have been chosen because I participated in a job training program designed to give me skills I did not have and to place me in a job.
- Ms. Tucker will interview me twice, once alone and once in a group. Each interview will last about one hour.
- Ms. Tucker knows of no risk related to my participation.
- there are no benefits to me for participating.
- an audio tape of the interview will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I can request the interviewer take notes of my responses only.
- tapes will be kept at Ms. Tucker's home and will be erased at the end of one year. She will use the tapes to assist her in documenting my interview; no other individual will hear the tapes.
- this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Angelia Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at (979)847-9362 (araines@vprmail.tamu.edu).
- I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
My Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:

Jo B. Tucker, Researcher

Phone: 210/656-3676

Email: jobietucker@yahoo.com

OR Dr. Larry Dooley, Dept. of EAHR

Phone: 979/862-7574

Email: l-dooley@tamu.edu

**APPENDIX D**

### Consent to be Taped

I voluntarily agree to be audiotaped during the research being conducted by Jo B. Tucker. I understand that the tapes will be used only to help Ms. Tucker document my responses to her questions. I understand only Ms. Tucker will have access to the tapes. These tapes will be identified by the name I choose to use for the interviews, not my real name. The tapes will be kept for one year at Ms. Tucker's home and will be locked in a cabinet. After one year, the tapes will be erased.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Refusal to be Taped

I do not agree to be audiotaped during this interview being conducted by Jo B. Tucker. I understand there will be no penalty of any kind if I refuse. I also understand that even if I do refuse to be taped, I can still be interviewed if I want to.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## VITA

Jo B. Tucker received her Bachelor's degree in Applied Science with a major in criminal justice from Southwest Texas State University. She received her Master of Arts degree in Sociology from the same university in 1998. She entered the Educational Human Resource Development program at Texas A&M University in January 2000, and received her Ph.D. in December 2005. Her research interests include workforce education and workforce issues related to poverty and single parenting.

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