

**Irreconcilable Differences**  
**The Unhappy Marriage of Federal and State Policy in the Welfare-  
to-Work Programmes of the United States**

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## **Abstract**

In 1996, the United States Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) changed Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) from a program which gave single mothers on welfare some possibility of staying at home to raise small children, into TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), which established 60 month lifetime limit on financial support. Whilst continuing further the trend to devolve control to the states, this new approach mandated self-sufficiency via work, or work via welfare to work programmes, as the ultimate goal for everyone physically and mentally able to be self-sufficient. This thesis explores the possibility for welfare reform and its related programmes to create successes for the most disaffected.

Although there is little doubt that the welfare rolls have diminished since the imposition of TANF, and many women who were temporarily in-need of financial assistance are now seemingly better off, welfare reform has had limited success in assisting another population, those termed 'hard to serve', to leave welfare for full-time, sustainable work, and single female parents lacking basic educational skills remain exceedingly poor. Further, it is known that this is the single group about which the least is understood how to assist into employment. Frequently these women fail to meet federal and state demands, the consequences of which drive both them and their children deeper into poverty. Indeed, as the welfare rolls diminished, successful applications for food assistance increased commensurately. Even during the best economic times we learn that they are not attractive job candidates; they lack not only basic skills but also possess multiple and enduring barriers to positive change.

The result is that these alienated families are in want of more than is afforded to them or that is likely to be in the foreseeable future. The findings indicate that viable second chances for financial stability and long term positive change for poor women and their children have failed within the current framework of welfare implementation. Welfare reform policies have grown progressively punitive over time, participation requirements have become more rigorous while ignoring the

immediate needs of families and welfare-related politics have grown increasingly polarised. Extending welfare reform as a success ignores evidence to the contrary for almost fifty percent of the welfare population. This is the price tag for the government's disregard of poor families and the isolation of them into mostly unseen zones of poverty. Without greater support, the worst-off will not work for they cannot work without multi-level assistance and their children are at risk of future labour market detachment and delinquency. Without greater attention, the cycle continues and costs are distributed amongst welfare providers, the criminal justice system, struggling schools, homeless shelters, government sponsored food banks and welfare to work programmes of little or no use. This thesis concludes by calling for both social justice and pragmatism by appealing to policymakers to recognise the necessity of long-term attention to the needs of these women.

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## Glossary

<b>Term</b>	<b>Actual Title (if any)</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children	Program started in the 1930s as Aid to Dependent Children, replaced under PRWORA with TANF
ADC	Aid to Dependent Children	ADC used interchangeably with AFDC
BA	Benefits Agency	Same as DSHS. Provides financial assistance to the unemployed.
CalWorks	California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids program	California welfare-to-work program
CSO	Community Service Office	Benefits Agency local office
DSHS	Department of Social and Health Services	Same as Benefits Agency
EFF	Equipped for the Future	Durable skills transferable across the three primary adult roles of parent/family member, citizen/community member, and worker. The skills are the basis for the EFF standards for adult learning.
EITC	Earned Income Tax Credit	
ES	Employment Security	A DSHS affiliate which performs preliminary testing and provides job training
IRP	Individual Responsibility Plan	A signed agreement by a welfare recipient to comply with regulations and her learning plan.
JOBS	Job Opportunities and Basic Skills	Programme created as part of the Family Support Act of 1988 which required welfare recipients to participate in training, education, training, and job search in order for them to receive cash assistance. Emphasis on the quick acquisition of employment.
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act	Major federal job training program. Cooperates at the state level with the EDD.
MDRC	Manner Development	Private non-profit organization which



	Research Corporation	specializes in the evaluation of work-related social programs, especially those which include training.
MDTA	Manpower Development and Training Act	Attempt by JFK to provide the opportunity to train or retrain those who wanted or needed it. While some states previously had vocational education programmes, for the first time the MDTA was a single major federal programme designed to address the specific requirements of the unemployed
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996	Federal Welfare reform act initiated by President Clinton
SBCTC	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges	Washington State organisation responsible for administering all community and technical colleges
SCANS	Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills	Broad academic, workplace, interpersonal skills and critical thinking skills
SSI	Supplemental Security Income	Federal cash aid program, mainly benefits permanently disabled adults.
TANF	Temporary Aid to Needy Families	Federal cash aid program with time limits and work requirements. It replaced AFDC in 1996.
WPA	Works Progress Administration	Depression era program established by the federal government, which put people from every walk of life to work.

## Acknowledgements

If I have seen further ... it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants (Isaac Newton, 1642–1727).

The will to begin my thesis began in the mid 1990s, but its pursuit was complicated by work and ageing parents. As it was, my dad, who would have taken some pleasure in all of this, missed it all. It was my mother, however, who fostered a sense of social justice in me but Alzheimer's disease ensured she forgot it. Larry, on the other hand, was the sustenance who made pursuit of this thesis possible and who provided constant and unbegrudging support while never ceasing to be amazed that I failed to learn to type. Lastly, thanks to my patient supervisor, Stuart, who rescued me from an unsuccessful Viva first time around. This is for you and for all of those who remain unnamed but whose guidance and thoughts are contained within these pages.

## **Chapter One Welfare Recipients**

### **Introduction**

#### **(1.0) Relevance of the Issue**

In 1996, the United States Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) changed the country's main family assistance fund, Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) into Temporary Assistance for Needy children (TANF). The now temporary nature of this assistance was critically important and key to the future of financial support of single parents, the vast majority of whom are women. No longer could poor women with few skills, little education and small children rely on state aid so long as they remained poor and unemployed, for the imposition of the new act limited benefit to 60-months over the course of a lifetime. This approach now mandates self-sufficiency via a minimum of 40 hours per week of work, or attendance in welfare-to-work programmes with full-time employment as the ultimate goal for everyone considered capable of working.

The purpose of PRWORA is explicit: To increase parents' employment and decrease their reliance on welfare by:

1. Providing assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
2. Ending the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
3. Preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
4. Encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families

Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45-Public Welfare (2005: 117)

The relationships between various phenomena arise when PRWORA's goals are scrutinized. Walker and Wiseman (2003) suggest that, while a worthy objective, caring for the children of welfare recipients in their own homes or in the homes of relatives, fails to connect the objective of improving welfare to the aspirations of

Americans who desire that lone parents should work for their welfare. (p187). Further, it remains unclear is how individuals who may lack ability and dependability can move from welfare-to-work if employers place greater demands on them than they are able to provide. Increasing both self-reliance and ability to work are the goals of social services and training and education providers which are mandated to make these women 'work-ready'. What is also unclear is how quality and relevance are assessed, the reliability and validity of those assessments and the meaning of the term 'work-ready' when US low-wage and low-skilled work may prove a hostile environment for the 'hard to serve'<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the practicality of the current emphasis on two-parent family formation is questionable when it has been suggested that many fathers are neither good marriage material (Stack 1974; Nurse 2001) nor reasonable parent material (van Poppel 2000). Should this be the case, then addressing the reasons for males' lack of marriagability and parental quality would be a requisite part of policy analysis as would discourse on the causes and effects of out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

The argument made in this thesis is not that work is bad for poor single parents with few skills, but it is that the low-wage work environment is hostile to their needs and circumstances and that the tools of work, either for this generation of "hard-to-serve" individuals or their children, must be made available. To avail those tools from within the confines of the current infrastructure to the studied population has proven difficult, for we shall see that the much lauded success of welfare reform appears to diminish under scrutiny.

### **(1.1) Rationale for this Investigation**

As a former instructor in and coordinator of three education and training programmes for welfare recipients in the United States, my interests lay in the creation of academic and employment skills training for the most marginalised single parents who had been receiving welfare benefits for prolonged periods of

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<sup>1</sup> This term entered the post-1996 welfare reform vernacular and implies that there are some individuals who may be beyond the scope of the social services typically available at benefits agencies (Dion, Derr, Anderson and Pavetti (1999:1).

time. This mandated training was seldom able to attain the goals of increasing the employability of the women attending classes. That this was a failing of the programme design itself seemed plausible and resulted in the constant restructuring of course content in what were vain attempts to increase employability and decrease attrition. Yet still outcomes remained exceptionally poor. Classes were comprised of individuals who had missed the educational boat: they were learners who, for a variety of reasons, experience social exclusion due to economic and social severance from much of the rest of society. The specific group of individuals, about whom it seems we understand little, but who are made more visible than their real numbers warrant, are unmarried mothers with little or no employment skills and education who receive welfare payments in the form of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

A final experience in 2003 was the last straw that had slowly pressured me towards this research for some years. In the first six months of that year, the welfare-to-work programme I coordinated in the south Seattle area of the United States spent \$100,000. During this time, none of the 100 or so women with low basic skills who entered the programme left for what could possibly be sustainable or sustaining employment. Most left the programme for no work at all after their allotted time permitted for training had expired. There were various reasons for this. Several were overseas students with no history of formal education in their native languages. Yet, the only employment training provided for limited English speakers was for entry-level, minimum wage jobs as childcare providers. This training required them to read more English than most were able to speak and successful completion of the programme was low. Others, a clear majority, had exceptionally low basic academic skills and limited or no work histories. As a result, they were unable to develop a skill set worthy of employment in the short order afforded them by case managers.

All students had 12-22 weeks to complete their education and training at which point the expectation was to be 'work-ready' and available for full-time employment. The time span allotted for programme attendance was somewhat arbitrarily dictated by students' caseworkers and was always unrealistic. Also unrealistic was the requirement of a 40-hour workweek. The women in these

programmes overwhelmingly had little in the way of helpful or reliable support from family and friends, thus they were on their own to care for their children and establish childcare. Although social services paid for childcare, parents were often fearful of sending their children to places they knew little about. Even when they did, children would be prohibited from attending when unwell, which was not infrequently. At such a point, the parents were unable to attend classes. Likely, they would also be unable to work, and, because the minimum wage jobs seldom provide sick and holiday pay, if they failed to work, they also failed to receive a full pay cheque amounting to what was already below subsistence pay. Because students frequently returned to the college to request readmittance to the programme, it was possible to learn that this combination often proved lethal to their already tenuous employment status. Furthermore, childcare was often limited to daytime hours, women working shifts were often in the position of having to make unreliable or inappropriate arrangements for the care of their children. Whilst most welfare-to-work directors, programme administrators and case managers are well-meaning, it is possible that they fail not only to grasp the complexity of the problem at-hand but also, and as we shall see, either fail to fully understand TANF law or are compelled at the state or local level to a narrow legal interpretation. Some see provision of educational services plus vocational training as a clear recipe for success and wonder why students fail to attend classes and fail to succeed year after year. Others resent access to a free education. Further, the individuals who teach course content are, oftentimes, on loan from various other college departments and are not dedicated programme employees with an understanding of the lives many of these women lead. They, understandably, have preferences for volunteer students in their classrooms, and welfare-to-work students typically are not volunteers.

## **(1.2) Previous Research and Gaps**

The welfare rolls have decreased almost sixty percent since the implementation of TANF (Peck 2001; Department of Health and Human Services 2003; Office of Family Assistance 2004). Seemingly, many women who were temporarily in need of financial assistance are now better off. However, welfare can hardly be considered to have been effective in assisting a large population to leave welfare for

full-time or even part-time, sustainable work. With limited skills and experience, burdened by guilt, self-doubt and the scars of physical and emotional abuse (Walker and Wiseman 2003:178), the 'residual welfare caseload' (Courtney and Dworsky 2006:9) comprising of single mothers and particularly blacks<sup>2</sup> (Holzer 2001:79), lack even basic educational, social, employment and skills. They continue to remain unemployed and exceptionally poor (Holzer 2001; Courtney and Dworsky 2006). Indeed, Courtney and Dworsky found that of more than one thousand welfare recipients studied, some forty percent failed to work at any point during the nine months prior to assessment (p5). Moreover, social scientists, policy makers, policy implementers and training providers are quite aware that this group is little understood, and efforts to draw them from unemployment and poverty and into work and self-sufficiency have mostly failed (Pavetti 2000; Department of Health and Human Services 2000). It is for this reason that they retain the official social service title of "hard-to-serve". They fail to meet federal and state requirements and frequently are financially sanctioned for failure to comply with work and training demands. This has the effect of pushing both them and their children deeper into poverty. Even during the best economic times, they remain unattractive job candidates; most lack rudimentary academic skills and suffer enduring, often multiple barriers to sustaining employment (Administration for Children and Families 2004-online; Barriers to Economic Security 2001; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002:76; Walker 2003:183).

And yet, to-date, it is received wisdom that welfare reform has been a success. Even early naysayers, Christopher Jencks (Professor of Social Policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government) and Joseph Swingle (Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College) retracted their initial reservations and predictions that a human disaster would ensue as the effects of welfare reform became visible (Jencks and Swingle 2000; Jencks 2002; Jencks, Winship and Swingle 2006). Although the effects of welfare reform continue to be scrutinised, and there is broad political consensus about the social benefits to individuals of welfare reform, there exists a sizable group of women who appear to have been virtually excluded from public discourse, the research on welfare reform effectiveness and the social and

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the term black versus African American is addressed in the methods chapter.

economic consequences it has exacted upon them. Therefore, this thesis will explore the foundations of the claim that welfare reform has been a success and, where it appears to have failed, will address the factors that may have contributed. It will investigate structural, institutional and personal factors that contribute to this failure to attain the goals of PRWORA and, more significantly, whether it is possible to foster positive long-term change for the single mothers under investigation.

### **(1.3) Objectives of the Research**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the extent to which the goals of PRWORA have been met with particular focus on urban areas, primarily in the South Seattle area of Washington State. Explicitly, the objectives of this thesis are:

1. To investigate the effectiveness of and social policy implications in welfare-to-work programmes and their wider social policy implications;
2. To investigate the US welfare-to-work policy in action from structural, institutional and social perspectives;
3. To investigate empirically women on welfare to gain an understanding of “hard-to-serve” women’s personal characteristics, circumstances, their barriers to self-sufficiency and the extent to which they compromise these individuals’ chances of achieving PRWORA’s goals;
4. To investigate empirically ‘street level bureaucrats’ engaged in the management and education of “hard-to-serve” women in order to assess their motivations, inclinations, knowledge and effectiveness.
5. To assess the social and economic consequences of welfare reform, including training and education, for the hard to serve;
6. To draw out policy implications from the findings.



#### **(1.4) Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is set out as follows:

Chapter 2 discusses the methods employed in the research for this thesis. It sets out the parameters for the research methodology and outlines the rationale for the approaches undertaken during the course of this investigation.

Chapter 3 provides an historical account of US social policy which sets the context for welfare in action as it exists today. It addresses the main changes and developments in US welfare-to-work policy as a reaction against the Great Society era's 'liberal' reforms. It analyses the ability of the current incarnation of welfare reform to succeed in meeting its objectives. It investigates the employment outcomes of welfare-to-work programmes that cater to the 'hard to serve'. It explores employers' responses to the lowest-skilled welfare recipients. Lastly, because it is important to understand the nuances of case work, this chapter highlights the role of individuals closely involved in formally managing the lives of this body of women and the policy infrastructure that is imposed on implementers.

Chapter 4 further explores a number of social and economic factors affecting the ability of welfare recipients to find and sustain work and the nature and stability of their employment once they are employed. It describes 'hard to serve' women's personal characteristics, their barriers to self-sufficiency and the extent to which they impede their ability to work. It investigates US public opinion and the political context for welfare reform's popularity and policy-makers' motives. It analyses US-style low wage work and the employment atmosphere in which welfare recipients are likely to find themselves. It investigates the racial disparities in both welfare receipt and employment. It describes policy implementers' skills, characteristics, motivations and policy infrastructure encumbrances; the experiences of welfare rights advocates and others closely involved in managing and monitoring the lives of this body of women.

Chapter 5 is the first of three empirical chapters. This chapter explores the world of the benefits agency and the nature of the work of the case manager. It describes in their own words the characteristics of the clientele they serve, the perceived

prospects and views they have of these clients, the relationships they have with education providers to this population and the causes of low employment rates amongst programme participants.

Chapter 6 explores welfare-to-work programmes for the “hard-to-serve” population. The purpose of this chapter is to determine what occurs in these programmes and the rationale for the approach taken. It also examines the characteristics of the studied population and programme outcomes, and investigates those matters that seem to confound positive employment results for the “hard-to-serve”.

Chapter 7 is a case study of the lives of three welfare recipients who are close to exhausting their 5 years limit on welfare. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how they came to be living the lives that they have, how they may have benefited from their years ‘within the system’ and from the time and attention of case managers and education and training provision. Finally it explores how their lives have changed since the inception of their welfare receipt and the possibility that their life chances will change appreciably.

Chapter 8 concludes this thesis. It synthesises the data that emerged during the course of investigation and makes policy recommendations for future approaches to attending to the needs of the least employable of welfare recipients.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

Clearly, policy guides bureaucratic action which, in turn, acts upon welfare recipients. And, welfare recipients, by virtue of their actions, or perceived actions, then guide bureaucrats' behaviour and decisions (Krugman 2007; Parker West 2002). It is even conceivable that welfare recipients are manoeuvred into visibility in order to justify policy reforms based on whites' cultural and sexual anxieties regarding poor black mothers (Hancock 2004:34). It has been argued that such was the case when Governor Ronald Reagan took action against 'welfare queens' (a term popularised by Reagan to refer to unmarried mothers) and established policy based upon the repeated embellishment of a tale about a single woman (Schram and Neisser 1997:117; New York Times 1976:51). Similarly, Chunn and Gavigan (2004:220) found evidence of a demonisation of lone parents and point to 'the pride of place the focus on "welfare cheats" occupies in the current attack on the poor' (p220). The concentration of attention on the moral regulation of poor single parents, and 'the slight and grudging acknowledgement of social responsibility for the poor' (Chunn and Gavigan 2004:233) is part of this demonisation which has attempted to financially penalise women who take up residence with partners who are not the fathers of their children. In addition to the continuance of a political environment averse to non-working parents on benefit, given the longevity of programmes for welfare recipients it might reasonably have been assumed that they accomplish, at least in part, what they set out to accomplish. But Rossi (1999) forewarned that data derived from programme evaluation is likely to disappoint. Effectiveness assessments are expensive and time consuming and should not be attempted unless there are 'clear indications that they can be carried out successfully.... The probability that any given social program will prove to be effective is not high' (Rossi 1999:554). Such was the environment in which I was to undertake this study. Furthermore, welfare policy, policy interventions, enduring poverty, access to quality education and single parenthood are a minefield of many interconnected features that make for challenging investigation.

My first dilemma was recruitment of individuals with whom I should speak to seek guidance and reliable information, but, given my decade of daily exposure to the problems encountered by benefits agency administrators, case managers and the population on welfare in this study, I felt in somewhat of a secure position in determining who were the 'major players' in the field both for empirical and theoretical investigation. While the usefulness of my experience was a little overstated, Strauss and Corbin (1994) had encouraged this assumption by suggesting that effective theoretical coding is greatly enhanced by theoretical sensitivity. 'This consists of disciplinary or professional knowledge because the more theoretically sensitive researchers are to class, gender, race, power ... the more attentive they will be to these matters' (p280). Emboldened, with this in mind I sought further guidance from Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Glaser and Strauss (1968) for additional recommendations on how best to meet the goal of this thesis. In brief, the goal is to determine consequences of policy and make recommendations based on the broad findings. With little oversight and accountability, usually the task of preparing welfare recipients for employment is left to community and technical colleges' welfare-to-work programmes. Anticipating little change in state and federal demands made of women on welfare, i.e., to go to work or engage in education and training with work as the near-future plan, and despite some professional misgivings, I stayed focused on work as the implicit goal because this was where welfare reform had encountered many failures in ensuring the take up of employment and where the publicity of welfare reform success has been misleading (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Frequent reporting in the media indicated that that were far fewer single women on welfare and that welfare reform was a success. Yet, from my own experiences it seemed hard to believe that so many women were now suddenly employable. An initial delve into the research suggested that all was not as the media portrayed. Many of those women remain unemployed, churn within the labour market, some are worse off and the costs of implementing welfare reform have increased although remain far below those of other western industrialised nations (these matters are raised in Chapter 3). But, how could this population of women be encouraged into the take up of work? And, in lieu of this, what are the policy problems, implications

and recommendations for those unable to meet the employment demands of the state?

I confess to having embarked on this research with hunches about, and biases against, President Clinton, case managers' approaches, what could be accomplished by short-term training, welfare policy and the welfare bureaucracy itself. It was here where it became necessary to temper my enthusiasm for what I perceived as seeking justice for the disaffected and focus my attention by ensuring that my task,

1. Enable the prediction and explanation of behavior
2. Be useful in advancing an understanding of the effects of welfare policy
3. Be usable in practical applications
4. Provide perspective on behavior

Glaser and Strauss 1968:3

It was important, therefore, I theorize primarily via data and not intuition. Wanting to ensure the integrity of the findings by not approaching the topic with too many preconceived ideas, the primary aim was to determine precisely what I was dealing with in terms of policy, professionals working amongst the studied population and mothers on welfare themselves (Strauss and Corbin 1998:12). That is, what were the factors acting against the employment of the welfare mothers, the needs of whom I wanted to address? Here, Strauss and Corbin articulate a need for description to 'convey what was (or is) going on, what the setting looks like, what the people involved are doing...' (p16). Fundamentally, what was to occur was a case study of variables impacting on a population of "hard-to-serve" single mothers, the purpose of which 'is to gather information so that a description of what is going on can be made' (Bouma 1996:89) and a prescription for advising on alternative approaches offered.

This chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part describes the rationale for, and process of, collecting data and generating the knowledge necessary for this investigation. Part two explains the underlying principles guiding the collection of empirical data. Part three provides details of how a variety of potentially confounding matters were addressed.

## **Part 1**

### **(1.0) Research Data Collection**

#### **Validity, reliability, generalisability**

Generating theory from qualitative research grounded in data collected was clearly a suitable methodology for this study, as it would help generate images of the effects of policy on the employment patterns of the poorest and least work-ready single parents under scrutiny. Furthermore, theoretical conceptualization ensured that I attempt to establish evidence of ‘patterns of action between and among various types of social units’ (Strauss and Corbin 1994:278) in order to specify the conditions and consequences of individuals’ actions and thus create predictability. In this case, the patterns of action were policy and people interacting with and acting upon limited-skilled women on welfare.

As with all assessments, there would be immediate concerns regarding validity, reliability, generalisability as well as about the research process and the empirical grounding of the research findings. I was aware that critique about the research process would likely fall into several criteria,

1. How the original sample was selected
2. What categories emerged
3. How theoretical sampling proceeded
4. How and why the core category was selected

I knew ‘multiple perspectives must be systematically sought’ and that the perspectives of individuals ‘judged to be significantly relevant must be incorporated into the emerging theory’ (Strauss and Corbin 1994:280). But the question remained, ‘How do I acquire the knowledge to find the answers?’. Bouma and Atkinson (1995) suggest, ‘consult an authority’ and acknowledge that ‘opinions, unless grounded in special knowledge relevant to [the topic] are of no consequence’ (p4). I began the process by seeking out leadership from experienced professionals in the areas of welfare reform implementation and academia. Already I had a fair idea of where to begin from my former employment and the plethora of data emerging that had evaluated the effects of welfare reform since its inception. The

plan was for them to assist me through the process of clarifying who are the other individuals critical in the social welfare policy process and what would be effective data and collection methods given the research objectives.

Whilst establishing who the likely experts were, another challenge presented itself: i.e., precisely what should I ask of those to be interviewed for empirical investigation? It was already growing apparent from my literature search that the academic and employment outcomes of significant numbers of welfare-to-work programmes were questionable, yet policy implementers still require their clients to attend such training. Furthermore, as a long-term educator of social services ‘‘hard-to-serve’’, I had some instincts as to what it was possible to accomplish with short-term, indeed any term, training of people with exceptionally low skills or other problems that seemed to restrict their take up of employment. In reality, even given reasonably stable individuals with limited ‘baggage’, so long as they have academic deficiencies, twelve to twenty-two weeks of education and training is generally insufficient to accomplish anything of much practical value. The reason for the twelve to twenty-two week time span allocated to the education of the least-skilled is that they are thought unlikely to benefit from longer-term training. At this point, then, I knew only two things. First, the education, training and ultimate employment goals of many programmes with a low skilled student body were consistently unmet. Indeed, it appeared that these education and training programmes were providing little in the way of any educational advancement or job training for the lowest-skilled. Second, while some programmes appeared to have a haphazard approach to instruction, the characteristics of their student body left the distinct impression that they were in want of something more than the average education provider could furnish in short order. This posed something of a problem. Outcome data looked poor, but I would need to ensure that interviews with welfare-to-work programme directors would elicit useful information, so it would be important that they not be on the defensive. This, however, could be said of all of the contacts that I would make.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest paying attention to the following principles when attempting to develop questions I felt needed answering. Apart from theoretical enquiry, there would be two groups of people investigated: the implementers of

welfare policy and those acted upon, all of which would serve the developing theoretical formulation. I designed an initial list with the following in mind. There are:

1. Sensitising questions which attune the researcher into what the data might be indicating;
2. Theoretical questions which assist the researcher to see the process, variation and concept development;
3. Practical and structural questions which help with the development of the structure of evolving theory;
4. Guiding questions which steer in-person interviews, observations and analyses (Strauss and Corbin 1998:77-78).

In addition to this, I was to consider the overall purpose of the enquiry as fulfilling the requirements of a thesis and satisfying the examiners. The questions were to be qualitative and practical in nature and ultimately lead to knowledge that could be applied in the field (Patton 2002:13). The purpose of selecting as many in-person interviews as possible was to ensure my ability to take part in observational analysis which could be descriptive of the people and situations being investigated (p21-22). This, I anticipated, would be of greatest help for fully understanding the circumstances of the welfare recipients themselves.

### **Empirical Research: Handling the data**

Once more it was with guidance from Strauss and Corbin (1994, 1998) that I developed a two-branched approach to the methodology. Branch one involved empirical investigation by gaining access to a specific body of people who work daily, ostensibly with the interests of welfare recipients and applied policy in mind. It also included the recipients themselves. Contact with these interviewees would be by way of informal interviews, with the questions previously brainstormed via Strauss and Corbin's listed question development advice above then piloted to several of the players with the intent of refining the parameters of what was to be asked. That is, 'The first step in the piloting process will involve showing your



provisional themes and questions to colleagues and experts in the fields for their critical review' (David and Sutton 2004:89). The lists drawn up were then disseminated to those individuals who had offered to pilot the questions before the revised interview guideline was distributed to educational programme managers, benefits agency administrators and case managers.

A semi-structured interview protocol served as an aide de memoire and general guideline for gaining insight into the key areas of interest. Lists of questions (see Appendices) were drafted as a guide for the individuals taking part. Directors of the three 'exemplary' welfare-to-work programmes critiqued the contents of the list to be used with other programmes prior to use. The Director (2004 Recorded interview, 13 May) of the region benefits agencies critiqued the list used in the interviews with case managers, social workers and administrators. Since not all of the questions were appropriate for use with those working outside of the central areas of case management and education provision, I selected questions of particular interest from the list and supplemented them with questions on topics that arose during the course of conversation.

The questions were, in essence, a guide that I hoped would lead to tangential discussions on topics of greater use. These semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit the broadest possible responses, followed by additional and more detailed in-person interviews, telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence for as long as necessary and as employees would tolerate. These open-ended questions permit understanding of the world as seen by the respondents and capture their points of view more efficiently than would adherence to a selection of established questions (Patton 2002:21). Further, they provide opportunities for what may be useful and unexpected deviation (Burnham, Gilland, Grant and Layton-Henry 2004: 213). All the in-person and telephone interviews with professionals in the field were recorded, the purpose of recorded conversations was to allow for greater attention to be paid to the interviewee (Patton 2002:381). For the record, to create a frame of reference, all interviewees were informed that I was once involved in the design of and instruction in welfare-to-work programmes and advised that their comments during the course of our conversations would remain pseudonymous.

According to Lofland (1971), there are four mandates for collecting qualitative data such as this. One must get close enough to both the people and situation under investigation, capture what is actually occurring, include ample details about the people and the settings and include direct quotes (p4). These direct quotes are a basic source of raw data and reveal individuals' thoughts about what is happening and their perceptions (Patton 2002:21). By selecting this method, I was able to develop fairly enduring and amicable relationships with administrators and case managers at benefits agencies, with welfare-to-work programme directors and managers not in the Seattle area and with three welfare recipients and one former recipient. With another, namely at the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), my sense is that I was perceived as an enemy of the ethos that education is a cure-all for poverty and disaffection. Although I had no tangible reason for sensing this, the interviewee appeared irritable and promoted the effects of training and education more forcefully than seemed necessary. While I was in no way an opponent of the ethos, it seemed to be a label that was difficult to disabuse him of once it became applied.

Whilst engaged in dialogue with the professionals, I was able to clarify certain givens<sup>3</sup>, the knowledge, perceptions, biases of all the partners engaged in the welfare plan, the interrelatedness of professionals' positions and the perceptions, biases and hopes of the women receiving welfare. Seven of the nine Seattle area educational programme directors and managers were less willing to engage with me. Precisely why this was remains unclear, but likely reasons may reflect programme ineffectiveness, perceived criticism, intrusion into their practices and outcomes, or, also quite possible, the manner I went about requesting data. My initial contact with all of the programmes was by way of an e-mail sent to directors with an attached document citing the legal nature of public disclosure (see Appendix C). In hindsight, this was an error. By appearing heavy-handed instead of what I hoped was simply formal, it may have fostered the animus I perceived. Such reticence to provide data was precisely what I hoped to avoid, but they proved unwilling to share

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<sup>3</sup> Under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, federal law states that the disabled (learning, physical) must be provided with access to special services, i.e., public and private agencies must provide modified desks, tutors, learning disabilities assessment, computers with voice recognition software etc. where appropriate. The reality is that public agencies seldom have the financial wherewithal to fund much beyond the secondary educational norm.

public data on programme outcomes. Eventually, I was able to visit four of the colleges, two of which highly amenable to questioning. However, after attempting to acquire the required data for six weeks at one college and eight weeks at another, I made a formal complaint against two college departments to the Washington State Office of the Attorney General. This had the effect I hoped for, and the last of the access to information was provided. In a subsequent conversation with one a research analyst at Renton Technical College, had I not given the initial impression of officiousness, he may have been more likely to comply with my request. This was a lesson well learned.

Although it is clear that an important distinction between research and general experience is that research relies upon carefully documented data from which conclusions are formed, I transcribed and quoted only the parts of our conversations that were relevant to the subjects under investigation. It was practical to avoid transcribing the recorded interviews in their entirety because it is possible to listen to interview recordings multiple times in order to better discover what sections are important enough to transcribe, which sections need to be summarised and which sections should be ignored (McLellan et al. 2003; Patton 2002). Because transcripts 'are not the rock-bottom data of interview research' (Kvale:163), I undertook my first data reduction step after repeatedly listening to the voice recordings, and over time it became possible to decide what should be transcribed and what could be left out by taking into account the contribution that each made to the research (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Thus, on listening to the interviews and learning how to better engage and elicit information by scrutinising my mistakes (too fast; too quiet), it became possible to use word-for-word transcriptions of some sections only and abbreviate others when typing up the interviews, therefore adding more value and less volume to the development of a complete image of what was happening. With this in mind, I used the following steps for reporting significant interview quotations, which came by way of Kvale (1996:266).

1. The quotes should be related to the general text.
2. The quotes should be contextualized.
3. The quotes should be interpreted.
4. There should be a balance between quotes and text.

5. The quotes should be short.
6. Use only the most relevant quote.
7. Interview quotes should be rendered in a written style.

In addition to these steps, it should be noted that no quotes were summarised prior to complete verbatim transcription (McLellan et al.2003:65). Once collected, the principles of comparative analysis were used once again to analyse and understand the data. Most interviewees' responses were collated into themes so as to create a body of answers more easily analysed and understood. When the time came to document the interview findings, not only were the questions assembled by theme, but also they were organised iteratively by the responses of professionals with similar authority, i.e., administrators and case managers with peripheral input from social workers. As necessary, respondents' answers were compared and contrasted to clarify or make a point.

A very different template was used for welfare recipients, however, who may be better understood by attempting to see them as whole persons and not simply as a body of data collated according to themes as was the case with individuals working with welfare recipients. Unlike the policy implementers who had to carry out a job, albeit with significant discretion (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of the autonomy exercised by case managers), the women on welfare required that a more complete image of them be developed so that it would be possible to look at their lives, past and present, as a whole. What I wanted to obviate with the women was compartmentalising their circumstances: such an approach would have been unhelpful to establishing the essence of the person, for by establishing this I would have better opportunities to evaluate their entire situations and predict life chances based on their histories and current trajectories. With this in mind, the approach taken here was to establish a case history.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) outlined several important criteria for developing valid and reliable theory. These reduce to ensuring both the applicability of the data to the phenomena under investigation and the development of a complete understanding by providing generality and control. This particular approach worked effectively for the analysis of the interviews in this study generally but particularly with regards to

analysis of the interviews and subsequent informal meetings with welfare recipients in addition to case managers. For example, it was possible to detect early on in the process that the quality of recipients' relationships with case managers was based upon a number of interrelated factors:

1. The great mobility of case managers within and out of the CSOs (Community Service Office or benefits agency).
2. Both groups' feelings of reciprocated respect/disrespect
3. Perceptions and use of power or lack thereof
4. Feelings of Us versus Them.

With this systematic approach, I hoped to establish the real world ramifications of policy-in-action.

### **Overview of interviews conducted**

A total of 36 individuals were interviewed for this investigation and is as follows. The precise rationale for the recruitment of each is expressed later in this chapter:

#### **In Person:**

1. Three long-term welfare recipients;
2. One Seattle-based regional manager. This individual is the overseer of all of the area benefits agencies;
3. Four benefits agency administrators located in the general vicinity of south Seattle: Renton, West Seattle, Burien and Tacoma;
4. Five case managers: two in Renton, two in Burien, one in Auburn;
5. One WorkFirst programme supervisor in Renton: acts as direct supervisor to the case managers;
6. One social worker (one case manager held a dual position of social worker/case manager. See Chapter Four: Interviews with Gate Keepers, Case Managers and Social Workers for a clarification of the qualifications of case managers);

7. Three education and training programme directors, one programme manager, and one placement specialist at Highline Community College, Seattle Vocational Institute and Renton Technical College;
8. Three education and training programme directors from officially recognised colleges in Portland, Oregon; Riverside, California, and Des Moines, Iowa;
9. One counselor at Renton Technical College welfare-to-work programme;
10. One Employment Security counselor at North Seattle WorkSource benefits agency;
11. One welfare-to-work 'programme specialist' at the Burien benefits agency;
12. One senior lecturer in social welfare at the University of Washington school of social work;
13. One Ghanaian national at a Seattle (Capitol Hill) benefits agency.

By telephone:

1. Four education and training programme coordinators. Three of these were from programmes that had previously been studied and found to be officially recognised exemplary examples of effective programmes. These were in Portland, Oregon; Des Moines, Iowa, and Riverside, California. The additional individual operated in Tacoma and was the director of Goodwill Industries welfare-to-work programme;
2. One 'ranking' member of the State Board of Community and Technical College in Olympia, Washington;
3. One Seattle Jobs Initiative director of strategic planning and policy.

By e-mail only was:

1. One 'ranking' individual at the Department of Education office of Washington State TANF data collection;
2. One dean and professor at University of Manitoba Faculty of Social Work.

## **Literature Review**

Branch two involved a review of existing data. Bouma and Atkinson (1995) suggest there should exist multi-level phases to research, and in this investigation data

collection in the form of a literature review and the subsequent analysis and interpretation were married to form a single unit of investigation, i.e., Branch two. The reasons for bonding these two areas were quite rational. Instead of a straightforward literature review followed by analysis and interpretation, the relevant studies of literature are woven into an unfolding story with ongoing analysis and interpretation followed by a conclusion. The purpose of such an approach was to create greater readability and clarity. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) understand the relevance of storytelling and call upon researchers to, 'embrace the interaction of multiple actors, and because they emphasize temporality and process, they indeed have a striking fluidity' (p279). Further,

Individuals do not live in a vacuum but within the context of their accumulated knowledge, life experiences and surroundings. Understanding as opposed to explanation, can be gained from an empathetic approach rather than from the reflective reconstruction of others (Gittins 1999:2).

This provided an opportunity to apply what was learned as my knowledge broadened and deepened. Because it involves constant analysis and synthesis of information, this is a cyclical not a linear process. Furthermore, the research was timely and there was a constant release of research on many of the topics under investigation. In essence, the literature became so multi-faceted that making sense of it was more readily done as a rolling process as new data came available.

### **Geographic Constraints**

For telephone interviews with welfare-to-work programme directors, I endeavoured to select programmes located in US urban areas with similar populations and challenges to those experienced in south Seattle, Washington State. The focus of the study on the geographic area of south Seattle is significant for several practical reasons. Because I needed significant and potentially repeated in-person contact with welfare agency case managers in addition to welfare recipients, it was necessary that these interview locations be physically accessible and, as a prisoner of circumstance, I live in Seattle. Furthermore, it is where the recommendations arising from the study's findings would likely be implemented or of interest,

therefore creating greater transferability. Also, given that administrators have significant autonomy within their own Community Services Organisations, a full understanding of the individual CSOs culture, policy and procedures would prove beneficial sooner for this research, and hopefully later, for implementation. This depth of knowledge is likely to come only from the kind of familiarity borne of direct access, both of which I have in metropolitan Seattle for the reason described above.

## **Part 2**

### **(1.1) Empirical Data Collection**

#### **Recruitment**

Benefits agency professionals selected and recruited to provide data for this thesis grew from the first contact made. This was the regional director of all the social service agencies in and around the greater Seattle area. He was first approached in the hope that he could assist with access to case managers. This individual not only provided directives to agency administrators to provide broad and repeated access as I desired, but he also helped narrow the field to involve five agencies that fall within districts with high rates of continued unemployment of “hard-to-serve” women.

Narrowing the area containing the agencies with greater challenges than others led directly to the nearby colleges that are supplied by the agencies with “hard-to-serve” low-skilled welfare recipients requiring education and training. The matter then was to gain access to programme directors and, by way of them, other individuals who work within programmes designed specifically with the future employment of welfare recipients in mind. Once contacted, this network of individuals proved mostly agreeable to providing information but there were varying degrees of success (as was indicated on page 16).

Other individuals recruited for information were sought as a result of reading research which pointed in their direction. In terms of education providers, these involved programmes considered exemplary in eliciting work from the lowest-



skilled and which existed in varying locations across the United States. One programme that would have been beneficial to access was in Riverside California, but the programme director neither responded to e-mails nor to telephone calls. In lieu of this, I selected another California programme with challenges of the sort I had in mind. Another contact came as a result of data collected on self-sufficiency and income derived from welfare benefits. In attempting to trace this individual, it happened that that she no longer lived and worked in Washington DC, but, fortuitously, lived in Seattle and lectured at the University of Washington School of Social Work. Thus we were able to meet and exchange several e-mails.

Finally, details of how the case studies of three women on welfare were able to occur are available in Chapter Seven.

### **Professionals**

In an attempt to answer my questions and address the needs of the women, it was important that I connect with all those intimately involved in the daily lives of welfare recipients. They are those who have knowledge of state and federal policies and experience in addressing the demands of the state and the needs of the women and families in this study. These individuals comprise a reasonably small group. They include a number of individuals mostly limited to two settings: policy implementers within social service agencies and welfare-to-work programme directors or coordinators in colleges.

To some extent, the task of precisely whom to approach for information seemed straightforward. I knew an evaluation of 'recognised' welfare-to-work programmes was necessary to determine how and why they do what they do, and that a mirror could be held against those of little or no repute. Further, as mentioned earlier, I knew CSO administrators were gatekeepers to many of the individuals who attended to the needs of hard to serve single women every day. It was only by way of a number of individuals who acted beyond the call of duty that I was able to gain access, and when I did the reception was effusive.

This effusiveness raises another, rather more perplexing, point which is unrelated to the topic but in itself is briefly notable in its relevance and helpfulness to the research. Jones (2001), an English associate professor of sociology at Philadelphia University, explores English identities in the USA. In it, she states that the English behave, somehow, more English when they visit the United States and that we use our status of privileged foreigners from the motherland to get what we want by pandering to the admiration of the native population by playing the Englishness up or down to suit our needs. It was this book that came to mind when I began to receive a startling amount of assistance from what appeared to be busy people. At first I had hoped that this line of research was considered simply valuable enough to be supportive of, but then a few significant individuals used the word 'anglophile' and 'we really like you guys over here' and 'Do you like Benny Hill?', and I could no longer remain misled that they supported me for the value of my thesis. While at no time did I wish to misrepresent myself or appear anything other than a student from the University of Liverpool, the level of attention encountered was invaluable and for which I am exceptionally grateful. Without it, it seems doubtful that the degree of assistance and access would have been greatly diminished or, at the very least, more onerous a task to elicit

Originally, the research for this thesis was set up in the form of gathering quantitative data based on questionnaires dispatched to formal places of work where addressing the needs of welfare recipients are dealt with on a daily basis. Following this, I would then utilise qualitative, semi-structured interviews with welfare-to-work students using an aide de memoire as a guide. However, while the advantage of quantitative data is that theoretically it is reliable and replicable and less subject to accusations of subjectivity, after significant deliberation, it seemed that surveys would be unsuitable for two reasons: Given the need for large enough samples to secure reliable data, a sampling size of about 50 individuals per profession involved with TANF recipients would be a reasonable goal since I could expect only to have returned somewhere in the region of 12 to 15 completed questionnaires. Additionally, and more importantly, it seemed practical that if individuals wanted to discuss topics in greater detail, then open-ended questions taken from a interview topic guide sent prior to the interview would provide individuals with the possibility

for greater elaboration and therefore more detailed answers. This correlates with guidance from Strauss and Corbin (1998:77-78).

For these reasons, before embarking on the main research I sent pilot interview questions to individuals I hoped to have access to later and who were employed in positions of interest. The intention of this was to provide feedback on the quality of the questions raised and ensure I left nothing out that required addressing. The feedback received at this juncture was both invaluable and gratifying for it appeared that I had omitted little that required attention.

When the time arrived to approach the interviewees, along with the introductory e-mail I attached the list of questions to be raised. The reason for this was to provide individuals with the opportunity for consideration of the questions, and therefore be fully prepared for the taped interview that was to occur at a prearranged time either in person or by telephone. It was also intended to give them time to opt out should they so choose.

I piloted the interview questions for welfare-to-work programmes with three individuals who were directors of 'noteworthy' programmes in urban areas of Oregon and California and a more rural community in Iowa. The director of an additional programme recognised by the Bush (W) Administration initially voiced considerable interest in talking part, but later neglected to respond to further requests for participation. The programmes that did take part were determined as notable mostly by way of their reductions in the numbers of recipients on welfare during the early days of welfare reform. While this was not much to go on, indeed subsequent chapters indicate that many recipients left welfare for nothing other than continued unemployment, it was, and remains, the measurement of success. Still, although the programmes used for the pilot the original aide de memoires did, on the whole, appear to have greater professional longevity and ties to community employers than their less noteworthy counterparts, it should be recognised that comparing long-existing programmes to Seattle area programmes of shorter duration is a limitation of this research.

To refine the parameters for discussion, the sample of individuals targeted for interview was asked to vet the questions for appropriateness, redundancy and

relevance to the purpose of the research goal. The questions for welfare-to-work professionals (Appendix B) were designed to discover the elements affecting their ability to promote employment among “hard-to-serve” welfare recipients. Twenty seven questions were employed which clarified the characteristics of the student population, size, classes available, programme integration and communication with external departments and agencies, externally imposed requirements about the nature and duration of education, qualifications and longevity of instructors and training and data collection methods of programme completion and employment. After a single critique was considered and the minor change made, I began the process of recording the conversations responding to the questions by starting with the three directors from California, Oregon and Iowa.

### **The Importance of 'Street Level Bureaucrats'**

Michael Lipsky (1980) coined the phrase ‘street level bureaucrats’ in an attempt to explain policy in action. He examined what happens at the point where the public policies of various human service bureaucracies such as welfare agencies are translated into practice. Lipsky argues that, in essence, policy implementation comes down to the people who actually implement it, and that they ‘have considerable discretion in determining the nature, amount, and quality of benefits and sanctions’ in the daily execution of their work (p.13). Further, he states that the ways in which bureaucrats deliver these benefits and sanctions have considerable impact upon individuals’ lives by delineating people’s opportunities (p4). Lipsky articulates the experiences of a number of academics who have studied such front line workers and who found policies implemented and interpreted in varying ways therefore creating irregularity. Additional features of the case management of welfare recipients have caused confusion and frustration, highlighted disciplinary and social control issues and intimidation and mistrustful treatment (Meyers et al. 2006; Herd et al. 2003; Meyers et al. 1998; Krieken 1991). With this in mind, it was clearly appropriate to include interviews with those street level bureaucrats who put policy in to practice.

If Lipsky was accurate in his assessment of human service agencies, and if DeParle (2004) was correct with his own, first hand-evaluation of staff as rigid and

discontented, then it would be important to my research to connect solidly and repeatedly with social services employees who put policy into action and who connect with welfare recipients and make decisions for them based on their own interpretations of policy.

Fundamentally, the approach taken to access welfare implementation professionals was continued everywhere I hoped to have repeated contact and access. With welfare offices, initially it proved difficult to gain either telephone or e-mail addresses of Community Service Office administrators, and once my thesis topic was raised at the General Information telephone line level that access became increasingly onerous a task. It proved a delicate matter for me to gain more than the promise of cooperation and I was grateful for a personal introduction, which facilitated getting my foot physically in one door. But there were additional doors I hoped, needed, to open. Finally, wider access came by way of contact with the regional director (in chapter 4, this individual is referred to as The Director) to all the area benefits agencies. This individual then sent e-mails to administrators at the five locations in which I had expressed interest. This particular interest was as a result of the nature of the areas they serve. The e-mails advised administrators of my wishes and asked them to help in any way possible. One administrator made himself available in principle but then retracted his promise of access when his case managers voiced concerns about speaking on tape. In time, I was able to interview four administrators who then provided further rights of way.

Even in the early days of this research I knew the importance of access to administrators could not be overstated, but I had yet to learn the finer points of why that access was so vital. Without administrators' assent, no agency employee would have been available for discussion and contact with case managers was central to the matter of understanding the situation. They face, quite literally, hard-to-serve single women every day and implement, with a personal flair, the policy of the federal and state government. While I did not know it at the onset of this investigation, these individuals have significant freedom in creating or denying access to services for their TANF clients. Indeed, it was precisely as Lipsky predicted. As one programme director stated, '... we sometimes run in to the problem of case managers having an attitude of "why do clients need more

education than I might have?"'(Steps-to- Success, 2004, recorded telephone interview, 19 April).

### **Welfare Recipients**

This study would not have been complete without hearing from the women themselves. Originally I intended to interview between twenty and thirty TANF recipients. The reasons for this were fourfold: First, ten seemed too little a number to get an accurate picture of the general circumstances of the hard to serve population. Second, unless I took pains to stagger the locations of my interviews, there was some likelihood that the first six to eight would all come from one class (i.e., in a college, not social class), therefore providing results which could mean a loss of the ability to generalise the findings to elsewhere. Third, given that these are interviews and not questionnaires, interviewee numbers approaching the forty mark seemed too onerous an undertaking and, ultimately, not realistic given that I expected to have somewhere between six and eight individual volunteers per local college welfare-to-work provider, i.e., four in the area under investigation. Fourth, the number of twenty to thirty interviewees falls firmly in-line with current interview studies. While this information is comforting, it seemed sensible that although numbers were of obvious importance, that quality of data gathered and interview expertise in both subject matter and human interaction would be most significant (Kvale 1996:148-149)

Based upon their enrolment in basic skills classes, women enrolled in welfare-to-work programmes were initially selected for their theoretical status as “hard-to-serve” welfare recipients. Unfortunately, I was unable to distinguish the precise reasons for their presence until the pilot interview process had begun. Yet, by sheer virtue of the fact that they were all TANF recipients attending to studies in basic skills, it was entirely plausible that they were also unlikely to have high school diplomas or GEDs<sup>4</sup>, be hard to help into employment from the perspective of case managers, unlikely to be considered employable from the perspective of employers

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<sup>4</sup> The GED (General Educational Development) is an alternative, but not well thought of, to the high school diploma.

and thus, by my definition, 'hard-to-serve'. In time, however, I grew dissatisfied with the outcomes of the interviews for a number of reasons explained in greater detail in Chapter Seven, Case Studies of Welfare Recipients. One of the reasons, however, addressed the following,

If you are interested in what people believe, rather than their behaviour, it is important that this be clearly communicated. If you are interested in what people do rather than what they say, you have another serious issue. This concerns motivation. What motivates an interviewee to answer questions? (David and Sutton 2004:89).

Clearly, I was interested in addressing both of these matters, but short interviews hardly fostered the openness and details I hoped to solicit and thus were not 'rich in the personal details of those from whom it is collected' (David and Sutton 2004:91). Furthermore, 'It is possible that questions may address things that the interviewee is unable to answer. A respondent may not have access to certain kinds of information, even about themselves ... People's own lives are not entirely transparent even to themselves' (p.89). This resonated particularly for the population I was interested in, and so I decided more details would be required to flesh out their real-life situations. This I anticipated would come through frequent and intimate access to them for it was clear obvious that only through repeated access over time would I develop a picture with the necessary details. Thus, it was with Kvale's earlier recommendation for human interaction in mind, and despite the fact that I had already interviewed some ten women, that I re-evaluated this particular interview process which had born little fruit. The contact I had with each had been quite perfunctory, involving approximately an hour of conversation guided by a list of open-ended questions but with limited possibility of follow-up. The brief nature of the interviews engendered a lack of intensity which scratched the surface of what I hoped to learn.

After reading *American Dream* by De Parle (2004), a senior writer about welfare issues at the New York Times, and some months after beginning interviewing, I was motivated by the author's experiences with three women on welfare also to follow fewer women but learn about them in far greater detail than I had been able to previously. At that point I asked case managers for assistance to access the

population under investigation. The initial result at one agency bore no fruit. Indeed, the only interest shown in speaking with me was voiced by one 'older' (possibly in her fifties) woman who said she would speak with me if I could have her work requirement removed. Unfortunately for her, I did not have that authority. Another agency case manager was able to better assist. The result was that I, too, had a couple of women who were willing to speak and meet with me regularly. An additional contact came by way of a fortuitous meeting with a former recipient who didn't quite meet my definition of "hard-to-serve" but who was instructive nevertheless. This contact lead directly to another long-term welfare recipient. Greater details of these meetings in provided in Chapter Seven.

Although two to three more women would have been preferable to conduct case studies on, it simply failed to materialise without what I felt was harassment of case managers. Still, they were 'hard-to-serve' and, at first face, appeared to be no better off after nearly five years of assistance and education and training than they were when they first became eligible for welfare. Initially, I thought that paying the women would be helpful to my gaining repeated access, but after starting the payments with one individual named Lucy at \$10 per hour, I began to fear this may taint the information that I hope to gain. With the other two interviewees, I did not offer cash and they remained not only amenable to my persistent intrusions but both sought to communicate with me over time as their situations changed.

Development of the questions to be raised with welfare recipients took a different path than that used previously with working professionals. While I had a list of questions, I did not use questionnaires with this population. There were three primary reasons for this. First, many 'hard-to-serve' have few academic skills and do not write well; therefore, it was feasible that I would be unable to interpret their responses without wanting clarification, explanation or expansion. Second, less formality may create an opportunity for greater elaboration. Third, because I was aware from professional experience that some welfare recipients are mistrustful of authority, it seemed prudent to be as unofficial as possible and ensure that interviewees understood they could speak both freely and pseudonymously. Reinforcing the appropriateness of informality, Finch (1997) and Henn, Weinstein, Foard and Wenn (2006) point out that in women-to-women interviews a relaxed



approach can be exceptionally effective, for it fosters the establishment of a rapport and is more useful in terms of promoting the fullness and frankness advocated by both Patton (2002) and Lofland (1971). Therefore, a combination of past experience interviewing and teaching TANF recipients, significant review of the literature on 'hard-to-serve' populations, characteristics and barriers, and peer review by two managers in Seattle area programmes aided the development of useful questions that I would want to consider.

Exploration into fairly intimate details of the lives of these women would prove useful. I hoped to predict and explain their behaviour, motivations and provide perspective on their behaviour (Glaser and Strauss 1968:3). I could do this only if I knew them; thus we became friendly, if not quite friends, and our dialogue was more of 'a shared exchange of information, rather than a one-way extraction of data' (Henn et al. 2006:164). What I wanted to know of them was how they attained and maintained their status of single parents on welfare, how time limits would affect them and make predictions of how they may fair in the future. I also felt the need to understand their attitudes, beliefs, values, knowledge and experiences, all of which would not be fostered by way of brief interviews. With the help of two case managers and some inductive work of my own, the women I selected were all were within nine months of their sixty months lifetime entitlement to welfare. The proximity of the potential income severance or curtailment dates ensured I would have the opportunity to witness what actually happened when the federal time limits were reached. To complete the picture, I would need other details that would allow me to ascertain their:

- educational history and attainment
- work history
- experiences of being on assistance
- perceptions of their relationships with social service employees and educators
- understanding of State's plan for them and how they feel about those demands

- aspirations and practicality of the demands based on level of education, training and experience and likelihood of case managers' support through to attainment of those goals
- living situation

Because I anticipated that this group of women would not necessarily be the most articulate (this was incorrect) or the best critical thinkers (this was correct), I anticipated there being value to providing them with the opportunity to voice their points of view in the form of open-ended and repeated informal conversations. Further, it felt reasonable they give voice because, '... a sub-set of the "working class" – including unwaged home workers, women on welfare, low wage service and domestic workers and immigrant women ... engaged in day labor – is co-opted, erased and rendered silent' (Adair 2005:819). Seemingly 'they are unwelcome and ostracised in the fight for labour rights and undeserving – because they are not "real workers" - of any positive ramifications that may emerge from rallying, lobbying or protesting' (p818).

My hope was to be able to draw from them useful information to help me determine their employment and educational experiences and needs, their interests and personal investments in training and education and their experiences and perceptions of welfare-to-work programmes. Based upon these factors and the barriers they have to full time employment, I hoped to determine the expediency of the federal government and state's demands on them. Lastly, should there have been particular circumstances and characteristics present in those welfare recipients who were likely to fail in meeting policy's demands, I hoped to find alternate solutions to the failed policy impacting them.

### **'Successful' Programmes**

I hoped to have access to four welfare-to-work programme directors who have taken part in programmes considered particularly successful by The Urban Institute (Pavetti, Olson et al. 1996), the federal government (Mills and Ellis 2000), and a

British study of successful US welfare-to-work programmes (Pinto-Duschinsky 2001).

- Delta College Calworks programme in Stockton, California. Because it is more highly considered, a better programme to study would have been the CalWorks in Riverside, but access to directors was more difficult than at Delta. This may have related to the fact that Riverside has endured rigorous study and persistent attention in recent years. Still, Delta college was of some interest as it has a particularly arduous task given that the majority of the area population is on public assistance and who face a multitude of barriers not atypical of low income areas generally but certainly more concentrated, including high levels of unemployment, substance abuse, crime and poverty.
- Portland Community College Steps-to-Success programme in Oregon is regarded as one of the most successful large-scale mandatory welfare-to-work efforts studied. The programme seems to take something of a holistic approach to training, education and life enhancement by providing drug and alcohol and mental health counselling, specialised services for teen parents and non-native speakers of English, post employment counselling and skill enhancement training.
- The Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Program (FaDSS) in Iowa was formally evaluated between 1987 and 1992, during which time it had comparative gains in educational attainment and employment of its own TANF recipients compared with those who were not enrolled. Today it appears to have noteworthy rates for entry to employment. Although this programme is designed to address the needs of a poor, rural population, it was chosen for its early noteworthiness and due to the simple fact that there were limited programmes from which to select. To this extent is it not as comparable a programme as its urban-centred counterparts.
- Shoreline Community College, Seattle, Washington was initially considered noteworthy for a federal recognition of exemplary services. While the college no longer advertises this fact, I was originally welcomed to study them, but later the director ceased responding to my requests for access. This omission left me with three programmes to consider.

I used the interview questions as a guide to determine how these programmes had chosen to address the needs of their 'hard-to-serve' lone parent students, how effective is the approach, how effectiveness is measured, what challenges they face and what, seemingly, sets them apart from run-of-the mill welfare programmes.

### **Gatekeepers and Significant Others**

The following were interviewed or contacted to create access to additional and more useful interviewees:

- One gatekeeper to the gatekeepers, the Programme Coordinator of the Region 4, King County, Department of Social and Health Services WorkFirst Programme. This individual provided priceless introductions to CSO administrators that almost certainly I would not otherwise have had access to.
- Five administrators at CSOs who are agency gatekeepers and who have wholesale responsibility for overseeing, among many other things, the implementation of TANF law. One of the five administrators was located in Tacoma which is fifty kilometres from greater Seattle but which is an urban area with high crime, poverty, and welfare recipients and, therefore, an ideal location for pursuing research for this thesis. The other four administrators chosen were out of a total possible of nine in CSOs existing in the greater Seattle area. Those selected are considered to have greater challenges than the other CSOs located in significantly less deprived areas. Further, while administrators have ultimate responsibility for overseeing the performance of their officers and outcomes of the centres' policies, it became rapidly clear that it would be an error to assume that they, as Dexter (1970) forewarned, would be 'good informants' (p76). Rather, administrators merely created access to better and more informants both in their own CSOs and elsewhere.
- Eight case managers, social workers<sup>5</sup> and TANF experts at CSOs. These individuals occasionally hold multiple positions; therefore, we have instances where the case manager is also a social worker and/or a TANF expert.

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'social worker' is official but misleading. For further clarification please see Chapter 5, Interviews with Gate Keepers.

Technically case managers have the sole responsibility of assisting the 'hard-to-serve' into long-term and sustaining employment, who interpret TANF law via the Washington Administrative Codes (WACs) and who execute sanctions on those who fail to comply. Apart from factual details of their job descriptions, perceptions on the relative success of welfare reform and their lone parent charges, and the difficulties associated with their jobs, the interviews addressed how various welfare-to-work programmes in community and technical colleges are perceived by the case managers who refer students to them. Initially a choice of eight case managers was requested, ideally two per CSO, and was limited out of sensitivity in not wanting to be perceived as taking unfair advantage of the administrators or co-opting their priorities. Additionally, case managers typically carry caseloads of approximately one hundred to one hundred and twenty TANF recipients. They are busy, stressed and, allegedly, 'rigidly clerical and chronically discontent' (DeParle 1998:50). They have a high turnover rate, possibly as high as eighty percent per annum (Del Rosario 2004 Recorded interview, 15 April); therefore, I did not want to risk the possibility of creating enmity by cluttering their days with additional and unwelcome work.

The role of social workers is to interpret the barriers to employment of those referred to them by case managers and, in turn, refer the in-need individuals to appropriate resources. As stated above, sometimes these individuals are one and the same. There are very few social workers at CSOs, and fewer still who hold it as a singular position without the additional responsibility of being a case manager. Usually there are approximately three social workers for a total welfare population in the range of one thousand to fifteen hundred, and for the reasons stated above, i.e., not wanting to take advantage of the accessibility provided by administrators, I hoped to interview one individual per office. What I got were three social workers in two agencies. Additionally, with an understanding that the majority of TANF recipients do not have the opportunity to meet with social workers, I anticipated their usefulness as limited.

- One Employment Security (ES) adviser. These individuals work closely with CSO case managers, and are often housed in adjacent office buildings. The function of the advisers is to decide whether TANF recipients need education

and training in order to secure employment and, if so, what kind. Making this contact seemed appropriate because the decision to facilitate education and training is also a job description of case managers, so I had some concerns about 'territory'. Furthermore, as a technically separate entity to the CSOs, it seemed prudent to have the opportunity to compare institutional cultures and have the opportunity determine if different social service agencies have philosophical and practical variations on how to address low-skills. Initially I had hoped for four ES adviser contacts, but the agencies failed to respond to my repeated requests for access.

- Four directors of welfare-to-work programme directors not considered, at least not yet, noteworthy. These are at the Seattle Vocational Institute, Tacoma Goodwill, Renton Technical College, and South Seattle Community College. These particular locations were chosen for their physical accessibility, amenable staff (mostly) and the nature of their student bodies within the context of increased caseload growth at CSOs and the unique demographic challenges facing the area. As above, I used the interview questions to determine how the programmes have chosen to address the needs of their hard to serve lone parent students, how they perceive students' case managers and how effective is the approach taken to increase employability. Further, I used the same aide de memoire used by programmes considered noteworthy.

### **Part 3**

#### **(1.2) Approaches to Problems**

##### **Determination of Truth**

The problem of determining the degree of truth spoken by all interviewees was of some concern. Whilst objective questions asked of welfare recipients such as 'How did you get to class when you were enrolled in programmes?', 'When did you leave high school?' are all easily verifiable information, the same could not be said for 'Did you think your course was helpful?', and the follow-up question 'Why, why not?', and may have required a level of critical thought that posed a challenge to

low-level learners. Further, and even more complicated, is the question ‘What are your future plans?’ for this addresses the often-unrealistic goals of extremely low-level learners (examples of the plans of the three welfare recipients discussed in this thesis are contained in Chapter 7). Past experience told me that students typically picked up on where this line of questioning is intended to go and, although it was not out of the question that the responses would be less than accurate, I decided to use them anyway, relying instead on my ability to establish trust and rapport and determine what was likely possible with the individuals’ current situations.

Still, while some of the questions I wanted answers to were subjective and others objective, mostly they remained verifiable. More important than the sheer matter of veracity, however, was the bigger picture that was to be gleaned during our conversations. For example, one woman, Margie, stated her goal was to become an auxiliary nurse (2004 Recorded interview, 28 December). Yet a discussion of her education and a clearly evident developmental disability meant that in practical terms no case manager would refer her to a nursing programme for two reasons: 1. The unlikelihood of her completing such a programme and 2. The impossibility of completing within the maximum of 12 months permitted for education and training support by federal and state governments. In terms of veracity, however, there was another question that posed something of a problem. ‘Do you live with anyone else?’ is a potential mine field for any student, for should she confess to having a live-in boyfriend, girlfriend, lodger etc. then she could, indeed would, see her welfare support reevaluated. It is at times such as this where the relationship most needed to be one of trust, and which was addressed during my initial introduction at the beginning of the interview which was carefully structured in light of these possibly confounding elements (Dean and Foote-Whyte 1970).

In fact, the list of questions I had for welfare recipients was a vague and only moderately useful guide for what I hoped to learn. What I wanted mostly was their time, for it would only be with time that I could elicit the kind of detailed information that I hoped to garner. Therefore, we began our first meetings by addressing the questions but let our conversations take control of the direction. This, I believe, was to the greater good for it fostered the openness and familiarity that comes from unhurriedness, informality and affability.

## **Consent, Confidentiality and Consequences**

Academic research texts and the sociological associations are transparent in their requirements for ethical research, and of utmost importance are the issues of informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation (Dexter 1970; Kvale 1996; Finch 1997). To inspire trust and confidence, prior to initially requesting interviews, immediately before the interviews were conducted and as a reminder during the interviews, it was stated that, while all conversations were recorded, no real names would be used in this research, or situations identifiable with individuals unless expressly requested and agreed upon both by myself, the interviewee, and the agency involved. This need for confidentiality, indeed anonymity and pseudonymity, was of particular importance for TANF recipients who, potentially, had much to lose by disclosure to authorities of their names and so pains were taken to assure that no harm would come to them (Finch 1997; Trochim 2000). In effect, for some individuals who chose to disclose sensitive information, I learned of several cases of previous benefit fraud, yet was compelled to uphold the principles of confidentiality.

Another ethical issue arose early on and which was related to disclosure of precisely why a student from the University of Liverpool would choose to undertake a study of US approaches to getting the hard to serve into full-time work. Interviewees frequently asked this question, and it was one with which I felt somewhat conflicted in answering with complete openness to the professionals involved. In truth, part of the reason (the other part was entirely personal and involved returning to England to care for a sick parent while also engaging in long-desired PhD studies) I undertook this research was because previous work experience in the United States appeared to indicate that some case managers hindered or harmed the progress of women who were struggling to find work, increase their education and job skills and raise children. Likewise, the education and training programmes I witnessed frequently sought to exclude individuals from training by establishing educational prerequisites. They didn't, however, exclude welfare recipients from academic education, access to education was available, but certainly it was sufficiently abbreviated (12-22 weeks based on the case managers' prerogatives), and all case managers denied the education-only option (In Chapter 5, two welfare agency



employees address this). Since work was the goal, education was perceived as too intangible to be associated with future employment. Lastly, these education providers had fewer academic and skill requirements of their instructors than non-welfare-to-work basic skills programmes, hired only part-time staff and had high turnover rates.

On the one hand, since it seemed that case managers had significant autonomy in implementing the reasonably flexible policies of welfare reform, I had wanted to establish if they did indeed encumber students, what were their personal beliefs about the employability of hard to serve women, and, if there was a relationship between the two, and how the welfare recipients could be helped to accomplish both their own goals while also meeting the goals of the state. On the other hand, were the case managers and educational providers really as disaffected as they seemed, and were programmes as ineffective as they appeared?

Given the potential for defensiveness and reticence, neither of which would be helpful, particularly between case managers and programme directors and myself, I chose to respond to the question of 'Who are you, and why are you here?' with words akin to '... because I'd like to know why 'hard-to-serve' populations of single women often fail to free themselves from poverty and public assistance and what can be done to improve their chances of success'. I ended the response with information about the current UK approach to welfare and single parents and the possibility of future changes resembling those in the US, thus implying that this line of research may be of some use or interest at a later date. This latter comment was a little disingenuous for the intention was to diminish any reservations case managers and programme directors may have in speaking with me and to create as much candidness on their behalf as possible. They seemed to think that I now resided permanently in the UK, but while this was not quite true, I was happy not to disabuse them of these thoughts so that I could maintain access without raising suspicions that any possible criticisms would have consequences for them. Without them I had nothing to go on. My analysis of the welfare population could result in a critique of policy, benefits agencies, case managers and educational provisions, and it was on a hunch of such that I suspect caused several Seattle-area local education providers to attempt to ignore my requests for data collection. These ignored

requests for data resulted in my eliciting assistance from the Office of the Attorney General in the state capitol of Olympia and is something that I regret since the outcome was overt hostility on behalf of two individuals at different educational agencies, although I was able to salvage the relationship with one. Still, my assessment of the approaches taken and their reliability and validity suggest that the selected methodology was appropriate to the task. Indeed, I feel secure in the knowledge that the research process lead to the intended outcomes and created an honest image of the situation and prognosis for the least fortunate welfare recipients.

### **Terminology Used**

Lastly, there existed some concern about the use of language. Three expressions in particular required making a decision and some explanation. These are: ‘‘hard-to-serve’’ and ‘black’ versus the use of ‘African American’ to refer to Americans of African descent. In terms of ‘‘hard-to-serve’’, the meaning of the expression was unclear and it appeared even at social services that most of those interviewed had differing views on the meaning. However, as was stated in the introductory chapter, the term entered welfare reform vernacular to suggest that some individuals may be beyond the scope of the social services (Dion, Derr, Anderson and Pavetti 1999:1). While it was never suggested at benefits agencies that any women on welfare were, in fact, beyond the scope of what case managers could accomplish, I chose to maintain the use of the term because of its ubiquity. In this thesis, it refers simply to those women who have sufficiently few skills and limited education as to render them unattractive to employers and who tend to remain unemployed or who occasionally enter work only to rapidly exit.

Of the use of ‘black’ versus ‘African American’, the politically correct term seems be the latter, but it is difficult to tell. Many African Americans in the public eye use the term black in addition to African American to refer to their racial group. Additionally, my own work experience with many black women on welfare suggested that there was marginal preference for the use of black. A more formal review of the literature was sought for guidance on public opinion but provided relatively little in the way of a quantity of evidence.. Still, Siegelman, Tuch and

Martin (2005) suggest that of almost 2400 African American adults polled, there were virtually identical preferences for both terms to refer to Americans of African descent (pp433-434). Thus, there was enough ambiguity to render the use of both expressions and, for the remainder of this thesis, the terms are used interchangeably to refer to Americans of African descent.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Historical Context of Government Support**

#### **Introduction**

Contemporary policy does not happen within a vacuum for it is evident that while people make history ‘they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances ... given and transmitted from the past...’ (Marx 1964:15). This matter of path dependency and persistence along current policy lines acknowledges that we do not simply arrive in the present untainted by the past. History matters insofar that less than ideal policy outcomes may not ensure the revision of measures taken although ‘We would have to ask why no arrangement was made to bring about consideration of all costs and benefits. If our only answer were that such arrangements are too costly’ (Liebowitz and Margolis 1995:209). That the US has essentially two competing parties helps mitigate path dependency by ensuring a certain degree of rancour, but there remains precious little public exposure to the effects of policies targeting the poorest and apparently few are the conversations by political actors about welfare policy adjustment. An honest analysis of the historical trail can, however, provide an opportunity to develop a ‘controlling perspective’ from which to regard the present and advise on what ought to be done (Steneck 1982:106). With that in mind, this context-setting chapter traces the development of the US government’s approach towards the ‘management’ of poor single mothers. It addresses the rationale for the approach taken in the US towards social safety nets and the main changes over time in policy towards poor women and their children. While the chapter begins with the ‘renaissance of public welfare’ (Trattner 1999:214) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the majority of attention is focused on the post-1935 period after the passage of Roosevelt’s Social Security Act (SSA) because this is the earliest US attempt to develop a comprehensive welfare state. The chapter advances the argument that provision of welfare has a thread of racism run throughout, and, reform’s goals notwithstanding, the least-employable welfare recipients continue to remain vulnerable, marginally employable and living

in precarious circumstances despite training and education programmes which are designed to increase their employability.

It is hoped that a greater understanding of the past may help pave the way for a coherent discourse on the subject of how best to balance the needs of the worst-off single parents and the aims of social policy. Specifically, from the perspective of current policy objectives, can the needs of the most marginalised individuals addressed in this thesis be met by continuing to proceed down the path we are currently taking? Or do we need to reform the reform? As Moynihan (1996) lamented with regards to the living conditions of African Americans in the 1960s and the ambitions of the War on Poverty

Supposing the optimism and commitment of that moment had been continued. Supposing the federal government had undertaken a huge commitment of resources along lines indicated by scholarly inquiry. Would anything different have happened? ... The plain answer is that we do not know. There is no way of knowing; for we did not try (p188).

This chapter is divided into six distinct sections. Section one investigates the political, social and economic conditions of the Progressive Era that gave rise to a focus on public allowances for women with dependent children and the birth of today's US welfare state at its inception in 1935 and section two. Section two explains the approach taken to addressing the needs of the poor, the historical reasons for the limited extent of welfare services, under what conditions we can predict their expansion and contraction, investigates the 'semi-welfare state' and focuses attention on the development of Aid to Families with Children (ADC). This section furthers the argument that mass moral and ideological disensus, alienation and increasing control of single mothers were frequently accompanied by racist and stereotyped images. Section three furthers the combined images of racism and welfare by focusing on the consequences of change during and after the press for civil rights. This period saw a diminished neglect of the poor that had characterised the post World War Two years and gave rise to a more expansive welfare state. Section three advances the argument that as the masses of the poorest Americans became visible to the public, and as social assistance was widened, another wave of disdain grew which, in-turn, fostered curtailment of public assistance. Section four investigates the rise of government sponsored education and training programmes

for unemployed single parents all of which failed to advance the prospects of the lowest-skilled populations. By investigating these programmes, it becomes possible to understand that behind the rise of programmes, comes a public dialogue about values much of which settles on an image of poor black mothers, all of which gave rise to Clinton's welfare reform Act of 1996. Section five investigates the social and political circumstances that bore the Clinton Act, rise of welfare and decline of entitlement. This section furthers the argument that the details of the Act drew heavily on welfare curtailment in 1980s Wisconsin, which had come at a time of burgeoning rolls of mostly black women. Section six analyses the outcomes of welfare reform act of 1996 a decade after its inception. This section advances the argument that welfare reform has done little to increase the employability of lowest skilled single parents.

### **(1.0) The Progressive Era**

Akin to a boom and bust cycle, some form of public assistance for poor single parents existed in the United States with some semblance of planning and organisation even prior to the 1920s (Trattner 1999:216-219) although the levels of funding and attention always fluctuated, depending on the focus of politicians, tolerance of the public, economic stability and degree of civil order on a seemingly 'enfranchised populace' (Piven and Cloward 1993:40).

The intentionally 'vile catchalls' (Trattner 1999:61) that were known as workhouses suggested 'a purpose quite different from remediation of their destitution. For these residual persons have been universally degraded for lacking economic value' (Piven and Cloward 1993:33). And yet, there was once significant philosophical public understanding and support for private aid to the needy, for public assistance would demoralise whereas private aid would not (Trattner 1999:277). Private organisations, that is, mostly white and mostly northern, businesses, cities, counties and some states pre-empted organised federal welfare with 'welfare work', a term intended to describe any number of assistance programmes designed to promote and enhance individual well being (Gordon 1991). Or so it is said, for from within the

confines of this discourse on lone parents, individual well-being was based on normative ideas of morality sent with a distinctly Puritan message.

Prior to this, organised labour had forced reformers into addressing the needs of the poor after witnessing international experimental forays into the same. Bismark, for example, had lead the way with rational, compulsory participation by employees and employers, in addition to non-contributory systems which aimed to help without stigmatising the recipients (Schlabach 1969). Although the purpose wasn't entirely philanthropic since Bismark saw the development of safety nets as a way to pacify the lower classes and secure the kaiser's rule (Krugman 2007:33), the importance of the non-profit sector was fairly easy to support for it was rooted in religious heterogeneity, which supported dense networks of welfare services (Bahle 2003:9). This public support was borne of not only cultural conditions but also beliefs in the value of patriarchy and rise in socialism. Indeed, the socialist women who founded the *Bund for Mutterschutz* called for a new code of sexual ethics and birth control to give women control over their reproduction (Koven and Michel 1993:1101) and succeeded in maternity rights being extended to unmarried mothers (Anthony 1915:139).

In the United States, however, the development of a welfare state was a peculiarly American blind spot (Krugman 2007:33). Americans' own beliefs in laissez-faire and self sufficiency, ensured an enduring distrust of centralised government which necessarily remained out of the business of mass social welfare programmes for many years (Weir et al. 1988; Koven and Michel 1990; Trattner 1999). This is not to suggest that there were not many groups that advocated assistance to the poor; there were. But it was not until the 1890s, which ushered in the immense growth of big cities, mass immigration, militant labour movements, and the depression of 1893 that their failed attempts were fully exposed and some self-criticism began to emerge (Trattner 1999: 112,113). 'The harsh treatment of those who had no alternative except to fall back upon the parish and "the offer of the House" terrorized the impoverished masses' a matter which was of deliberate intent (Piven and Cloward 1993:34). Furthermore, social upheaval and the anonymity and mobility afforded by a rapidly changing urban landscape ensured children who were fortunate enough not to work in industry, but whose mothers worked outside the home and

thus they were unsupervised, contributed to an alarming increase in juvenile delinquency (Trattner 1999:109)

Champions of welfare reform for the needy, particularly needy children, fundamentally were women who challenged the underlying assumptions of the Social Darwinism that had guided American public policy for decades (Nobel 1997:51). Finally they began to gain earnest attention and 'Children became the symbol of a resurgent reform spirit, the magnet that pulled together a diverse collection of causes and their champions into a new, loose, informal – but very effective – coalition' (Katz 1996:17). Yet, without maternalist politics, the state would have been less responsive to the needs of women and children for 'their success was always qualified by prevailing political conditions, and tended to be inversely proportionate to the strength of women's movements' (Koven and Michel 1990: 1107).

The reasons for attention shifting to children were based on a number of factors, all of which were concerned with values: religious, social and political. Indeed, much of the enduring impetus for the protection of health came because so many men were exempted from national service during World War One as a result of enduring health problems that could have been averted with adequate childhood nutrition (Trattner 1999: 219). But, while children had become the focus, their welfare was not simply a matter of pity or compassion. Most citizens viewed the child as the key to social control; they held promise for the future, but they were also a threat (Trattner 1999:109). For evangelists, social Catholics and others, the reason reflected a moral vision and was seen as a redemptive tool for mothers (Koven and Michel 1990:1085). For the newly professionalised social workers, that is, educated, middle class women who carved out niches for themselves which were 'free from domestic drudgery' (Koven and Michel 1990:1078), the child's best interests were of primary importance, and for them it was the child who was the client, not the mother. Although most social workers professed the right of single mothers to decide for themselves, they often pressed the women into adoption of their babies along with a range of other provisions intended as protection for the child (Kunzel 1993). It is possible, however, that there was something more sinister



at work, for Wilson (1977) suggests that these women, and the social welfare agencies for whom they worked, functioned primarily to force poor women into 'submission, nurturance and passivity' (p8) while Abramovitz (1988) demonstrates how capitalist states' welfare policies have reinforced an entire social system based on women's subordination. At the same time, all this occurred within the confines of a state that would still impose limits to full participatory citizenship on women until 1920<sup>6</sup>. Thus, it comes as little surprise that these child advocates frequently found themselves at the bottom of organisational hierarchies with voices diminished over those of male bureaucrats, a matter which ultimately gave rise to 'a generation of young activists [who] consciously jettisoned maternalism (Koven and Michel 1990:1108).

Carabine (2001) observes that social protections in their varying forms have embedded at their heart

the heterosexual married couple comprised of the father/breadwinner male and housewife/mother/carer female. Women's labour market inactivity and dependency on men was assumed and they were expected to earn their 'right' to welfare through their husband's contributions.... Accordingly, single mothers [and others] were variously castigated and abhorred as immoral, abnormal and unacceptable (p293).

Further, Piven and Cloward suggest that "'suitable" home provisions ... were used to discipline and exclude many poor mothers [and] agencies charged with implementing these new laws were often hostile to them' (1993:51). The result of this was often exclusion and conditional eligibility for services. Such was the perceived problem that President Roosevelt called a White House conference on how best to cope with the rising numbers of poor mothers and their children, and Justice Julian Mack stated children must be protected, and by association also their mothers, for they should know that they are 'the object of [the states'] care and solicitude' (quoted in Shepherd Jr 1999). Occasionally this benevolence extended even to children born out of wedlock and their mothers who needed saving from debauchery and to enable them to be worthy parents. Hence:

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<sup>6</sup> There existed significant opposition to the amendment to extend voting rights to all women, a policy that was targeted at black women and which typified the racial exclusion of feminist movements in the 20th Century (Marilley 1996).

Without the civilizing influence of their children, increased numbers of parents...would slide into immorality and degradation, hastening the ... unravelling of families that threatened the social foundations of American society (Katz 1996:31).

This was a break from the past for previously single mothers who approached the work houses for help had often found themselves facing the impossible situation of either being condemned as depraved, and therefore bad for their communities, unfit to parent for neglecting their children while working, or otherwise morally culpable for their poverty (Lewis 1980). Simply stated, 'Illegitimacy tested and stretched family ties, sometime to the breaking point' (Kunzel 1993). Yet, born out of this concern for children, the Mothers' Pension was implemented in a variety of forms in all but two states by 1933 (Piven and Cloward:51). But it had its limitations. First, there was great conflict among policy makers regarding programme cost, control, and eligibility. Second, it eliminated official recognition of women's domestic labour as being truly work-worthy insofar that it excluded women from access to unemployment benefits, a fact that Goodwin (1997) considers one of its biggest failures. Third, in determining the amount of financial support to issue, the total ability of the family to raise funds was considered. This included children, as it was normal in the era for children aged 8 and older to contribute to the cost of running a home (Katz 1996). Fourth, it was racist, classist, and hierarchical, often woven into a call for nationalism (Hancock 2004:28).

Single, poor Black mothers were urged by elites of both races to look toward Victorian ideals of motherhood as the solution to their problems. However, the structure of political and economic institutions prevented such aspirations from coming to fruition, given a U.S. political economy dependent on Black women's inexpensive labor as domestic servants and agricultural workers (p28-29).

Furthermore, the Mothers' Pension was really a form of wage subsidy as most of the recipients had to earn part of their support. Even then, state-level legislation was uneven and, mostly, permitted but not required (Piven and Cloward 1993:51). While the general intention was to provide struggling mothers without husbands the opportunity to remain at home with their children, mostly those whom it benefited were white widows (Hancock; Piven and Cloward 1993; Nobel 1997). Disqualified from help were large numbers of black, single, divorced and deserted women who

were widely considered lazy, shiftless and slovenly (Gordon 2001:17). The public's, politicians' and professionals' beliefs in the dominant issues of race and morality ensured some women were seen as more employable than others. Still, this period represented a small but irreversible step from charity to entitlement for those in need and began state and federal efforts to preserve the family, home and children (Trattner 1999:228-229). It was not long, however, before these needs would become greater than ever with the stock market crash of 1929 and the inception of broader-spectrum, federal, protective legislation in the form of an established welfare state.

### **(1.1) The Birth of the 'Semi-Welfare State'**

Katz (1996) refers to the United States as a 'semi-welfare state' (p280) for today it remains the last advanced Western nation without comprehensive healthcare, family allowances and universal welfare coverage, and its social welfare expenditure has long constituted a smaller percentage of the GDP than any other wealthy country. Furthermore, both Katz (1995, 1996) and Trattner (1999) indicate that there exists limited public assistance because both public and private spheres of support have never been entirely distinct. Early reformers believed in the view that charitable and voluntary work could serve as an alternative to state support and, thus, the expansion and shape of the welfare state remained confused, contradictory and amorphous (Leiby 1978; Trattner 1999). Typically, efforts to build comprehensive welfare states are most likely to succeed where political institutions have centralised multiparty systems (Noble 1997:27). In the United States, however, both a two-party system that has discouraged the formation of a social-democratic left, and decentralised state and party systems that have empowered conservative opponents of public provision and encouraged racial and ethnic conflict have undercut reform and abolished or weakened social transfer programmes (Noble 1997; Peck 2001). For all these reasons, the US has what is considered an archetypical case of a liberal welfare system (Esping-Anderson 1990).

This semi-welfare state, which Piven and Cloward (p447) and Krugman (15-36) believe reached its zenith in 1935 and has since declined under persistent attack,

typically has been accompanied by waves of public disdain for the 'undeserving' poor, often black, single parents. The premise here is that where social benefits are means tested, people are subject to intrusion and it is likely that the recipients of those benefits will become stigmatized by way of attributions of culpability among those who feel they are paying for the idleness of others. As a result, these benefits are almost always cut first when there is retrenchment, and are subject to constant tightening of the criteria for eligibility as public support for them declines. This support comes and goes in a sort of 'dance' in which inequality and political polemics move as one. That is, as inequality rises, conservatives liberalise; as it declines conservatives move more to the right and foster partisanship (McCarthy, Poole and Rosenthal 2006). This is a familiar thread woven throughout US history (Koven and Michel 1990; Katz 1996, Gilens 1999). What the development of New Deal policies showed during the expansion of the welfare state was that this interaction of public opinion and context conditioned the implementation of public policy and the experiences of single, poor, African American mothers. Further, it revealed the intersecting roles of race and gender in the implementation of New Deal social welfare policies (Hancock 2004:34) and beyond. Indeed, it could be said that both slavery and Southern legislators who wanted to keep black people submissive and exploited powerfully shaped existing welfare policy (Neubeck and Cazenove 2001; Trattner 1999). Indeed, Krugman (2007) suggests that 'racial antagonism has had a pervasive and malign effect on American politics, largely to conservative advantage (p29).

Over time, the formula for contraction or expansion of public welfare provisions has proven somewhat predictable. Historical evidence suggests that relief arrangements are cyclical: initiated or expanded during outbreaks of civil disorder produced by mass unemployment, recession or social tension and are abolished or contracted when political stability is restored (Piven and Cloward 1993:xv). These are intended to reward the deserving poor for their labour, or inadvertent loss of labour, while ensuring the maintenance of political stability and social order, enforce work and social mores and quiet public unrest (Katz 1996, Trattner). Such were the conditions in early 1930s USA.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the word 'welfare' seldom appeared alone and generally was viewed positively within the context of 'social welfare' and 'public welfare' and quite vaguely referred to public well-being in a variety of broad contexts designed to provide small benefits to 'deserving' individuals in financial need (Nobel 1997:49). Indeed, in June 1934, during the height of the US Depression, President Roosevelt appointed a Committee on Economic Security, which was intended to safeguard 'against misfortunes which cannot wholly be eliminated in this man-made world of ours' (Katz 2001:3). The New Deal, which, in an effort to mitigate the effects of the Depression, for the first time put the federal government squarely in the business of mass relief by initiating over time eight major public works relief programmes. This central government control, cooption of the states' perceived rights and the subsequent loss of autonomy (a matter Hoover considered illegal) was not part of a long-term plan, however, but merely was intended to address temporarily the economic needs of those individuals affected by the Depression and to do so in as fast and efficient a manner as possible (Trattner 1999:277, 281). In point of fact, great care was taken to appeal to the Americans' work ethic, strong sense of individualism and self-reliance by asserting that federal assistance programmes were for those who had earned, literally, the right to it (Koven and Michel 1990). Rimlinger (1971) writes, 'The emphasis on contractual rights was of strategic significance: in an individualistic society the individual was not to be left dependent on the benevolence of the ruling powers' (p229). Indeed, Piven and Cloward suggest that 'No one liked direct relief – not the President who called for it, the Congress that legislated for it, the administration who operated it, the people who received it' (1993:80).

Hence, in the spirit of this American ethos, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) came to be an important part of relief for the needy and unemployed by creating work for millions, although millions remained unemployed (Piven and Cloward 1993:80; Noble 1997:71). Still, the tug of war of Americans' ambivalent relationship with central government ensured that there was no permanent role in creating jobs for the unemployed (O'Connor 1999:90). Rather, the system of relief created by the Social Security Act 'was administered for more than two decades to ensure that as few of the poor as possible obtained as little as possible from it (Piven

and Cloward 1993:36). And, suggests Krugman, while they numbered as much as twenty five percent of the total population, many were immigrants with no voting rights, while others were disenfranchised blacks (2007:32).

Much debate and criticism remains about how effective the New Deal was. Yet, while it may have hindered recovery from the Depression by failing to resolve chronic unemployment (Powell 2003), what it did succeed in was preventing further catastrophe (Trattner 1999:281) by quelling 'disorder, disarray, and panic' (Piven and Cloward 1993:80) with the provision of much needed funds and food for some of the poorest of the day. And there were many, for a full thirty five percent of the population needed some form of relief (Katz 1996). What it began, and what remains to this day, however, was the US trend towards decentralised employment and training programmes. Although the New Deal era was a time of strong executive power and leadership, the country had, and retains, strong roots in state and local political establishments. For education and training, this meant that states had significant autonomy to experiment with programme development for, the argument went, a one-size-fits-all approach to content would fail the needy and the country (Rodgers 2000;Trattner 1999).

The Social Security Act created five major, although modest, publicly approved means-tested relief programmes such as Aid for Dependent Children (ADC) and Old Age Assistance (OAA) (Rodgers 2000:86). Under the New Deal, ADC was originally established 'as a program intended to prevent chaste widows' from being forced to send their children to orphanages (Hudson and Coukos 2005:19). Suggests Hancock, the very need for ADC was created, in part, as a result of 'the lack access to economic independence reinforced by women's group's brand of paternalistic materialism' (p28), and the programme was packaged as support for orphans and children whose faultless mothers had been widowed, deserted or divorced (Rodgers 2000; Trattner 1999). Yet, it is clear that from the onset, the Social Security Act was never anything but a two-tiered system. The top tier was a non-means tested social insurance programme designed to benefit the elderly and those simply unemployed. The bottom tier was a localised, means tested system for poor women and children and which rendered it virtually inevitable that the recipients would become

stigmatised and even singled out for abuse (Piven and Cloward 1993:445-447; Nelson 1986:223) for they are designed with the express intent of creating stratification (Esping-Anderson 1990:22).

ADC thus created mass ideological disensus, and 1939 saw the beginning of several decades of change that would ensure its stark differentiation from OAA because, suggests Gordon (2001) provision of benefits to some, not all, would create the intended impression of a purchased right (p16). This legislative 'normalization' (Teles 1996:34) had the effect of weakening further ADC into a programme of widow's relief only and largely sealed its fate as assistance for other 'undeserving' poor (Teles 1996:34-36; O'Connor 1999:90) that 'would comeback to haunt liberalism' (Noble 1997 :73) by harming later efforts to make the welfare state more generous. Furthermore, widows were unable to escape the stigma that had spread to all lone mothers (Gordon 2001:18) and, as the post-war period saw a significant rise in the number of female-headed households, ADC developed into one of the more major, and therefore visible, programmes in terms of funds and coverage (Rossi and Lyall 1976: 142).

Ultimately, Gordon (1994) believes ADC did women an enormous disservice and set the stage for the anti-welfare backlash to come claiming that the progressive reformers who helped push it through were not misogynist old men and politicians, but educated women. They were white, middle-class professionals, social-workers who 'engaged in rescue fantasies' (Gordon 1991:44), were unprepared and ill-informed, and designed the relief to preserve the family by addressing the needs of stay-at-home widows with children. This, despite the fact that prior and post-Depression, it was typical for women to work, indeed most always had, for, 'Full dependence on husbands [had] actually been a "privilege" of a minority of women' because few men 'have ever actually been able to earn a wage enough to single-handedly support a family (Gordon 1990:183). And, what little money was made available in the form of ADC was 'meager', never 'intended to allow mothers to stay home with their children' and more 'a gesture rather than an achievement' (Gordon 1991:49, 63). Hudson and Coukos (2005) view the inception of ADC from within the confines of mobilised economy and political forces of the day (p18).

That mobilisation, they suggest, soon guaranteed public hostility for, 'Never-married women with children have never been included in the moral category of the "worthy" poor' (p20). Katz (2001) suggests that a matter of enormous importance is being overlooked and, while reformers and politicians may have been misguided and have got the ingredients for ADC wrong, that the recipe for public assistance is a bargain compared to other programs and its low cost is one key to its staying power because, 'Throughout American history, it is still hard to imagine a cheaper means of keeping people alive' (p11). And yet, as we shall see later, if welfare keeps people alive at all, in Twenty-First Century America, it is still rationed by race and deserving versus undeserving poor.

Still, Gordon (1990), Piven and Cloward (1993) and Noble (1997) all state that this was the beginning of the dominion that characterizes welfare today because the public believed in relief services for the elderly and most unemployed, but not for select groups. The labour of domestic workers, single parents, deserted and divorced women, and Southern agricultural workers who were mostly black, for example, failed to qualify as real work and rendered them ineligible for unemployment benefit should the situation arise (Neubeck and Cazenove 2001; Quadagno 1994). This group was forced to rely on ADC. Even these funds, however, came with the caveat that limited their availability to those children who lived in 'suitable homes', that is, homes with parents of good moral character, and which was a provision 'used to discipline and exclude many poor mothers' (Noble 1997:51). Furthermore, benefits were never extended to slum dwellers, regardless of income (O'Connor 1999:90). Therefore, given the political climate in the United States at the time, single women and blacks oftentimes found themselves in want but excluded from the possibility of assistance. These restrictive criteria for ADC eligibility had been somewhat forced because Southern states wanted to maintain control over the distribution of benefits, and thus were in-built as part of its infrastructure out of the need for the bill to pass successfully through Congress. Given US southerners' fondness for the preservation of cheap black labour and a desire to preserve the caste-based economy of the South, it would only pass if the southern states were mollified enough to support the measure (Piven and Cloward 1993; Noble 1997; Trattner 1991). 'In several respects, Roosevelt's decision to



accommodate southern economic interests crippled the SAA' (Noble:71) and his vision of an inclusive national programme was frittered away by compromise and political machinations (Trattner 1991: 281). As we shall see, this situation would bear some resemblance to Clinton's efforts to reform welfare sixty years later.

It is true that the vast majority of domestic workers were women, and clearly many agricultural workers were black. So, like Gordon, Katz (1996), Hancock (2004) and Neubeck and Cazenove (2001) see provision of, and access to ADC as discriminatory against both gender and race. Says Hancock, 'By this time, the beliefs about single, poor Black mothers's hyperfertility and laziness were mapped onto norms of "proper" maternal behavior. Black mothers were judged as failing to conform to these standards' (2004:34). In fact, the relationship between race and welfare programmes for the undeserving has endured and continued to have considerable political ramifications in and beyond the 1990s (Gilens 1996, 1999; Neubeck and Cazenove 2001; Trattner 1999).

As the federal system of welfare expanded to meet the needs of greater numbers of people, so too did the criticism it received (Hancock 2004; Piven and Cloward:1993) . To this day, there is a great philosophical and political disagreement between those who believe that the existence of welfare helps the poor and those who believe it creates dependence and compromises individuals' dignity. In spite of his SSA initiative, Roosevelt clearly belonged with those in the latter camp and urged that welfare provision be administered with caution.

The lessons of history ... show conclusively that continued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fibre. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit... The federal government must and shall quit this business of relief.... We must preserve ... their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination (Roosevelt 1935a-online).

Highlighting the rise in 'entitlement programs' between 1965 to 1980, Reagan echoed Roosevelt, almost verbatim, in his 1990 autobiography, adding that 'hundreds of billions were spent on poverty programs ... that made people worse off' (198). In his 1982 White House diary he comments 'I'm trying to undo the "Great

Society”. It was LBJ’s war on poverty that led us to our present mess’ (p316). Again referring to the War on Poverty, he suggested that ‘the Democrats had had their turn at bat in the 1960s and had struck out’ (p198). At least in part, JFK would have concurred. Suggesting that jobs needed to be created with possibilities for advancement and stating in a 1962 message to Congress that the purpose of the War on Poverty was

... to help our less fortunate citizens to help themselves... We must find ways of returning far more of our dependent people to independence... Public welfare emphasis must be directed increasingly toward ... rehabilitation. No lasting solution to the problem [of poverty] can be sought with a welfare check’ (quoted in Sowell 1995:9-10).

This matter of dependence is one that Gordon (1990) finds paradoxical.

There is ... a class double standard for women: [non-working wives] are encouraged to be dependent on their husbands, the poor to become ‘independent’. Public dependence, of course, is paid for by taxes, yet it is interesting that there is no objection to allowing husbands tax-exemptions for their dependent wives (p177).

## **(1.2) Social Change and Civil Rights**

The full employment brought about by World War Two ushered in a dramatic decrease in the welfare rolls, with the exception of benefit relief for the elderly, so much so that welfare relief became synonymous with destitute elderly persons. Those individuals still receiving assistance received less public patience, although Katz (2001) suggests that the positive connotations associated with welfare were still well enough established in the 1949 American psyche that Saturday Evening Post editors cautioned writers against use of the word welfare when criticising Truman’s plans to extend welfare services: ‘Welfare’ is the key word. Who’s against welfare? Nobody...’ (quoted in Katz 2001:4). Furthermore, despite the flush of success brought about by the war, many Americans still had post-Depression fears of widespread unemployment, and, while there was little government involvement in job training and education between 1943 and 1961, a battery of small, temporary programmes began to emerge with the intention of maintaining or creating employment. Still, it wasn’t long after this that a semantic

bifurcation began to emerge with a differentiation between the term 'welfare' meaning OAA and 'welfare' meaning ADC, with the latter taking on an increasingly pejorative meaning for many akin to public support for people who are able but refuse to work.

While Truman remained adamant that welfare remained a valuable and trusted means of support for many, the 1950s saw a nation shaken by fear and suspicion associated with communism (Trattner 1999:308). It was at this point that welfare came to be equated with socialism and was unprotected from politics and vituperative attacks. The earlier public and political association of welfare with relief had now truly parted ways and ushered in was a belief in its ties to 'regimentation, loss of freedom, and heavy-handed state paternalism' (Katz 2001:5). During the 1950s and 1960s, Americans witnessed enormous social and political upheaval born of resistance against race-based oppression and segregation and a surge in demands for civil rights. By 1962 ADC has metamorphosed into AFDC at a time when blacks comprised almost fifty percent of recipients and the programme's marginalisation was complete (Teles 1998: 36). Furthermore, it was about this time that the United States fostered greater insecurity in employment. The shift was away from an economy based on the creation of goods to the service orientated economy we see today. With this, however, US social policy came to be entangled in a backlash of deeply embedded structural transformations that are unable to be disentangled from matters of race (O'Connor 1999:83) a topic which will be raised in greater detail in Chapter 4

All this time, the United States Employment Service was closely monitoring the relationship between employment needs, education and training, and it had enough reliable data to present to the Department of Labor (DoL). In turn, the DoL made plans to recommend that the President appoint advisers who would focus solely on the problem of unemployment in depressed areas. Eisenhower vetoed the bill, and the dissatisfaction from both the public and politicians helped ensure a Democratic win for JFK in the 1960 election. He had spoken directly to the unemployed when he promised to alleviate their hardships and to help get them back to work.

In May 1961, JFK stated

The task of abating unemployment and achieving a full use of our resources does remain a serious challenge for us all. Large- scale unemployment during a recession is bad enough, but large- scale unemployment during a period of prosperity would be intolerable' (Kennedy 1961-online).

By signing the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) into law in March 1963, JFK hoped to obviate the problem of squandered human capital by providing the opportunity to train or retrain those who wanted or needed it. While some states previously had vocational education programmes, here was a single federal programme designed to address the specific requirements of the unemployed, or tenuously employed, due to the changing face of labour market.

But the programme choices made by Kennedy were made from within the confines of political centre strategies designed to court the interests and support of business executives and racial conservatives. Thus, it received little more than modest funding and even then was unavailable in depressed areas (Noble 1997:100-101). Ultimately, 'His welfare-state agenda was limited to ... a modest program that did not entail redistributive reform. The look and feel was new, but the substance was not (p100).

This period of the 1960s ended the 'benign neglect' (Trattner 1999:307) of the poor that reasonably summarises the post-war years. Despite a series of recessions, concern with poverty had become remote, and, although Galbraith (1988) remarked that poverty still existed among small pockets of racial minorities, Americans felt the problem had mostly been solved. Yet, the 1950s and 1960s was a period of immense social and political conflict within American society.

1963 saw the assassination of JFK. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 threatened to eliminate federal funding to segregated school districts. The MDTA had come and gone and was replaced by the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 and the Work Incentive Program of 1967. The US became deeply embroiled in a costly war in Vietnam. And by 1968, Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. had both been assassinated, the latter by a white supremacist. AFDC had grown into a

programme that catered to enormous numbers of single black women with illegitimate children and set forth a trend that increased significantly over the course of the following years (Trattner 1999:309). This period fostered rancour in political spheres, no less than when Welfare Commissioner, Mitchell Ginsberg, advocated to a Senate sub-committee for a complete revision of poor assistance that was 'bankrupt' and 'failed as an anti-poverty weapon' for it to 'free [from poverty] the poorest of the poor' (Kifner 1967:1).

This was also a time that saw the development of the grassroots welfare rights lobby which grew in response to increased demand for removal of the means-tested restrictions introduced earlier, the need for more jobs and increased benefits. The movement was comprised of mostly single welfare mothers, although there were many more people who had little money for basic needs. Marches and demonstrations raised public awareness, and multiple lawsuits resulted in one court after another striking down the regulations that attempted to discourage or limit the take up of assistance. These poor single mothers, particularly black mothers, increasingly came to challenge their exclusion from public support (Gordon 2001:20). With this, a newly visible population of poor blacks had become not only increasingly enfranchised, but had replaced apathy with an enhanced racial pride and willingness to engage in violent protest in the face of 'white terrorism directed at non-violent protest' in an attempt to force the alteration of discriminatory and racist laws (Krugman 2007:91). This was fundamentally successful in so far that it ensure that poor, black women now had access to public assistance. So much so, that in the single year between 1966 and 1967, the number of welfare recipients increased from 7.8 to 8.4 million, more than 7 percent, and social welfare expenditures on public assistance increased almost 146 percent from \$5879.9 million in 1965 to \$14,433.5 million by 1970 (Social Security Administration 2002:130). It was under a canopy of this increased take up of welfare provided to blacks, that Governor Reagan disparaged the 'undeserving' poor when he said

People are tired of wasteful government programs and welfare chiselers; and they are angry about the constant spiral of taxes and government regulations, arrogant bureaucrats, and public officials who thought all of mankind's problems could be solved by throwing the taxpayers' dollars at them (Reagan 1990:147)

Piven and Cloward (1993) also emphasise the clear relationship between race, rights and poverty, and suggest that the explosion in numbers of people receiving AFDC came out of a decade of political disorder, urban conflict, an increase in the power of poor blacks who were mollified with welfare funds. To this Krugman (2007) adds the social change wrought by the 1960s counterculture that 'infuriated' many Americans by undermining their traditional values (p95). Regardless of whether the authors are correct, the increases in AFDC take-up ensured that provision of support became a central political and public matter of conversation for as Harrington (1997) had suggested, the poor were no longer invisible for the festering wounds of poverty, exploitation and hopelessness were now made clear (Trattner 1999:319).

The 1950s and 1960s had seen such immense social and political change that Harrington (1997) shouted a call to conscience for politicians and the public to witness the wretched living conditions of many American families. Mead (1986) considers Harrington (who was actually a socialist) and his counterparts 'radicals' for their belief that 'society unfairly burdens the poor, to the point where they are forced to dysfunction' (p9). Yet, in the course of his research on poverty Harrington stated,

The millions who are poor in the United States tend to become increasingly invisible. Here is a great mass of people, yet it takes an effort of the intellect and will even to see them....

After I wrote my first article on poverty in America ... I had proved to my satisfaction that there were around 50,000,000 poor in this country. Yet, I realized I did not believe my own figures. The poor existed in the Government reports; they were percentages and numbers in long, close columns, but they were not part of my experience.

... Poverty is off the beaten track. It always has been. The ordinary tourist never left the main highway... (1997:2-3).

Harrington's text, deeply influenced both Kennedy and Johnson and galvanised the War on Poverty but was criticised by many conservatives (Citro and Michael 1995; Murray 1996; McManus 2001; Rector 2004a). This view suggested that the rise in female-headed households came as a result of the War on Poverty which began the indiscriminate mass government support of lone parents and, in so doing, single-

handedly increased the likelihood that single women would have children, thus creating communities filled with unruly, fatherless, underclass children (Murray 1996:31).

Prior to the War on Poverty, mass government engagement in initiatives tended to be directed toward the best interests of the middle classes of Americans (Moynihan 1969:6). But Kennedy was to initiate a modest change that President Johnson hoped to continue in expanded form (Noble 1997:102). In his State of the Union address in January 1964, and again later in a message to Congress in March, Johnson declared in his proposal 'This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America' (Johnson 1964-online). He stated that it was only right to address the need to decrease poverty and outlined a number of actions the government would take to implement new anti-poverty measures. But problems at the policy level appeared almost immediately.

It was one thing to propose to do away with poverty; it was another to determine how to do so and yet another to find the resources and persuade the Congress to authorise the effort ... Here the legacy of Kennedy's difficulties with Congress and the advent of Johnson's manner, [ensured a] preoccupation with legislative maneuver ... with ominously little attention paid in between to what exactly was the problem to be solved (Moynihan 1969:10).

Further compounding problems was that 'There was no common understanding as to the nature of poverty or the process of deliberate social change (Moynihan 1969:19). Still, among Johnson's plans was a focus on education, 'Education will not cure all the problems of a society ... [but] without it no cure for any problem is possible (quoted in Galbraith 1986:21). Similarly, Mead (1986) stakes an important part of his argument for citizenship and obligation on the premise that people 'must be educated in minimal ways, able to maintain themselves...' (p6). Along with a concentration on education there would be an expansion of the food-stamp program, job training, youth employment and Medicare. But what was missing, 'The one element that might have been expected to be a central feature of any large scale anti-poverty effort but was nonetheless absent ... was that of an adult employment program' (Moynihan 1969:13). Moreover, Johnson incorrectly thought the War on

Poverty would cut the welfare roles suggesting, 'the days of the dole in this country are numbered' (quoted in Corbett and Weber 2001:1). And with that, Johnson turned his attention to women and children. From the perspective of the poor single mothers receiving AFDC, he promised to give high priority to all of those who lacked basic skills or had not completed their educations and, significantly, he promised to create a skilled and dedicated population of individuals who would help in achieving this goal. This promise, suggests Abramovitz (1988), was ultimately broken and may have played some part in sabotaging the success of many of the most in-need today. From the 1920s on, it was primarily professional social workers that were involved in lobbying for welfare provision, and later it was they who provided welfare advice and assistance to the needy. Gradually, however, the convention of hiring the skilled and dedicated fell away, quite possibly out of the desire to reduce costs.

This focus on women and children 'was to have consequences great and small throughout society, but most fundamentally for [black] Americans' (Moynihan 1969:13). While the war on poverty was a unifying theme, it was understood that although blacks were proportionally over-represented, they remained an overall minority in terms of numbers and as a result found their needs not catered to. Despite the fact that the civil rights marches had changed the face of American politics, the widely publicised marches with Martin Luther King Junior exposed deprived blacks, yet those living in dreadful slum conditions remained mostly a national mystery. It was just as Harrington said: 'Here is a great mass of people, yet it takes an effort of the intellect and will even to see them.... (1997:2).

Johnson, ultimately, was forced to sacrifice his plans to expand the War on Poverty in order to elicit the necessary support from conservative Democrats, Republicans and the business community to fund the Vietnam War (Noble 1997:98,99,102). This began a trend that would see AFDC lose significant funding (food stamps and medical care less so) in favour of old age assistance, a decrease that ensured it lost some forty-two percent of its purchasing power over the twenty years from 1970 to 1990 (Piven and Cloward 1993:371-373). Thus, for all the promise and ambition of the Great Society's programmes, they never developed into coherent social policy, instead remaining fragmented within various federal agencies and suffering from



limitations in scope and financial support (O'Connor 1999:108). Much of this, suggests Krugman (2007), is because conservatives have long worked to roll back the gains achievements of the New Deal.

### **(1.3) Government Training Programmes and Social Policy**

This 'semi-welfare state' (Katz 1996:280) continues to spend less of the GDP than any other wealthy country. The US also has something of a history of ambivalence in implementing work-training programmes for the poor, unemployed and unskilled. That is, the desire exists to implement programmes but an equal desire exists to spend little money on support of the programmes (Califano 1981; O'Connor 1999).

Government training programmes tend to fall into two broad categories: voluntary and mandatory. Mandatory programmes are overseen by implementers who hold authority to sanction uncooperative recipients (Friedlander et al. 1997:1812-1813). The first major training programme to be implemented, one which was voluntary, was born out of the 1962 Manpower Development and Training Act, which implemented JFK's plans to help dislocated workers keep abreast of technological change (Friedlander et al:1997; Noble 1997) but which grew into a mixture of myriad and disconnected training programmes and acts such as the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Work Training Program and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act amendments. But devolution had left local governments running these programmes and they 'lacked the revenues and competence to deal with them' effectively (Piven and Cloward 1993:259).

It was not until the advent of Work Incentives Now (WIN) programme in 1967 (which mostly took the form of subsidised employment) that single parents were required to become actively involved in work or, occasionally, education and training programmes were available to help them develop the work skills they lacked (Piven and Cloward 1993:382). This was the dawn of 'welfare-to-work' or 'workfare' as we mostly understand it today (Piven and Cloward 1993:382; Friedlander et al 1997:1812) and it came at a time when single parents were growing increasingly conspicuous (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Ruggles 2004; Akerlof

and Yellen 1996). The fact that many of this group were black ensured that assistance for them was publicly unpopular and may have paved the way for the backlash to come (Gilens 1996; 1996a).

As the welfare rolls increased in the early 1970s, the Nixon Administration made an attempt to consolidate the myriad social welfare programmes into something more coherent and cost effective. The latter point may prove of some significance for there appears to be a 'solid preference of many Americans of the highest respectability and saintly character for any politician, however depraved, if he seems not to be a threat to their personal wealth....' (Galbraith 1986:395). This New Federalism sought to give states greater power and limit federal restrictions on how funds could be spent by creating the provision of block grants. At the same time, 'it aimed to forge a new electoral majority based on white working-class resentment and the black welfare poor' (O'Connor 1999:109).

It had become clear at this point that subsidised employment was unsuccessful in placing single parents in work so Congress enacted the Talmadge Amendment. The explicit intention of this was to impress upon states that they must emphasise work before training but it also ignored research which indicated that there existed severe job shortages in addition to other confounding matters such as appropriateness of jobs to the individual (Trattner:346).

Beginning with the Private Sector Initiative Program under the title of Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), and then with the far broader role given to private sector-dominated Private Industry Councils under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and Workforce Investment Boards under WIA, the business community became increasingly engaged in local policy-setting. In December 1973 when CETA went into effect, more power was once again returned to individual states with the provision of lump sums of funding earmarked for education and job training to assist the economically disadvantaged (Wallace 2007:2). As its name indicated, CETA was intended to pull together the myriad smaller programmes that had come into existence, and represented Nixon's proclivity for federalism and block grants. States would then fund local sponsors,

social service agencies, for example, who, in turn, turned money over to the specific service providers. Yet, by 1975, it was once again clear that employment rates had remained unchanged (Piven and Cloward 1993:383).

In response to the 1973 oil crisis, profit squeeze, corporate response and unemployment rate increases, over the course of its life CETA was amended significantly. When, in 1976, Jimmy Carter learned that the working poor often found themselves worse off after leaving welfare, he promised, 'If I'm elected President, you're going to have welfare reform next year' (quoted in Califano 1981:320). By vaguely pledging a revamp of CETA by eliminating fraud and waste and encouraging work, Carter entered the quagmire of welfare reform. What emerged 'was a tragi-comedy of naiveté, of guarding institutional interests, and of clashing personalities' (p321). All of this meant that reform was 'substantially difficult and politically treacherous ... encrusted with myth, regional politics, and racial prejudice' (p325-326). Joseph Califano, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Reform from 1977 to 1979, was entrusted by Carter with the task of devising a comprehensive welfare plan without increasing any of the associated costs, famously referred to welfare reform as 'the Middle East of domestic politics' (p321). Ultimately, CETA had grown 'unwieldy' (O'Connor 1999:111), was overwhelmed by 'budgetary gimmickry' (Califano:349), fiscal problems, serious administrative issues and lack of positive evaluations (Mead 1986), recession and inflation, and died with the words of Carter, 'No legislative struggle has provided so much hopeful rhetoric and so much disappointment and frustration' (Califano:364).

In 1981, CETA, in turn, was attacked by the Reagan administration, which ushered in a more radical framework of decentralisation and privatisation consistent with supply-side economics. During a time of harsh recession and supported by apparent public approval for personal responsibility, the Reagan revolution succeeded in withdrawing much assistance for poor communities, proposing that no government intervention into the lives of the poor would have the much success in getting individuals to work. This was an act that would prove 'devastating' in its marginalisation of poor communities (O'Connor 1999:114). Indeed, the pejorative view of welfare as public support for 'Welfare Queens', had long had vigorous

support (Krugman 2007; Gilens 1999). Although Reagan has previously shown himself to be hostile to welfare recipients, Murray (1984) provided much of the fodder to the Reagan Administration's policy towards welfare recipients in the form of *Losing Ground*, a text that identified welfare recipients as consciously manipulating the benefits system in order to maintain their lives of relative leisure. This sparked a popular backlash against what amounted to nothing more than a stereotype of encapsulated characteristics: 'She is African American, she is "unwed" or single, she started child-bearing as a teen, and she does not put her children first though she stays home full time and does not work' (Parker West 2002:12). This image proved a potent political tool used to limit spending on a range of government policies designed to outwit the 'conniving and evil welfare cheat (p12). This devolved into an emphasis on local, public-private initiatives beginning in the 1980s, which resulted in a collection of short-lived programmes with limited institutional memory (O'Connor 1999:77). And yet, well before Reagan used this valuable rhetorical tool to further his power, the attack on welfare recipients was festering amid state penuriousness and visible social change.

CETA came to be replaced by the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which continued further the trend to relinquish control to the states for 'decentralization would [allow] the White House to shift blame for cutbacks to the state and local officials' who had been forced by reduction of federal funding government to make those cuts (Noble 1997:120-121). The JTPA specifically targeted youth and adults facing serious barriers to employment, and, for the first time, invited business communities into the process of controlling skills training and service delivery. It placed great emphasis on employment-related outcomes such as earnings, employment status, and the relationship of training to the targeted job, employer satisfaction, and programmes' abilities to meet the needs of employers. Of significance is the fact that JTPA relinquished any control over the distribution of vocational training funds to the states and ended federal funding of public service employment and training programmes. It also provided little in the way of work support to working mothers, thus forcing many out of work and back onto the rolls. The situation worsened for the least well-off families 'and new and confusing bureaucratic obstacles succeeded in cutting participation rates among the poor. In

due course, these cuts had their greatest impact on working conditions in the service and retail sectors and created ‘a vast new “service proletariat” - an army of low-wage workers, the majority of them women and minorities, who cooked, served, and cleaned’ (Piven and Cloward 1993:361-362). And, as may be predicted, reduced access to AFDC for those working jobs at this end of the labour market, ‘intensified the fear of being fired which underlies employer power (p:362). For more details on employer power and the low-wage retail labour market, see Chapter 4, **Why Walmart Matters**.

By 1981, conservatives were becoming disgruntled at work incentive programmes, which they perceived as enabling women on welfare to use benefits to purposefully stay out of the labour market, income eligibility was cut and the system once again readjusted (Piven and Cloward 1993:385). ‘By triggering citizens’ predisposed moral judgements of single, poor Black mothers, Republican efforts about welfare reform remained a dialogue about values’ (Hancock 2004:51). Two main goals of the Great Society’s social reforms: the elimination of poverty and racial injustice, were now under vigorous attack from mainly four fronts. The first reduced anti-poverty spending by lowering benefits and increasing eligibility requirements. The second involved increasing devolution, a matter that was intended, in part, to dilute the effects of defenders of the welfare state who would be less powerful outside of the capital city. Third involved a convoluted restructuring of the tax system that diminished the federal government’s ability to raise money and thereby created a need to reduce social spending. Fourth, Reagan promised to end the ‘special privileges’ afforded to racial minorities that include disproportionate social spending on poor blacks (Noble 1997:121).

The effect was that the employment success rates of poor mothers changed barely perceptibly. Indeed, ‘evaluation research suggested that poor labour market performance by AFDC women resulted from deficits in literacy and occupational skills’ (Piven and Cloward 1993:386). Thus, with JTPA still operating, 1988 saw the creation of the newly passed Family Support Act and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programme, which, again, specifically targeted welfare recipients for whom the goal was self-sufficiency, and which created compulsory

participation for twenty percent of the non-exempt<sup>7</sup> national caseload in what was national welfare legislation. All eligible mothers who received AFDC were required to participate in JOBS in a variety of forms or face economic sanction. Thus began the help and hassle, and often acrimonious relationship between single mothers and their case managers, but more controversy, conflict and control was to come.

#### **(1.4) Clinton: Ending Welfare As We Know It**

In his 1992 campaign manifesto, *Putting People First*, it wasn't enough for Clinton to call for personal responsibility and to 'end welfare as we know it' but, to elicit the votes he needed, he attracted voters with a one-size-fits-all approach to welfare reform. Indeed, Krugman (2007), a Princeton University professor of economics and international affairs, on economic issues from welfare to taxes, Clinton governed not only to the right of Carter, but to the right of Nixon (p5). Among other things and for the purposes of this research, this included removing welfare entitlement and established a mandate for poor single women with small children to work full-time or attend full-time education and training, with the goal of work and none of which could exceed sixty months (Gordon 2001; Trattner 1999; Weir et al. 1988).

In many parts of the United States this process has come to be termed 'Workfare', referring to the fact that individuals in receipt of benefit are required to work for their welfare. The philosophy of working for welfare has enormous philosophical support from both the public and politicians for whom it would be tantamount to political suicide not to champion its varying tenets. Indeed, Hudson and Coukos (2005) suggest that from an historical perspective, Clinton's timing was impeccable insofar that welfare reform was mobilised during a period of economic strength, political activity and public support. Fundamentally based on a long-standing Protestant ethos, Clinton looked to the past and was able to tap into Americans' distaste for idleness and depravity to '...reduce the twin vices of dependency and "illegitimacy"' (p22).

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<sup>7</sup> Non-exempt referred to those who were not under mandatory work requirements, for example, poor, pregnant women and, at the states' discretion, mothers with children under three.

Once he had settled publicly on the idea of welfare reform, to some extent Clinton's hands were tied and it required addressing. Of foremost importance, he had run for office on a public promise to change welfare for, says DeParle (2004), long-time welfare correspondent for the New York Times, 'the rise of "dependency" deserved above all to be studied and discussed' (p139). Katz (1995), however, dismisses any discussion on welfare dependency as potentially leading to punitive policies against the welfare poor, but Teles (1998) suggests this is misguided, preferring instead to think that concern for dependency could be woven into generous welfare policy that reflects the values of average Americans (pp7-9). For 18 months Clinton did little and which set in motion the forces that would lead to the system of welfare that exists today (Trattner 1999:397). On a number of occasions and over multiple issues he threatened presidential veto after Republicans lobbied for policy changes that would have hurt those Clinton was adamant needed protecting. One Republican plan removed entitlement status for child welfare services, Medicaid and food stamps. Clinton won this debate. Another punished many of those on welfare who simply could not get jobs due to limited work experience or education, and yet another those who, while fully employed, still could not support their families without government subsidy. In a message to Congress, Health and Human Services Secretary, Mary Joe Bane, promised that President Clinton's welfare bill would promote work, parental responsibility and provide vulnerable children with an economic safety net. AFDC had intended to do precisely that for, in the 1990s prior to PRWORA, it had supported an average of 13 percent of all US children (Department of Health and Human Services 1997:61). Yet, significantly and for the first time, what the Clinton bill did was mandate that single women with small children of 12 months or more must work full time, or be involved in the process of acquiring full time work, in order to be eligible for government assistance or subsidy. This, along with the five-year lifetime limit on welfare, was the core feature of the bill and the Republicans had dictated the details because Clinton had failed to take the initiative (Trattner 1999:396). At some point, Clinton had criticised all of the major tenets of the act and Gingrich, who had powerful Republican allies, thought the new bill would politically destroy him (DeParle 2004:153). It did not.

The plan to reform welfare into something resembling its current incarnation was not Clinton's brainchild; he stole the thunder from Tommy Thompson, the conservative Republican governor of Wisconsin who had already taken the state to task four months into Clinton's first term, indeed won election on the welfare reform ticket, several years earlier (Trattner 1999:380-381). In the mid 1980s, Wisconsin had the country's fastest growing ghettos, attributable possibly to the fact that the State had some of the highest welfare payments available. Thompson sought to reduce these via two new initiatives, LearnFare and the Work Experience and Job Training programmes. These plans intended not only to reduce payments to recipients, but penalise those who failed to ensure their children attended school, to limit the enrolment of would-be recipients and, finally, to limit individuals to two years of help (Piven and Cloward 1993:396; Noble 1997:194-195). After two years, all assistance would cease, 'Not "two years and work," but two years and have a nice life' (DeParle 2004:114).

None of these projects worked particularly well (Rodgers 2000:167), and, according to a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UW-M) study, which Thompson commissioned, neither would they (Pawasarat and Quinn 1993). DeParle (2004) suggests Thompson was made aware of UW-M data, but, when the findings failed to meet his political needs, he condemned the academics as 'liberal ideologues' (p76) and subsequently cancelled the university's contracts on two occasions. Further, in 2000 the Office of Civil Rights concluded in a review of possible civil rights violations that Wisconsin had denied benefits to eligible ethnic minorities (Neubeck and Cazenove 2001:198).

What is clear, however, is that Wisconsin's welfare cash payments dropped 89 percent between 1995 and 2000, and, despite the stated goals of PRWORA, for many it is precisely this that is the single most important identifying feature of success (Corbett and Weber 2000:10). Writing from the Heritage Foundation, senior research fellow Robert Rector (1997a) remained singularly impressed and convinced of the plans' efficacy years later, suggesting that 'Wisconsin's experience with welfare reform provides an unparalleled model for implementing reform that other states would be wise to follow'. The author claimed the state's greatly reduced welfare roles debunked the myths that 'Recipients really want to work but



jobs are not available; the lack of day care makes employment impossible; education and training are the key to reducing dependence; and it costs more to reform than to continue the status quo' (1997a: online).

Lastly, while the welfare rolls have declined substantially, PRWORA costs more than AFDC. And, whilst caseloads have reduced, costs have increased. DeParle suggests Clinton anticipated caseload reduction, not costs, a matter of some significance confirmed by Clinton himself. Cost reduction was never intended as part of the welfare reform proposal because of the anticipated need for supportive services while former recipients were working (Clinton 2006:19).

### **(1.5) Welfare Reform Ten Years On - Is It Working?**

2006 saw the ten-year anniversary of welfare reform, and, while Clinton remained satisfied that he had created 'a new beginning for millions of Americans' (Clinton 2006:A19), those successes must come with some caveats, even for Clinton. Says DeParle 'A good welfare bill, wrapped in a sack of shit' (2004:153) was how Clinton described the end product of his welfare reform. Seemingly, few were pleased with the product. McCrate and Smith, (1998) refer to President Clinton's 1994 battles with a right wing Congress over his promise 'to end welfare as we know it' as an action which effectively 'reignited the smouldering political obsession with welfare recipients, the vast majority of whom are unmarried women and their children' (p61). Clinton and his advisers '...helped unleash the political maelstrom' which made up the most recent bout of welfare reform (Piven and Ellwood 1996:14) and ensured a 'race to the bottom if the federal government devolves social policy responsibility to the states' (Weir 1999:5). It is possible, however, that Clinton may deserve a modicum of sympathy. The original incarnation of his welfare reform bill was a very different product than the one finally signed into law. But a Republican congress headed by Newt Gingrich (speaker of the house after 1994) required major compromises and, since Clinton had run for office on the promise of a welfare reform bill, he was now in a position to produce it.

It was already known that forcing minimally-educated women with marginal employability and small children into the workforce 'offers the prospect of constant recycling of claimants through short-lived and low-paid jobs' (Jones and Novak 1999:98). Further, Peck (2001) outlined in some detail his beliefs on why the goals and methods of welfare-to-work programmes for the least employable are flawed.

Welfare strategies appear to make sense when the labor market is generating large numbers of contingent jobs; the presence of such jobs facilitates the deregistration of welfare recipients; which in turn means that the policy is perceived as successful. Never mind that the argument is circular, that the jobs are unstable and poorly paid, that the programs are clumsy and ineffective, the overall picture continues to appeal to politicians as an alternative to 'welfare dependency (p342).

He suggests that the very presence of welfare-to-work strategies ensures employers have ready access to an easily dispatched population of potential employees. The effect is that it 'fuels working poverty by swelling contingent labor supply and depressing wages; high social externalities; residualizes hardest-to-serve clients' (p78). This entry of low-skilled individuals exacerbates the 'churning effect in the low end of the labour market because the flow of labour market entrants is one way and only into entry-level jobs' (p354). He asserts that this overt government control over lives 'contributes to the maintenance of social order, as well as disciplining the individuals' (p349) for breaking the social contract of self-sufficiency. Mead's (1997) approach goes further on this matter and suggests that 'paternalism is an effort to control the lifestyle of the poor' (p6) for the poor need structure, support and behaviour modification in the form of governmental enforcement of social policy which, whilst serving the freedom of others, also purports to serve the needs of the poor (p22).

In an August 2006 radio interview, Ron Haskins, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a key architect of Clinton's welfare reform bill, reflected on welfare reform ten years since inception.

There are some mothers at the bottom of the income distribution who are not able to handle this new welfare system ... They are worse off as a result of welfare reform but this was predictable ... There's a trade off as there always is with policy and the question is whether one is worth the other ... we are not very good at dealing with them (The Conversation 2006:online).

Liz Schott, a senior analyst at the Center of Budget Policy Priorities and member of Washington State's Governor's Welfare Reorganization Board concurs with Haskins, saying that welfare's success is mixed because the most poor are being left behind and that an estimated one million single parents, an increase of some four hundred thousand in the past decade, fall into a situation where they are neither eligible for welfare nor are they able to find work (The Conversation 2006:online). Therefore, it may be that more creative and intensive approaches are needed to meet the challenges posed by this population (Parrot et al. 2006:2). Yet, compounding an already difficult problem is a flexible, deregulated labour market which renders the least-able with little recourse against wage deterioration and job stability (O'Connor 1999:79). Furthermore, the Bush Administration manages a multitude of demands on the country's wealth and with limited evidence of improved outcomes for students in basic skills and job training, the US federal budget for 2006 curtailed by two-thirds the funding for adult education and completely severed that for vocational education (Department of Education 2005).

To be sure, there are fewer people on welfare now than there were five years ago with individuals 'receipt down by 7,792,314 - from 12,242,125 to 4,449,811 - a national decline of 64 percent (Department of Health and Human Services 2006-online). Indeed, so efficient have states been at removing people from welfare that in fiscal year 2004, \$86 million was awarded to states for their improvements in facilitating job entry<sup>8</sup> and 'Success in the Workforce' (Department of Health and Human Services 2005-online).

While on the face of it receiving bonuses for a job well done seems appropriate, what it also means is that states with smaller reductions in welfare rolls are financially penalized for their own failures to comply with federal mandates and there is, therefore, considerable pressure on states to get recipients off welfare and, preferably, into work, any work, sustaining and sustainable or not. Ironically, a cruel parallel is drawn between the sanctioned women who have failed to comply with federal mandates to get a job and the states also being sanctioned for their own failures to comply with federal mandates to reduce caseloads. And yet, many of

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<sup>8</sup> This latter title is, however, rather vague, but within a historical context most likely means that once individuals have entered employment, they remain gainfully employed for at least 13 weeks.

these declines in welfare caseloads occurred at a time when unemployment and applications for food assistance rose. Indeed, it is now clear that leaving welfare is not necessarily synonymous with being employed, nor is employment synonymous with self-sufficiency (Department of Health and Human Services 2000:141; Loprest 2001).

## **(1.6) Conclusion**

If low income single parents with fragile holds on the world of work continue to remain living in precarious circumstances, then simply leaving welfare, or becoming ineligible for continued support, cannot be considered legitimately 'successful', not even by the standards of success set by the goals of PRWORA, and additional, long-term scrutiny would need to be undertaken. For the tenuously employed, or those unemployed, 'hard-to-serve' women living with barriers, how might they cope best with federal work requirements when they fail to cope with the stress of their daily lives? The United Kingdom's Social Exclusion Unit states that entrenched problems and circumstances must take priority over work if individuals are to succeed (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004:64). And yet, 'a work requirement is not a penalty. It is the pathway to independence and self-respect. For former welfare recipients, this path has led to a new and better life' (Bush 2002-online). It is possible. But in the decade since welfare was implemented, some 20 percent of welfare leavers returned to TANF from work, another 10 percent left TANF in anticipation of work that failed to materialise and some 36 percent left welfare only to return because they were disqualified for not following programme rules (Loprest 2002:2,3). Furthermore, a 2006 Urban Institute study suggests that more than 40 percent of welfare leavers have not worked in more than two years and that these disconnected (from work and welfare) women face multiple economic hardships: numerous food insecurities over the course of the year, difficulties paying for housing costs, lower average incomes than other leavers (Loprest and Zedlewski 2006:44, 45). Should they find work, Acs, Holzer and Nicols (2005) found that the most marginalised former welfare recipients are least likely to hold onto work, indeed less than 50 percent work full-time, particularly during recession, and are the

least likely to benefit adequately, if at all, from unemployment insurance once they lose work (p2,4). Finally, there may be evidence of a trend which suggests that the by-product of a press for employment has created no-parent families for some insofar that many of those working single parents often leave their children inadequately cared for (Acs 2001:2) and open to investigation from child protective services (Courtney and Dworsky 2006).

While there can be little argument that independence can promote autonomy and self-respect, any one size fits all plan ensures that welfare reform fails to both reach and assist the most disadvantaged. Many women continue to live precariously and with a prominence of doubleday work<sup>9</sup>, seasonal work, job hopping, poor nutrition, compromised physical and mental health for themselves and their children, suffer periods of homelessness and, indeed, after periods of work, are not only likely to return to welfare but also become more dependent upon it (NCPA 1996; McCrate and Smith 1998; Rank and Cheng 1995). David Ellwood, President Clinton's welfare reform expert who left the administration disappointed with PRWORA and insisted that mandatory work and time limits would only work if the low wages, health insurance, training and other support services for poor families were scrupulously attended to in order to make work possible. He asked 'Do [Americans] want to ensure the minimal custodial care for children in low income working families, or are we willing to pay for the kind of day care that opens brighter futures to children?' (Ellwood 1999:6). For more information on the benefits of quality childcare, see Chapter 4. Today, the prosperity and employment boom of the 1990s yielded to a multi-trillion dollar federal budget deficit, which ensures a focus on curtailing federal spending wherever possible. Single parents have remained pariahs (Hancock 2004) or 'modern-day social monsters' (Holloway et al. 1997:6). There exists evidence of racial scapegoating (Neubeck and Cazenove 2001:5). Racial prejudice and bias in hiring practices endure (Holzer, Stoll and Wissoker 2001:11), and the poor generally are the focus of either indifference (Rank 2004), or they should be rendered invisible by virtue of what Murray (2005) refers to as 'custodial democracy ... figuratively custodial for the neighborhoods we seal away from the rest of us' (p6). Along with the appeal of devolution and a climate demanding

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<sup>9</sup> Some women work multiple jobs or split shifts.

personal responsibility, it is reasonable to conclude that the U.S. welfare state will remain distinctive from those elsewhere in the West, leaving still more of its population unusually dependent on 'the distribution of private property, education, skill, talent, and luck' (Noble 1997:10).

This section investigated the circumstances that gave rise to the development of the 'semi welfare state' and the causes and consequences for the path taken. These matters of formal political structure generate further enquiry that reflects an investigation of the social and economic structures of the United States. There are elements of these structures that ensure failure to attain the policy goals of eliciting employment from the least employable. The next chapter, then, will address the social and economic structures of individuals' barriers to employment, the hostility of the low-wage work environment, the relative efficacy of welfare-to-work programmes and the social and political cultures that breed resentment and stigmatisation of those receiving public support.

**(Table 2) Brief History of Welfare State Support of Women**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
1911 and later: The Mothers' Pension	Victorian era concern for children, loose women's redemption, and emergent issues of women's economic vulnerability	Controversial: Moralistic and exclusive. Benefited mostly white widows; therefore excluding single, divorced, deserted, black women from help
Title IV of the 1935 Social Security Act, ADC (Aid to Dependent Children)	The Great Depression and increasingly evident inability of states, cities, charities, businesses to address effectively the needs of the poor.	Controversial: May have prolonged the Depression, probably racist, possibly misogynistic. Began the first federal mass foray into decreasing mass poverty
McCarthyism: 1950's	Fear of central government control	Mass government involvement and control became associated with communism and socialism, and by association so did welfare. Welfare came to be a dirty word
Civil Rights and women's grass roots organisations: 1955-1960's	Institutionalised racism and discrimination	Increased rights and recognition for blacks. Broader welfare rights for single women with children
Michael Harrington's book, The Other America, 1962	In the course of his research, Harrington had become appalled at the silence towards the millions of hidden Americans living in poverty	Galvanised JFK and Johnson's efforts to address unemployment and poverty
Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA): 1962	Increased unemployment and poverty due to changing labour market focus from goods to services and to accommodate increased use of technology	First major federal programme which focused on unused human capital, but the MDTA was expensive and cumbersome to operate

War On Poverty: 1964	Continued JFK's theme to increase employment and banish poverty	Poverty was already in decline, but the War on Poverty failed to fully follow through with the promise to create a skilled and dedicated body of professionals to help achieve programme goals
Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) 1973	Wanted to coalesce the myriad programmes which had emerged from MDTA	Suffered from fiscal, targeting and work support problems, was modified several times, then finally gave way to the JTPA
Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) 1982	Specifically wanted to target youth and adults facing serious barriers to employment	For the first time, invited business communities into the process of controlling skills training and service delivery. It placed great emphasis on employment-related outcomes
TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) 1996	To appeal to the public and gain political approval of getting single mothers off welfare and into full time jobs. While AFDC had work plan requirements for single mothers, this Clinton proposal which came out of PRWORA, set a scope of work mandates, not just work plans i.e., education and training, that far outweighed anything implemented previously	Introduction of TANF meant the demise of AFDC and ended the notion of entitlements to cash benefits for eligible low-income families. It also meant that work was mandatory for anyone 'able' to hold down a job. While the federal government had work mandates for welfare parents with children over the age of 12 months, many states now require full work participation after the child is 3 months old



## **Chapter Four**

### **US Welfare-in-Action**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter addresses in detail the causes and consequences of welfare reform's failure to force the least skilled into the take up of work. In Chapter 3 our attention was drawn to problems of public and political philosophies; policy approach, design and implementation; and the design and administration of programmes that have, together, helped confound successful outcomes of welfare provision to those who are not immediately desirable to employers. The culmination of this was that welfare reform fails to reach its goal of ensuring the least-skilled gain and maintain employment and that this comprises a significant percentage of the welfare population. Chapter 4 will address the causes for this in detail. It advances the argument that there is little possibility for this population of welfare recipients to work in the short term because they have insurmountable and interrelated barriers to employment; the low wage work environment is hostile to their current circumstances; and education and training programmes offer too little to them and it comes to them too late. Furthermore, the social and political cultures ensure that they are disparaged and often denied adequate access to much needed resources.

Suppose nothing special happens. Welfare 'reform' follows the script, without amelioration. What will we think about it? The welfare rolls will diminish. Governors will point with pride. Congressmen and senators (and presidents?) will nod their satisfaction. No one will ask what has happened to the former welfare recipients or to the working poor. If any asks, there will be no answer. There will be no data [because] the system tracks only recipients, not the would-have-beens [although] they may be living with relatives who cannot afford them, on the street ... under bridges ... (Solow 1998:43).

Solow was prescient. Ten years since inception, welfare reform remains fundamentally unameliorated, the rolls have diminished and governors and presidents, indeed many people, have uttered their satisfaction. This thesis is an attempt to address the concerns of individuals such as Solow, in addition to Edelman, Holzer, and Peck, and collect data on what happens, and why, to the most

compromised current and former welfare recipients and what could be done to improve their circumstances. We saw in Chapter 1 that with limited skills and work experience, the least skilled single mothers, and particularly African Americans, lack even rudimentary educational, social and employment and continue to remain unemployed and exceptionally poor (Holzer 2001; Courtney and Dworsky 2006). And still, welfare reform policy demands that they work if they are judged capable by case managers who, for many reasons, may be ill-equipped to judge. When they are not, due to lack of skills or education, then education and training programmes are intended to bridge that gap and help them develop the necessary skills in order to gain employment. Yet, years of welfare-to-work programmes have not helped prepare this population achieve PRWORA's employment goals. Part of the problem, suggests the Dean of Faculty at the University of Manitoba School of Social Work, is that 'Workfare programs are 'cash cows' for business people.... Besides providing cheap labour and subsidizing employers, workfare takes jobs away from other workers and serves as a mechanism for keeping wages down and profits up' (An Administrative Nightmare 1996). Although originally published in the summer of 1996, just when Clinton signed welfare reform into law, Mulally stresses that it is important and relevant today 'now more than ever' (Mulally 2004, e-mail correspondence 25 October). This scrutiny of the circumstances of the least-skilled should not occur within a vacuum. That is, it should not occur without a discussion of its unintended consequences, the challenges posed by the US labour market and without consideration of other structures in place the express intent of which is to create employability but that appear less efficacious than is desirable.

Misfortunes tend to cluster together. Poverty is a misfortune, and the poor are less educated than the wealthy; they smoke more and weigh more; they and their children are more likely to be sick, to eat what's affordable rather than what the experts tell them is healthful; to have poor medical care and to live in environments with more pollutants, noise, stress, social fragmentation and even suicide (Davey-Smith in Taubes (2007:58-59) and Whitley et al. 1999:1036-1037). None of this bodes well for the individuals in this study and is the reason why addressing the causes of their lack of work is of significance. This chapter, therefore, responds in six distinct parts to the objectives of this thesis as stated in the Introduction. With these in mind, part one is an in-depth analysis of the culture of US society and

politics in an attempt to clarify how welfare recipients are viewed and determine if there are any consequences to this. This section sets the stage for part two, which examines the emergence and effects of policy and the pressure to work on this population of women. Part three investigates the ‘barriers’ to employment of the ‘hard-to-serve’. Barriers draw attention to the personal circumstances of these women in an attempt to explain why they continue to face unemployment despite efforts to the contrary. Because employers’ willingness to hire those with few skills are a critical part of the equation of establishing a place to work, part four addresses their relative willingness to employ single parents with few skills. Part five studies the nature of the low-wage work environment and highlights why being at work and remaining employed is onerous for these women. Part six investigates education and training programmes the explicit purpose of which is to create employability but which appear to be failing for the population under assessment.

## **(1.0) Culture**

### **Culture of Condemnation of the Undeserving Poor**

Portz et al. (1999) and Jacobs and Shapiro (1998) suggest that when it came to welfare in the 1990s, opinion polls showed that Americans had a negative image of both welfare and recipients and, whilst public opinion did not direct policymakers toward specific reforms, it simply told them to change a system that no one liked. Indeed, if we are to believe polls at all, they show that Americans’ views of welfare are enduring and that there is little evidence of political polarization (DiMaggio, Evans et al. 1996; Mead 1997).

Americans say they have strong beliefs in individualism (McClosky and Zaller 1984; Seccombe, James et al. 1998), those who try hard enough can get ahead (Seccombe, James et al. 1998; Stearns 2001) and 74 percent say individuals have a responsibility to care for themselves (Gilens 1999:35). Yet Rank (2004) warns of popular myths which rest on the assumption that America is embodied in phrases such as ‘rags to riches’, ‘the land of opportunity’ and ‘the American Dream’ (p171) and that America is a place where you can be rich if you work hard enough. Rank is perplexed that the apparently Judeo-Christian ethics of many Americans so

contradicts their 'attitudes of apathy towards the poor' (p124). Taken as a whole, the fundamental messages of the Bible, he says, are of mercy, generosity and urgency in helping the poor. Yet the disregard of their plight by many who profess an attraction to Judeo-Christian ethics is profoundly oxymoronic (p131).

Further, some 81 percent agree that people should work for their welfare (National Opinion Research Center 1998-online) and Mead (1997) suggests that while the American electorate wants to protect the vulnerable, at the same time it is attracted to the rhetoric of ensuring adults work or otherwise behave well in return for assistance (p13). 'What really seems to matter' says Loury (quoted in Solow 1998), is that recipients are visibly trying to do something for themselves. This is what we are calling 'work', in our effort to resolve the conflict between the values of self-reliance and altruism (p48). Wilson (1997) calls on the Americans' beliefs in democracy, the tenets of which rest not only on equal rights but also equal obligation. He raises the point that ensuring welfare recipients behave takes the form of political leaders publicly moralising about good versus bad moral character. Indeed, Wilson says, powerful members in state and federal governments feel the need to increasingly encroach on citizens' decisions and seem unable to separate sexuality from morality yet they are also unable to connect humanity and charity and poverty. Still, all of this sits comfortably within the minds of the public and hence the increasing support of a paternalistic approach to the administration of welfare (p333).

It even sits comfortably within the minds of some welfare recipients, who view others from within a 'them and me' mindset of 'them': taking advantage of the system and 'me': a victim of circumstance (Ellwood 1988; Gilens 1999). This internalised view is consistent with the views of the general public: the deserving poor versus the undeserving poor (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Weaver, Shapiro et al. 1995; Gilens 1996; Gilens 1999). Appearing decidedly ambivalent at times, we know that many polled Americans have a dislike for poor single parents receiving welfare without having to provide some sort of service in return, for example workfare. Yet many Americans also believe the government has a responsibility to take care of the poor (Gilens 1999), while at once confessing a disdain for big

government involvement in people's lives (McClosky and Zaller 1984; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Gilens 1999).

Ellwood (1988) suggests that everyone hates welfare. Liberals hate it because people are 'mistreated and misunderstood by policy' (p9), and conservatives hate it because they perceive it to be 'a narcotic that destroys the energy and determination of people who are already suffering from a shortage of such qualities' (p4). Those ambitious enough can get the jobs they want, they say, but ambitions with little semblance of skills and direction is surely folly. Indeed, welfare recipients have no shortage of ambition, what they lack is skills and education (Seccombe, James et al. 1998). Ellwood himself believes welfare 'cheapens the efforts of those struggling hard to get by' (p6) but stops short of Murray (1996) who advocates abolition. Rector believes it creates its own clientele by 'undermining the work ethic and marriage' (1997-online). Edelman (1997-online) perceives 'the intersection between work and welfare is screwed up'. Danziger (1997) defends welfare because he suggests there are not enough low-skilled jobs, and Turner (1997) refutes the lack of low-skilled jobs thereby implying welfare recipients can but do not get jobs.

All these individuals are highly visible fixtures in the field of US welfare policy debate, and no discussion of the topic would be complete without their contribution. Yet, their opposing and often heard viewpoints ensure there is relentless debate. Were this not the case, perhaps the public would feel less conflicted. But Americans *are* conflicted and deeply ambivalent. Whilst many are keen to cut taxes and criticise social welfare to the undeserving poor, they have no desire to harm the deserving poor (Gilens 1996, 1999; Ellwood 1988). But this poses a problem. Ellwood attempts to put into perspective the budgetary ramifications of welfare by divulging that just 1.5 percent of the national income is targeted for cash, food and housing for the poor (p5), but endeavouring to create clarity is likely of little use. Given our understanding of US history and politics, it is doubtful that Americans would ever feel much comforted by the knowledge that only a small fraction of their money is expended on welfare. Americans are not convinced the truly in-need are the only ones being served and have a deep disdain for the idleness of 'mothers who are getting money, medical insurance, and food stamps while they are doing

nothing' (Ellwood 1988:3). As Ellwood states, 'Politicians would have to be out of their minds to campaign for welfare benefits' (p4).

Galbraith laments his failure to forecast the changes in social attitudes to the poor when he wrote the first edition of *The Affluent Society* in 1958, '... I did not foresee the extent to which affluence would come to be perceived as a matter of deserved personal reward and thus fully available to the poor, were they only committed to the requisite effort (1998: xi). Murray (2005), however, welcomes a cessation of welfare and, in an attempt to control their destructive behaviour, the public disgrace of single parents who cause unemployment, poverty and criminality and who incur no penalties for their irresponsible behaviour (p6). This population, he suggests, matter little in America today and soon will matter little in the UK for '... in another decade or two Britain will have learned to manage the problem – meaning you will have learnt how to keep the underclass from getting underfoot ...' (p6) by the segregation of those who are improperly socialized. Yet, a GAO report indicated there was no conclusive evidence to support the belief that welfare discourages work, extra-marital childbirth or undermines families (cited in Wilson 1996:163).

To complicate matters, while living in a community of black welfare recipients, Stack (1974) concluded that social conventions discourage successful marriages and encourage short-lived sexual relationships. In turn, the 'system collaborates in weakening the position of the black male' (p113). In 2005, Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen found their plight to have worsened. It had not helped welfare recipients that particularly in inner-cities where poverty is concentrated, the legitimate jobs have all-but disappeared and been replaced by crime and drug trafficking (Wilson 1997:22) and those jobs that are available are not 'mother ready' (Albelda 2001:72). Similarly, Shanafelt (2004) suggests that 'people can be actively involved in the 'recreation of their own oppression, even when acting under the false impression that they are resisting power' (p99). Wasonga and Christman (2003) state that many 'belong to a culture infected with victimology, separatism, and an anti-intellectual strain (p182). While Silva suggests that the cultural transferral of negative behaviours that restrict achievement can find a permanent home within families and communities (quoted in Hill 2005:9). Gordon (1990), meanwhile, suggests that social service programmes are stigmatising, 'stingy and humiliating' (p182) while Wardhaugh and Wilding (1993) say their ritualised procedures and regimentation

serve to depersonalise and dehumanise clients (pp6,7), are a function of an imbalance of power (p11) and hierarchical structure that makes social service clients' complaints difficult to get heard (p26). Case managers are, the authors suggest, 'taken for granted by the organisation, seldom regarded as its heroes, given little support, not consulted about the organisation of their work' (p12).

Further, it may be true that case managers are disaffected, that they attend to groups for whom society has little regard (Gilens 1996, 1996a; Hancock 2004) and who are 'easily stereotyped, [and which] affects the resources made available for their care' (Hancock:14). They are the relatively powerless who are the objects of management, administration, intervention, policing, discipline and coercion into particular patterns of behaviour (Krieken 1991). Yet, it seems unlikely that disregard for and damage to clients is wilful, if it exists at all. It may be, for example, that case managers have large caseloads and are pressured to see many people, assign the most appropriate action from within the confines of their agency policy and must do so in relatively short order. It may also be that they are 'the least trained, least supported and lowest paid ... and therefore out of their depth' (p16). Meyers et al. (2006:25) and Meyers et al. (1998:10) found that case managers exercise significant discretion in which clients are provided with what services thereby creating considerable, and inconsistent, variations in practice of different clients by the same case manager. Lens (2006) found that sanctions and treatment of clients depended largely on clients' barriers to employment: the bigger problems, the greater the likelihood attention rendered would be bureaucratised instead of individualised (p586). Furthermore, 'Some research suggests that states use sanctions against families that do not understand why they are being sanctioned and that sanctions are sometimes applied inequitably' (Haskins, Sawhill et al. 2001:4). Pavetti et al. (2004) suggest that the sheer volume of information for clients to digest may interfere with their ability to retain what may be helpful to them. Similarly, Meyers at al. (1998) found that case managers 'control large amounts of information needed by clients to ensure their economic survival' (p9).

This dissemination to clients of large quantities of information may lead case managers to habituate their communication, a matter that may be unlikely to lead clients to disclose the kind of sensitive information that may have gained them

access to necessary services (p10). The practice of rote dissemination of large quantities of data, in addition to attending to the documentation of necessary details, no doubt compromises case managers' ability to pay the kinds of attention that would be helpful for their clients. Furthermore, welfare recipients speak repeatedly of control of their own lives being co-opted by caseworkers (Abramovitz 1997) who are 'rigidly clerical and chronically discontent' (DeParle 1998:50) and contributing to the creation of a climate of suspicion toward low-income women (McCrate and Smith 1998) who are in the process of receiving welfare. The UK's Social Exclusion Unit states explicitly that respect, consistency and relevance of interventions are vital to creating positive change for welfare recipients (Social Exclusion Unit 2004), and it is likely that, in principal, case managers concur. And yet they continue to provide unequal access, wantonly or otherwise. Ironically, regardless of the causes, the consequences are that the availability of services are rationed and disseminated unequally and inconsistently and the most in need remain the least helped. It is no surprise, then, that Tanner (1996, 1997), Ellwood (1986), Murray (1996), Edin and Lein (2003), Peck (2001) and Katz (2001) all state that once on welfare, women find it difficult to exit.

### **Condemnation by Race**

At no point in any discussion involving social policy, welfare recipients, exclusion, quality and access to education, employment and public opinion could race reasonably be omitted. And, while Gilens (1996, 1999) treats racism and gender as distinct from one another, it may be that they are not only related but also intertwined.

In the United States, the legacy of state sanctioned and enforced slavery and segregation is a shadow on the not-too-distant horizon. Of social policy, Moynihan (1996) suggests that in 1965 the legacy of slavery and segregation continued. It was not possible, he suggests, to take a person

... hobbled by chains and liberate him, bringing him up to the starting line of a race, and say, 'You are free to compete with the others,' and still just believe that you have been completely fair ... No one who understands the



complexity of this task is likely to promote a single means by which it may be accomplished (p187).

Exiting TANF for work may be a larger problem for black women than other populations because of their long history of disadvantage in education and the labour market and a general lack of opportunities available to them in their communities (Holzer and Stoll 2001:15; Parisi, McLaughlin, Grice and Taquino 2006: 77, 78).

These deficits are not genetic; but they are exacerbated by racial and class segregation in this society. They are nevertheless deficits, deep and profound, and they may not be easily reversible with jobs programs of any kind (Solow 1998:52).

Further, the rate of hiring for minority recipients appears to lag significantly behind their representations in the female-headed, low-income populations and suggests that minority welfare recipients face more serious employment barriers than their white counterparts (Holzer and Stoll 2003:219; Hancock 2004; Gilens 1996a, 1999).

Much of what we know about how blacks Americans are faring under TANF comes from government data sources and independent not-for-profit agencies and universities. Collectively, these paint a detailed picture of their experiences and life prospects, and that image is sometimes astonishing. We know, for example, that the states with the largest populations of minorities on welfare tend to have the most punitive policies, greatest percentage of individuals in sanction, least generous welfare benefits and lowest public support for welfare. Whilst the US population of blacks is 12.3 percent, 38.6 percent of welfare recipients are black (Administration for Children and Families 2005, Table 21).<sup>10</sup> Amongst the most chronically disaffected of all would-be workers, blacks comprise almost 70 percent of the population (Turner et al 2006:240). By geographical area, the figures are more pronounced with 98.2 percent, 86.7 and 81 percent of TANF recipients in Washington DC, Mississippi and Georgia being black<sup>11</sup> (Administration for Children and Families 2004:58). In 2002, of the 80.8 million white households, 5.4

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<sup>10</sup> It may be of some interest to note that this number is similar to the percentage of inmates in Federal prisons, i.e., 39.9 percent (Bureau of Prisons. (2005, 2 July). "*Quick Facts About the Bureau of Prisons.*" Retrieved 4 August, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> 60 percent of Washington DC, 28.7 percent of Georgia and 36.3 percent of Mississippi populations are black.

percent were single mothers with children. Of the 13.3 million black households, single mothers head 22.5 percent. The trend is towards reduced numbers of white TANF recipients<sup>12</sup>, increased percentages of Hispanics, increased numbers of children on TANF and increased rates for blacks (Population Reference Bureau 2002). This shift has accelerated since TANF implementation (Administration for Children and Families 2002a).

Census Bureau data indicate that although similar percentages of blacks and whites are enrolled in school up to the ages of 17, whites are more likely to continue with higher education than either blacks or Hispanics (United States Census Bureau 2002b). From the general population, 15.1 percent of white women and 21 percent of black women leave school with no qualifications (United States Census Bureau 2002).

Further, white women without high school diplomas earn more than their black counterparts, and the numbers of black women with professional and doctoral degrees is considered too small in number to meet statistical standards for reliability (United States Census Bureau 2002:10). Indeed, while affirmative action attempted to level the educational playing field by creating greater access to higher education for minorities, the latter group of university educated blacks is somewhat select as 66 percent of whites sit the college entrance exam (Standard Aptitude Test: SAT) compared to just 11.3 percent of blacks (p29).

Should black women without high school diplomas find work, 25 percent are likely to find themselves among the working poor. The rate for similarly afflicted white women is 13.6 (Mosisa 2003:14). The good news is that in the years from 1996 to 2001, poverty rates for all populations dropped revealing 23.1, 24.9 and 7.9 percent of blacks, Hispanics and whites respectively living in official poverty (Finegold and Wherry 2004:1). The bad news is that in 2002 and 2003 poverty rates increased once again and disparities have endured with minority families remaining significantly more likely than whites to suffer 'crushing poverty' (Presser and Cox 1997:231) and food and housing inadequacies (Finegold and Wherry 2004:2). Low

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<sup>12</sup> In 1992, 38.9 percent of the TANF population were white; by 2001 they comprised 30.1 percent.

birth weight is another factor related to race, with black mothers tending towards lower birth weights than whites. Other factors associated with this, e.g. low education and income, welfare receipt, single parenthood and low social support disproportionately appear to affect black mothers (Lieberman 1987; Cramer 1995).

Wilson (1996) found that due to ongoing discrimination, and the exodus of working and middle classes from segregated inner cities, many black families lack any semblance of a social network involving high school graduates (and consequently the means for social mobility) and individuals with stable employment. This segregation 'leads to a lack of networking and establishment of weak ties, factors that, if present, would facilitate achievement in the present structure of academic institutions (Wasonga and Christman 2003:185). Thus, as many poor blacks find themselves dislocated from the labour market, research suggests that when all else remains equal there is less employer demand for black welfare recipients than whites, and minority women are less likely to be hired than their numerical representation as female heads-of-households would predict. They are more likely to remain unemployed and for longer than whites, who leave the unemployment rolls at faster rates than blacks who, in turn, are more likely to be forced to return to welfare (Holzer and Stoll 2002:32).

Further, a National Urban League Institute for Equality and Opportunity paper suggests that the implementation of TANF and WorkFirst have hurt blacks and created

... a system that forces low-income people, especially women, into dead-end jobs without adequate education or training opportunities. ... the effect of reinforcing the very social and economic inequities that keeps low-income workers chronically unemployed and underemployed; and its ill effects ... leave recipients high and dry without marketable skills or a reliable source of income (Rockey Moore 2002:2).

Not all agree, however, that discrimination is a valid concern or that TANF has accomplished anything other than what I set out to do. Goodsell (2004), for example, dismisses (with an occasional nod of consent) Lipsky's (1980) notion of street level bureaucrats as discontent and capricious and insists that research into bias against minorities proves otherwise (p46). Still, the caveats put forth are of

some consequence for he states that whilst most bureaucrats are professional in their approaches to providing services, they

... operated within the constraints established by conditions inherited from the past [racial and income segregation].... The results were not perfection according to some ideal.... the bureaucrats were not social reformers – but neither were they elitists or bigots (p48).

One way or another, we react to what may be institutionalised racism in the form of Goodsell's accidents of discrimination, policy and resulting social inequality such as are evident, and those reactions are likely to be indicative of our political proclivities, class, education and race. Shipler (1997) suggests the 'mixture of sociology and stereotype is intricate and compelling, fertilizing the ground in which a seed of truth grows into a tangled caricature (p331).

How and why the sculpting of racial perceptions occurs is of some significance. McWhorter (2000) shows how 'Black America is currently mired in a detour' from the path that Martin Luther King envisioned for his people (p212). 'As direct consequences of the abrupt unshackling of a crippled race, Victimology, Separatism, and Anti-Intellectualism' black people have come to 'nurture the very racism that kept us in chains for 350 years' (p213) and he offers suggestions for breaching the gap to reach success. Shipler (1997) tells us that racist stereotypes have had ample time to flourish over time as part of a culture of complacency. Indeed, for many years none had any semblance of a whole existence within a credible life (p335-36). Gilens (1996) suggests public opinion on welfare and race is distorted by over-representations of blacks in news about welfare and poverty and serves the purpose of perpetuating negative racial stereotypes (p517, 521).

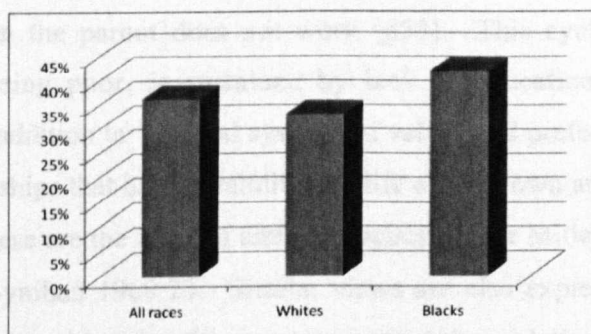
The public is surely aware that welfare rolls have reduced dramatically. Certainly this much is routinely reported, so it is likely that those who bother to track unemployment rates wonder why so many women continue to remain poor and unemployed. And yet it is little wonder. It is possible, even likely, that media coverage is serving to perpetuate a resented, ostracised class of single parents who are unemployed and virtually unemployable. Rank and Yoon. (2003) suggest that no matter what, so long as structural failings in American society remain (lack of sufficient paying jobs, inability of the social safety net to pull individuals and

families out of poverty, inequities in educational quality, lack of political power for the disenfranchised, continued racial residential segregation), a certain percentage of the population will always remain locked out of opportunities and experience economic deprivation (p3).

### Cultural Transferral

In 2006, 43 percent of all children living in female-householder families were living in poverty. For Black and Hispanic children the rate is 50 percent (United States Census Bureau 2007-online).

**(Figure 1) 2006 Poverty Rates for Families with Female Householder, No Spouse Present and children < 18 years (Percent)**



United States Census Bureau 2007a-online

Indeed, Johnson and Favreault (2004) found enduring poverty with more than 25 percent of women aged 65-75 years who spent 10 or more years as single mothers on welfare still living in poverty. In contrast, only 5 percent of mothers in the same age group who were always married when their children were young were impoverished (p20). This trend continues, and the University of Washington's Northwest Policy Center reiterates what we have already learned: individuals most likely to remain poor were people of colour, women, single parents with two children, and those with lower levels of training and education.

Some believe that welfare reform appropriately removed the notion of entitlement (Anderson et al. 1996) while others focus on the supposed immorality of single women who have children they can ill afford (Murray 1996). Still others see welfare as self-perpetuating (Ellwood 1986; Murray 1996) although Rank and Cheng (1995) see only slight evidence of this. In their study of 13,017 women, 5 percent of frequent users of welfare were raised in homes that also used welfare frequently (p682). It may be, then, that predicting welfare receipt has less to do with an intergenerational connection to welfare and has more to do with class. Parents who are poor typically have few resources to offer children and those children, in turn, are more likely to be economically vulnerable. This then leads to a magnification of differences between groups in differing social class (Rank and Cheng 1995: 683). Thus, part of the job of policy would be to address the aspirational package received from parents by working class children. In Britain, Aldridge (2003), like Patterson (2006), found that 'poverty of ambition' (p45) acts as a barrier to mobility, that peer effects play an important role in transmitting values and behaviour, and that high levels of child poverty amongst lone parent households when the parent does not work (p39). This cycle of poverty and subculture of being poor, is sustained by lack of education and limited job opportunities in addition to 'internal systems of values and preferences and interim personal relationships that have a validity and life of their own and that are capable of persisting' (these are the ideas of anthropologists Walter Miller and Oscar Lewis presented in Moynihan 1969:23. Similar views are also expressed by Patterson 2006). Successfully addressing this matter may provide a solution to long-term take up of welfare.

Furthermore, in 2004, poor, unmarried women living in the United States were more likely to have more children than any other group, and one million births, or 27 percent, were to never married mothers (Dye 2005:5). The poorest households are concentrated in high population, poor urban areas where schools have greater challenges: limited funding, younger than average teachers with less experience, fewer school resources, and where families are more likely to be headed by single, female parents (Hill 2003; Berube and Tiffany 2004). Here, sixty five percent of children are born to single mothers with family incomes of \$30,000 or less (Fields 2003:13).

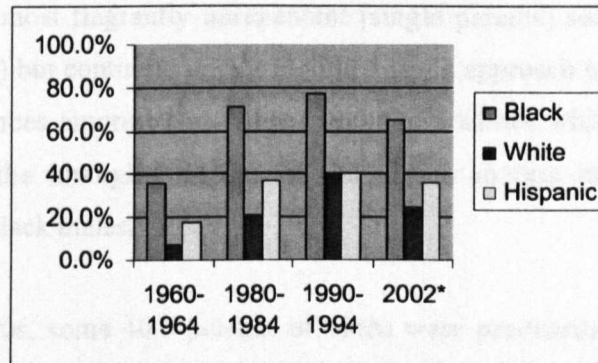
Berube and Tiffany (2004), Dye (2005) and Fields 2003 indicate that single parents with limited education are most likely to create more single parents with limited education and reduced labour market attachment. Yet these children are disadvantaged many ways. They tend to have continued poverty as adults. They are more likely to receive welfare when they reach adulthood than the offspring of two-parent families (Ellwood 1986; Rank and Cheng 1995; Tanner 1997). White children, in particular, are compromised by family break up to the degree that, 'for the average white child, family disruption eliminates the advantage of being white with respect to high school graduation' (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994:59). The children of single parents marry earlier. They have more children both in and out of marriage. They are more likely to divorce and they are more likely to be involved in or commit delinquent acts and to engage in drug and alcohol abuse (Ellwood 1988, McLanahan and Booth 1989, O'Connor 2003). The challenges these women and children face are consistent across ethnic groups (Berube and Tiffany 2004).

Higher inequality limits GDP growth, and is corrosive to a civil and democratic society. Consequently, it can be in the interest of the wealthy as well as the poor to raise the incomes of the poor, by using education and training as a means for redistribution (Krueger 2002:9, 11). And access to quality education along with a belief in the value of education within the home is what helps significantly to facilitate employment as adults (Lareau 1987:81; Werts and Watley 1970:193). Therefore, there may be compelling reasons to pay considerable attention to the lives of the poorest and least-single parents. Attempts to curb inequality, poverty, and labour market detachment should focus, at least in part, on the education of young children for we are left with the certainty that educated children are privileged recipients of a valuable resource. And, government surely is invested in the supply of public education, in all of its guises, with the long-term hope of creating taxpayers. For those who have 'missed the educational boat', strong attachment to work may be too late, but for their children, it may not.

Yet the problem of neighbourhood remains. For example, the more densely black the population of a given inner-city American school, the greater the likelihood the school will be academically inferior (p31). Likewise, Austin-Smith and Fryer, Jr. (2003) suggest that 'adolescents within these neighborhoods can have tremendous

disincentives to invest in particular behaviors' (p4), i.e., those perceived as white, and to unambiguously indicate their conformity to local norms and attachment to black cultural identity (Patterson 2006). While the challenges these women and children face are consistent across ethnic groups (Berube and Tiffany 2004), the most dramatic breakdown of these living arrangements is by ancestry (Martin, Hamilton et al. 2003; Berube and Tiffany 2004).

**(Figure 2) 2002 Percent Premarital First Births of Women aged 15-29**



Bachu 1999:2; \*Downs 2002:5

None of these data are particularly surprising. We lead, it seems, somewhat predictable lives that are guided by inherited cultural capital. As a result, the poorest are fairly likely to raise children who will endure hardship. This is the principle behind cultural transferral. For this reason, there is little point to focusing only on forcing single mothers into jobs that pay little and that may compromise attention to their children. Some intergenerational communication of lifestyle values is, evidently, not a myth, so we should care a great deal about the family structure of the next generation.

### **Cultural Change: Single Parenthood**

It is important to analyse the causes of single parenthood amongst the “hard-to-serve” population because they are not part of the PRWORA ‘success’ story. If we are able to isolate the reasons for increases in single parenthood, and effectively



address them, more women may choose to marry. With that, we find there is evidence to suggest that their children would be better-off financially (Lerman 2002).

From at least the 1930s until the 1960s, there had been little change in the number of children living in single parent households. The 1960s, however, gave way to a dramatic increase in the single parenthood of never married women and those who were divorced (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Ruggles 2004; Akerlof and Yellen 1996; Population Reference Bureau 2002-online). Murray (1994) pejoratively states that 'the most flagrantly unrepentant [single parents] seemed to be mostly black, too' (p18) but continues with a more tempered approach to an explanation of cultural differences amongst American blacks and whites while leaving out any discussion of the changing nature of the labour market and the increasing disaffection of black males.

By the mid 1990s, some 40.5 percent of births were pre-marital (Bachu 1999:2). Katz (1996) suggest that efforts to explain the rise in extramarital births outside have so far been unconvincing. One argument is that which attributes increases in out-of-wedlock birthrates, and subsequent take-up of welfare benefits, to a rise in female promiscuity, and antidote to which would be the reintroduction of stigma (Murray 1993, 1996, 2003). But, suggests Skocpol (2001: 113-115), welfare benefits rose in the 1960s and then fell in the 1970s and 1980s, when births outside marriage rose the most. Akerlof et al. (1996) endorse the view that changes in attitudes, particularly the 'need' for shotgun weddings, have been a large part of the recipe for a rise in births outside marriage (p313). Stack (1974), Nurse (2001) and Wilson (1987) have all attributed these birth increases to a decline in the 'marriageability' of black males due to a shortage of jobs for less educated men. This matter will be discussed in greater detail later. Another study (Teachman et al. 2000) attributes the rise in women's employment and consequential decrease in economic reliance on men as a contributing factor. Furthermore, a case could be made that post-1996 welfare reform has furthered this situation, since it focused the vast majority of its efforts on the employment of women (Holzer et al. 2005).

We know that married couples were having fewer children, so the increasing proportion of children growing up in single parent households is partly a result of a decline in births in two-parent household; there was an increase in the numbers of divorces; and there is evidence of a decline in both the stigma of divorce and that of children born outside marriage (Skocpol 2001; McLanahan and Booth 1989). Further, as a result of greater access to prolonged education, many women enter into their first marriages later than they once did, a decision that opens them up to the possibility of childbirth outside marriage, and, since the turn of the last century they have entered the labour market in increasing numbers. The economic independence born of work created increased self-sufficiency and helped free women (to some extent) from the need for financial support. This provided them the opportunity to be more selective in their choices of marriage partners and to have greater freedom to leave unhappy marriages should they so wish (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Fischer and Hout 2002).

As elsewhere, the Post World War Two period saw deindustrialisation, economic restructuring, a rise in the value of individual freedom accompanied by changing sexual mores; second-wave feminism; and, while the decision to marry was still economically sound, it grew less so as the gender gap in earnings continued to narrow (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Parrot and Greenstein 1995). At the low end of the educational spectrum the situation was bleak. During the 1980s and into the mid-1990s, both men and women saw their incomes reduce, the economic benefit of marriage declined 15 percent (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994), a dramatic rise in criminal records and consequential decrease in employability (Edelman, Holzer and Offner: 2005:1) ensured that low skilled American men, particularly black men, reached 'calamitous proportions' (Giddens 1994:147 ). A decade later their situation is worse (Holzer, Offner and Sorensen 2005) and they are now less likely to be employed than African American females (United States Census Bureau 2003) the result of which makes them less than attractive candidates for marriage or otherwise long-term personal commitments (Becker 1973).

So, reduced economic need by women for men, easier access to divorce, and the reduced stigma of out-of-wedlock births gave women choices and control over their

lives they had not previously been afforded. But, US welfare laws now require case managers to advocate on behalf of the formation and maintenance of marriage, and while it is clear that two parent families are better off financially than single parent families (Lerman 2002), it is not at all clear that they are better off emotionally because many of the partners of mothers on welfare are in no way reasonable marriage material (Edelman et al:2005; Stack 1974; Becker 1973) nor are they reasonable parent material (van Poppel 2000).

This matter of being a good partner and father should be of enormous importance to policy makers and seems frequently to have been neglected in the discussion of “hard-to-serve” single parents. Mincy (2006) concurs that some of the culpability for current high occurrences of out-of-wedlock births and lack of family formation amongst black women is the limited ‘marriagability’ of black men as measured by their low labour force participation, wages, educational attainment, marriage rate, family structure, poverty rate, and geographical concentration. Patterson (2006) suggests that black men suffer from socially negative attitudes and values and a culture of self-destructiveness. In Mincy’s judgment the welfare reform act of 1996 focused heavily on the employment of poor single women to the detriment of poor men, while Patterson takes the view that the cultural factors of image and ‘coolness’ better explain the state of young black men. It may be that both Mincy and Patterson are correct and that limited educational attainment along with few job prospects have fostered a coping strategy whereby these men feel they are able to maintain some dignity and purpose. Indeed, ‘to be the only young male in a housing project environment who carries books home from school, marries the girl he gets pregnant, and works for “chump change”... is an individual who would have to behave heroically and heroism is not the norm’ (Solow: 52).

We can say, then, that single-parenthood is mainly a product of the social and economic pressures associated with poverty and exclusion. The particularly high-rates of single parenthood among African Americans simply reflects their poverty rates. With this in mind, if policy-makers believe that PRWORAs goals can be met by attending only to women on welfare and their children while ignoring their male counterparts, then surely there exists cause to re-evaluate (Edelman et al; Solow).

## **Criticisms of Cost**

Determining the precise cost of welfare is an onerous task for data supplied at state and federal levels, even within the various federal departments, rarely concur (Administration for Children and Families 2004a-online; Fiedler 2004; Office of Management and Budget 2004-online). Official reports are sometimes modified after initial posting and codified differently among the federal and state departments and local agencies involved (Rahmanou and Greenberg 2004).

In his 1997 budget plan, President Clinton promised to save \$40 billion ( $10^9$ ) dollars in the first seven years of welfare reform. That time has now elapsed and we have a better, but not yet entirely clear, picture of what was accomplished. In 1999 the federal budget allotted \$3 billion for implementation of welfare-to-work (United States Government 1999:51). Additionally, US government data indicate a post-1997 TANF budget of \$16.9 billion annually (and for the foreseeable future) while \$13.3 billion was allotted in the pre-reform days of 1997 (Administration for Children and Families 1998-online; Administration for Children and Families 2004a-online). This amounts to an increase of 3.6 billion dollars, almost 28 percent, over the course of five years and yet a total percent reduction in recipients receiving TANF of 60 percent (Administration for Children and Families 1998, 2003, 2004a-online; Department of Health and Human Services 2004a). In terms of the administration of welfare-to-work programmes, after 1995 the federal share alone of programme funding was \$1 billion per annum (Friedlander 1995:198). Today the cost of the grants programme amounts to \$2 billion per annum with states providing \$1 of state funding for every \$2 of federal funds (Fraker, Levy et al. 2004: 6).

Many of the reasons for the elevation in costs are associated with administering support programmes to work-seekers. In Washington State and others, the expenditure on childcare during parents' work, job search and education and training has become the single largest fiscal outlay (Houser 2004, recorded interview, 15 July). Funding of childcare subsidies alone had a 2002 budget of 12 percent of the overall federal TANF budget – or slightly over \$2.1 billion annually, and, in the three years from 1997 to 2000, the costs of funding childcare rose from \$1.9 to \$3.5 billion (Mezey, Schumacher, Greenberg, Lombardi and Hutchens 2002:19).

Clearly, these increases are understandable, for the working poor would be unable to afford work without the availability of childcare subsidies.

In an attempt to put the welfare budget in perspective, however, the total TANF grant is less than 1 percent (.85) of the more than \$2 trillion in the federal budget, or .4 percent of the GDP, and is down from .6 percent in 1997. Family benefit expenditures elsewhere as a share of the GDP are greater: 2.9 and 3.0 percent in Sweden and Finland and .9 and 2.8 percent in Canada and Australia (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2004-online). This parsimonious approach to meeting goals while criticising what amount to comparatively low costs is something of a conundrum. Although costlier than previously, federal funding of childcare, which is clearly central to the ability of least skilled lone parents to go to work, has been reduced (Mezey, Parrott et al. 2004) and which has had the effect halting or curtailing the funding of childcare to some 300,000 or more eligible children (Mezey, Parrott, Greenberg and Fremstad. (2004:1).

Lastly, there exist other forms of cost that are less tangible but are, nevertheless, costs: social and economic. The numbers of women and children living in poverty have increased and remain high (Fremstad 2004:2), and there are fewer women employed and more women unemployed now than in the 1990s (Loprest 2001). Of those who left the rolls, we should not assume that they are employed and faring well for there is evidence to show that applications for food stamps rose as caseloads continued to decline, indicating a continuance of poverty and need for assistance (Zedlewski and Rader 2004). Fundamentally, there appears little evidence of improved living standards or stability for the families involved (Kaufman 2003; Fremstad 2004) and these women remain jobless and impoverished (Holzer 2001; Courtney and Dworsky 2006).

## **(1.1) The Effects of Policy and the Pressure to Work**

### **Emerging Data**

We know that attaining PRWORA's goals remains elusive for a significant number of 'hard-to-serve' women'. The following is a collection of data to be addressed in detail later in this chapter.

- ❑ Of more than one thousand welfare recipients studied, 40 percent failed to work at any point during the nine months prior to assessment (Courtney and Dworsky 2006:5).
- ❑ Those chronically disconnected from work amounted to 40 percent of 493 urban welfare recipients studied. This calculation resembles data collected over time (Turner, Danziger and Seefeldt 2006: 237, 228).
- ❑ 25-40 percent of welfare leavers have 'considerably lower incomes than they did when they were on welfare' (Moffit 2001:8) and have not gone on to independence from social services (Loprest 2001; Rahmanou et al. 2003). They remain 'unstable and extremely vulnerable' (Taylor and Barusch 2000:5) and more likely to use food banks. This latter point highlights a failure of PRWORA's goal 2: 'Ending the dependence of needy parents on government benefits' (see Introduction).
- ❑ 40 percent do not have health insurance for themselves, and 25 percent have children without medical coverage (Regenstein, Meyer et al. 1998; Department of Health and Human Services 2000-online; Loprest 2001; Peck 2001).
- ❑ 40 percent of lowest-skilled welfare recipients fail in the labour market because they are sufficiently unskilled or damaged (Barriers to Economic Security 2001; Haskins, Sawhill et al.; Holzer and Stoll 2001; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002).
- ❑ A labour market analysis of those subject to welfare-to-work programmes in California suggests that some 40 percent had tenuous employment during the three years after exit from their programmes (the GAIN programme, widely considered exceptional, showed 66 percent had employment during this time). But outcomes were worse for a 'more disadvantaged' subgroup' of

low-skilled former welfare recipients (Riccio, Friedlander and 1994:134-135). Similar effects were found elsewhere (Hamilton 2002: 11).

Policy-implementers and programme coordinators appear aware that many of the women who fit the category of “hard-to-serve” face significant ‘barriers to participation’, will remain unemployed, marginally employed and cycle on and off welfare. Further, data collected to assess the effects welfare reform have remained ‘rough’ and ‘inadequate’ (Harrel 2005a:269), and although ‘Most states have done the basics, [they] still lack the evaluative, supervisory, and bureaucratic skills required to put most of their healthy TANF family heads into work activities, and provide support services to those who have been diverted from or moved off welfare’ (Harrell 2005: 292). What has yet to be grasped is the identification of any effective way to help them meet the government goals of leaving welfare for work.

Many “hard-to-serve” often do not find work, or they find tenuous work soon followed by long spells of unemployment. While the numbers of welfare recipients has diminished since reform implementation in 1997, there is some evidence that those remaining on TANF are becoming increasingly, or differently, disadvantaged (Administration for Children and Families 2004-online; Loprest 2002, 2001) and that those who have left TANF have not gone on to unequivocal success, or even independence from social services, for as many as 20 percent left welfare in the late 1990s (a period of economic vigour) only to return within a year (Loprest 2002: 1,2; Rahmanou et al. 2003:2).

Further, the strength of the labour market and pool of potential employees has significant impact on the behaviour of employers (Holzer 2001), and those former welfare recipients who stay off are the population most likely to have more education, access to better jobs with higher pay, fewer learning disabilities and white skin (Murphy and Johnson 1998; Seccombe 1999; Miller 2002; Department of Education 2005-online). That is, they are not the individuals most likely to be served in short-term education and training programmes or the individuals who are the focus of this investigation. Most of these women are unable to secure work, but when they do, they fare poorly (Edin and Lein 2003; Grubb 1996; Hamilton 2002;

Jackson, Gyamfi et al. 1998; Peck 200; Riccio, Friedlander and 1994) and approximately one third of all former recipients continue to need assistance with feeding their families (Department of Health and Human Services 2000-online; Loprest 2001; Peck 2001).

Then there are those who leave welfare but not for work. Turner, Danziger and Seefeldt (2006) suggest that those who are chronically disconnected from work (enduring multiple spells without work and termination from welfare that lasted an average of 12 months) amount to some 40 percent of 493 urban welfare recipients studied (p237). These figures greatly resemble historical data (Riccio, Friedlander and 1994:134-135; Hamilton 2002: 11; Turner et al.228). Similarly, Moffit (2001) estimates that some 25-40 percent of welfare leavers are not working and are of particular concern because they have 'considerably lower income than they did when they were on welfare' (p8). Indeed, Taylor and Barusch (2000) indicate that these former recipients are 'unstable and extremely vulnerable' (p5) more likely to use food banks, leave their small children alone, and be investigated by Child Protective Services than those still on welfare (p7).

Mead (1986) says these individuals find 'Their place in American society is defined by their need and weakness, not their competence' resulting in 'lack of accountability ... stress, non-work, crime [and] family break up' (p9). It is not enough to say that they lack jobs. They lack the fundamental ability to get and sustain jobs or adequately support their families on the minimum wage paying jobs they would be technically qualified for, i.e., will train, no qualifications necessary, if only they could gain and retain initial employment (Loprest 2001; Turner et al. 2006). Rank (2004) argues that the US government has chosen to approach the matter of welfare reform via a tendency to view social programmes in terms of the reverse logic of remedy to diagnosis. Instead of devising social policies that address the root causes of poverty, policymakers' strategies 'have rested on an imagined world that reflects a preferred set of myths, agendas, and policies' (p170).

Likewise, Galbraith (1986) wrote



... we have come first to identify the remedy that is most agreeable, ... convenient, ... in accord with major pecuniary or political interest ...; then we move from the remedy so available or desired back to a cause to which that remedy is relevant.... [In colleges, we are taught] to look for the causes of poverty in ethnic disadvantage, in inadequate education, in poor health care ... but that is not, however, the logical process of the modern world [because] remedies for poverty ... cost money, which is an unwelcome thought to those who must pay (p35-36).

For Peck (2001) the matter of cost is multi-faceted.

‘Savings’ on welfare costs, calculated on the basis of simply moving people off welfare, do not take account of externalities associated with working poverty or - yet worse - complete loss of income (where claimants are simply sanctioned off welfare due to some administrative misdemeanour) without a job to enter. Welfare “savings” may simply become displaced as ‘new’ costs in the form of homelessness, ill health, criminality, or foster care (pp234-235).

Holzer, Schanzenbach, Duncan and Ludwig (2007) attempt to put a figure on some of these costs and determine that childhood poverty alone reduces productivity and economic output by about 1.3 percent of GDP, raises the costs of crime by 1.3 percent of GDP and raises health expenditures and reduces the value of health by 1.2 percent of GDP. The total estimate is put at \$500 billion dollars per annum (p1).

In one study of African American single mothers (Jackson, Gyamfi et al. 1998), two clear but conflicting views of the effect of maternal employment on children from poor families arose. The first suggests that employment, enduring poverty and single parenthood create added stressors on an already burdened family. Parents indicated elevated feelings of strain, symptoms of depression and increased frequencies in spanking than single but poor parents who were not working (p895). Esping-Anderson (2002) tells us there is no evidence that mother’s work is harmful to children. In fact, the better women do in the labour market ‘the more positive is the psychological spill over within the family’ (p67). Yet, ensuring that the seldom-discussed 40 percent of women do ‘well’ in the labour market has proven onerous. If women are stressed, or economically insecure, this can have a negative impact on their children; therefore, compensatory measures in the form of quality day care and

pre-school ought to be promoted 'so as to weaken the impact of inherited under privilege' (p67).

This matter of quality childcare is important. Yet, much of the childcare that is available to single parents, has been and continues to be mediocre and insufficient because states use a variety of formal and informal methods to ration childcare subsidies, primarily because of insufficient funds (Berger and Black 1992; Adams and Rohacek 2002). Harell (2005) suggests that the demise of AFDC was no great loss, for it had failed to provide 'even modestly adequate support for mothers who wanted to work' and reform recognised the need for affordable, quality childcare, at least in principal, so that poor mothers could leave their children for the workplace (p277). Yet research suggests that low-income communities tend to have a lower supply of regulated care than higher-income communities, and the non-center-based care (that advocated in PRWORA goal number 1) used by low-income families tends to be of lower quality than similar care used by higher- income families (Adams and Rohacek:6; Coley, R.L., Chase-Lansdale, P.L., Li-Grining 2004: 2-3).

The investment in quality childcare is, suggests Esping-Anderson and Sarasa (2002) part of a 'win-win policy model' that not only ensures child welfare, but makes a strong 'actuarial' case insofar that working women will likely reimburse the subsidy via tax payments made throughout their lives (p17). The authors suggest that developing responsible social expenditures are a 'productive investment in the future' for they ensure the welfare of today's children by enhancing their life chances and productivity later (p17). Recent data support this. Head Start, the early childcare programme for poor parents has shown long-term benefits in educational attainment, crime prevention and economic performance for those involved. In almost 40 years of tracking the 123 black children from Ypsilanti, Michigan who were randomly assigned to the High/Scope Perry preschool study<sup>13</sup> and control group, the positive impact of the attention received in Head Start endures remarkably well. Females were significantly more likely (84 vs 32 percent) to complete high school; nearly twice as many have received college degrees; 76

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<sup>13</sup> The emphasis was placed on cognitive development and problem solving. Teachers were well trained, decently paid, made weekly home visits to encourage parents to read to their children and the ratio of teachers to children was 1:5.

percent compared to 62 percent have jobs; are more likely to own a home, car, savings account; are less like to receive welfare and earn considerably more. The most recent cost/benefit estimate of this programme is an economic return of \$17 on each \$1 invested (Schweinhart 2004:1-4). Says David Ellwood, currently the dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, the programme results suggests it, 'may be the most powerfully influential group in the recent history of welfare reform' (quoted in Kirp 2004:32). Sure Start, a voluntary UK programme largely inspired by Head Start, initially directed its attention at tackling the disadvantages of poverty by attempting to increase opportunities for children from birth to five years and for their parents. Although it showed favourable outcomes early on (limitation of teen pregnancies, and increase middle school academic achievement (Barnes, Desousa et al. 2005:2,5), its philosophy may have morphed to more heavily emphasise maternal employment (Abrams 2005). Still, early intervention in child development has been seen to be efficacious in the long term and trajectories set in the preschool period are difficult to change when children enter the school system (Jefferis, Power and Hertzman 2002; Feinstein 2003). But 'such interventions must be ... sustained, high quality and thus expensive' (Jackson, Erikson, Goldthorp and Yaish (2007:225). And yet, the likelihood of philosophical and financial investment in such programmes by local and national government remains uncertain. The women in this thesis are unpopular. Additionally, there exists the possibility that many may never be in a position to repay childcare subsidies via tax payments (although their children may have greater labour market attachment) and thus the financial outlay may be seen as a gamble. Certainly this is the case put forth by Murray (2005).

## **(1.2) Barriers to Employment**

### **Skills of Hard to Serve**

Giddens (1969) states that access to education is particularly important to life chances because of what it engenders: 'self-direction requires more flexibility and breadth of perspective than does conformity; tolerance of conformity ... requires a degree of analytical ability that is difficult to achieve without formal education'

(p190). Education is directional, he suggests, for it is 'primarily a determinant rather than a consequence, of self-directed values and orientation (p191).

Self direction – acting on the basis of one's own judgement, attending to internal dynamics as well as to external consequences, being open-minded, being trustful of others, holding personally responsible moral standards – this is only possible if the actual conditions of life allow some freedom of action, some reason to feel in control of fate (p189).

We know there is a mismatch between jobs available and the literacy and employment skills of the most chronically unemployed (Holzer and Stoll 2001; Pease and Martin 1997:554; Lerman, Loprest et al. 1999:4). We know, too, that unemployment and low literacy are highly related to dependence (Barton 1998; Murphy and Johnson 1998; Kirsch, Jungblut et al. 2002). The population studied in this thesis is the most likely to fail in gaining enduring employment for they have multiple barriers to work which are well documented and widely perceived as interrelated (Barriers to Economic Security 2001; Grubb 1996; Pavetti, Olson et al. 1996; Department of Health and Human Services 2000-online; Haskins, Sawhill et al. 2001; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002). Furthermore, the nature of most of the jobs available to them is objectionable to them and incompatible with their lives and skills (Grubb 1996; Government Accountability Office 2001; Zedlewski and Alderson 2001). Indeed, national survey data show that a majority, 60 percent, of TANF recipients is not involved in any work activity because many have characteristics that make it difficult for them to get and keep jobs (Government Accountability Office 2001:5).

Compromising their prospects, we know that these welfare recipients have significantly lower skills than other adults with similar levels of education (Johnson and Tafoya 1999). And, educational attainment in conjunction with few employment skills is a clear indicator of welfare use and poor long-term employment prospects (both for individuals receiving welfare and as a predictor of welfare use by their offspring). Furthermore, those who do find work soon lose them (Parrott and Greenstein 1995; Barton 1998; Levenson, Reardon et al. 1999; Jencks and Swingle 2000; Peck 2001; Martinson and Strawn 2002; Kaufman 2003) because skill requirements for jobs filled by welfare recipients generally are not trivial, and many

long-term recipients have poor skills and other personal characteristics that limit their employability (Holzer and Stoll 2001:2,3).

There is, in fact, some evidence to suggest that literacy levels below 5<sup>th</sup> grade can so compromise individuals' probability of gaining employment as to render them virtually unemployable (Haennicke, Konieczny et al. 2000; Cheesman-Day and Newburger 2002). In California, which has the single largest number of welfare recipients and the lowest-skilled, it was estimated that 80 percent of welfare recipients may fall into this category (Johnson and Tafoya 1999:vii). Likewise, of TANF recipients, 76 percent of those tested functioned at the lowest two skill levels<sup>14</sup>. This ensures that many cannot read a bus schedule, locate an intersection on a map or write a letter (Levenson, Reardon et al. 1999), and while there are small job increases, about 10 percent per annum, in the sorts of positions they are apt to be capable of undertaking, they still pay far below subsistence and the women themselves continue to be unattractive job candidates when compared to virtually anyone else (Barton 1999; Carnivale and Desrochers 2000; Peck 2001). Also, because education and poverty, along with a host of other social ills, are inexorably linked, those who are least likely to have worked, have worked the least, or have worked in close to minimum wage paying jobs in the past 12 months are also those with the lowest educational attainment levels (Cheesman-Day and Newburger 2002; Kirsch, Jungblut et al. 2002). Additionally, single parents, particularly those with children under 5, with limited education are most likely to be employed involuntarily in jobs involving non-standard hours and days, unpredictable schedules and on weekends, conditions which are either a job requirement or all there is available to this group (Presser and Cox 1997). While some women clearly may choose the flexibility afforded by working such jobs, for many of those with very limited education and employment skills there is little in the way of choice.

With this in mind, it seems clear that academic and vocational skills training and employment programmes cannot occur without collaboration with one another. Indeed, the task is complicated further insofar as most successful welfare-to-work programmes are multifaceted, with coherent and long-term relationships cultivated

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<sup>14</sup> The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) has delineated 5 literacy levels.

to provide employment-related services and frequent connections with community, social service agencies and policy implementers. Understanding, fostering and maintaining the relationship between skills and employability is of critical importance. Many studies show that adult education instruction in tandem with relevant employment training increases positive willingness to work, decreases authoritarianism (Preston and Feinstein 2004:12) and earnings by increasing the likelihood of work for those who are able (Grubb and Kalman 1994; Strawn 1999; Carnivale and Desrochers 2000; Hamilton 2002; Gennetian, Miller and Smith 2005). Yet, because federal regulations deny funding of training beyond 12 months<sup>15</sup>, and because those with the lowest skilled need in excess of this, it is understandable how the decision to provide only perfunctory access to education and training is taken. In essence, caseworkers make practical choices regarding whom is deserving or undeserving of long term versus short-term training (Del Rosario 2004, recorded interview, 15 April – see Chapter Five for more data collected from gatekeepers). The prevailing thought is that low skilled individuals have little to gain from extensive services; thus, because the law requires individuals be ‘engaged’ short-term training could be perceived as scarcely more than an activity for idle hands (Carla 2004a, recorded interview, 30 June; Clyde 2004, recorded interview, 30 June).

### **(1.3) The Skills Gap Employers’ Responses**

Whether or not the lowest skilled really can get jobs seems to depend on the vigour of the economy and the relative desperation of employers for employees with no skills. This matter may be complicated by the immigration of low-skilled individuals who may have a ‘considerable’ effect on the economic expectations of the least educated native-born Americans who currently make up ten percent of the U.S. population (Lee and Miller 1998:192). It comes as no surprisingly, then, that firms that had a history of hiring welfare recipients with high school diplomas, recent work experience, or previous training have demand far in excess of those that

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<sup>15</sup> Some circumstances may create exceptions to the rule, but these are rare and generally applicable to those who have already shown promise in long-term training, i.e., not the population of this study.

had hired recipients without these characteristics (Holzer and Stoll 2003:225-226). Such findings concur with the experiences of two gatekeepers interviewed at benefits agencies (See Chapter 4).

It is understood that a third of welfare leavers return to welfare within 12 months (Regenstein, Meyer et al. 1998; Klawitter and Christensen 2004). Klawitter and Christensen suggest the reasons for return appear to be inability to find jobs (28 percent), lost jobs (23 percent) or jobs simple pay too little (11 percent) (p6). It may also be related to the fact that slightly more than 30 percent of TANF caseloads function at less than 6<sup>th</sup> grade level and 30 percent have a serious barrier, or barriers, to employment. When these two are counted together, the percent with a serious barrier in addition to low basic skills rises to 54 (Olson and Pavetti 1996-online).

Many of the most disadvantaged are likely to require more help than the average welfare-to-work programme can offer or employer is willing to tolerate (Grubb 1996; Olson and Pavetti 1996). This may account for the fact that, over time, studied groups of welfare recipients have self-reported decreasing helpfulness of education and training (Seccombe, James et al. 1998; Klawitter and Christensen 2004). It may also be correlated with increasingly disadvantaged caseloads of individuals who have little education and more barriers to success and/or the quality and appropriateness of the training services provided (Grubb 1996; National Center for Policy Analysis 1996; Murphy and Johnson 1998). On a positive note, we do know that once they are employed individuals are more likely to be able to find other employment, i.e., jobs beget jobs. Further, 40 percent of employers indicated that they would hire welfare recipients without work experience, and just 25 percent said they require a high school diploma or GED. Yet, unsurprisingly, mostly what employers want from potential hires are positive references and prior work experience (Regenstein, Meyer et al.1998:24). Of course, during recession, a time when the lowest skilled compete for jobs with more attractive job candidates, job placement becomes more difficult once again (Holzer 1999). Complicating matters, Holzer and Stoll (2003) say that while approximately two percent of jobs are currently open to welfare recipients, forty eight percent of new US jobs are expected to be held by workers who have a high school diploma or less (Moncarz and Crosby, 2004-2005:3). These are precisely the category of jobs for which low-skilled

welfare recipients would qualify, and for which they will need to compete if they are to find work, but for which they are effectively non-contenders. Furthermore, the majority of these jobs are seeing growth in the suburbs, an important matter that complicates actually hiring those without reliable transportation (Regenstein, Meyer et al.:15).

To some extent, it may be not so much that many welfare leavers cannot get jobs, they cannot keep them (National Center for Policy Analysis 1996a-online; Bos, Polit et al. 1997; Phillips 1997; Jencks and Swingle 2000; Peck 2001). The primary reason stated seems to be a lack of 'soft skills', those skills requiring positive attitudes, habits, communication, tact and punctuality (Wise, Chia et al. 1990; Haennicke, Konieczny et a. 2000; Placement Specialist 2004 Recorded Interview, 16 April). The inability to actually do job related tasks allocated is not stated as a reason for failure to succeed in most of the positions these women take. Other reasons for inability to maintain employment, however, are exceedingly well documented and studied, and include poor physical and mental health, criminal records, little or no work experience, transportation and child care problems, substance abuse, domestic violence issues, low basic skills and learning disabilities (Haennicke, Konieczny et al.; Barriers to Economic Security 2001; Haskins, Sawhill et al.; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002).

Still, Grubb (1996) suggests that the belief that any job is a good job, regardless of its nature and demands, is misguided, for the jobs that individual welfare-to-work programme leavers get are often 'so dreadful ... that it is no wonder that individuals leave after short periods of time' (Grubb 1996:94). Likewise, Galbraith (1998) suggests that for many, indeed most, work '... is fatiguing or monotonous, or at a minimum, a source of no particular pleasure. The reward rests not in the task but in the pay' (p249). Clearly Mead (1986) understands the repulsion of many forms of work for 'Low-wage work apparently must be mandated.... Government need not make the desired behavior worthwhile to people. It simply threatens punishment...' (p13, 84-85). He urged that, '...social policy must focus on motivation and order rather than opportunity or equality' (p10).



In light of the acknowledgement that many jobs are less than appealing and located in the suburbia, miles from the urban homes of most welfare recipients, it is possible, therefore, that while soft skills acquisition is of obvious importance, the nature of some of jobs, particularly for women with myriad problems, is more than they can endure. Real or imagined, many enter jobs already feeling demoralised by case managers and the general public (Seccombe, James et al 1998; Gilens 1999), so it is possible that we should be unsurprised that they fail to flourish and sustain employment at minimum pay.

#### **(1.4) Low-Wage Work**

##### **Effects of the Minimum Wage**

In 1997, the Fair Labor Standards Act established the federal minimum wage at \$5.15 per hour for full-time and part-time workers in the private sector and in Federal, State and local governments. A decade later, the minimum wage remains at \$5.15. Much is made of the personal responsibilities of welfare recipients, but little is said about a shared sense of common responsibility, i.e., the state for the citizens and vice versa. Yet this was raised more than a century ago.

In the earlier days of the Free Trade era, it was permissible to hope that self-help would be an adequate solvent, and that with cheap food and expanding commerce the average workman would be able by the exercise of prudence and thrift [be able to] maintain himself. The actual course of events has in large measure disappointed these hopes [and] the prospect for lifelong independence ... appears exceedingly remote ... it is clear that the system of industrial competition fails to meet the ethical demand embodied in the conception of the 'living wage' (Hobhouse 1911:160, 163).

The matter of a minimum wage is likely to remain a contentious matter in the United States. At \$5.15, an individual would normally stand to gross \$824 per month before tax and far less if health insurance is available and paid for. Designed as a work incentive, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is intended to mitigate the effects of those incomes unable to sustain families by reducing the amount of tax owed by employees and by providing supplements to the earnings of low-income workers. While there is no doubt that it pays to work as close to full-time as

possible, up to 30 percent of low-income families do not have a bank account, have poor financial literacy, a poor credit record and fail to claim their EITC (Department of Health and Human Services 2006a:2). Moreover, families are likely to remain living on incomes that barely nudge them over the poverty line, such as it is (Harrell 2005:296).

Diana Pearce, a lecturer at the University of Washington School Of Social Work, takes exception to the lack of meaningful poverty guidelines and in the early 1990s began to develop Self Sufficiency Standards (SSS) for individual states, counties, metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas which are designed to define the amount of income required to meet basic needs (Pearce 2001). Whilst she has had some success in getting municipalities to take up the SSS, efforts to tamper with the minimum wage are challenged by detractors who suggest that small businesses would be unduly hurt by such increases and that for every 10 percent increase a loss of 100,000 jobs would occur. Indeed, as of January 2007, the minimum wage had not been increased in a decade. Says a Cato Institute policy analyst

The name "Fair Labor Standards Act" is typical of the dishonesty of the paternalistic state. The FLSA is basically a blank check allowing political manipulation of the labor markets in order to reward some people by throwing other people out of work (Bovard 1995-online).

Debunking myths about the minimum wage are complicated. Yet, suggests Holzer et al. (2007), it is clear that more could be done to make work pay for less-educated Americans and that only moderate increases in the minimum wage would help those at the bottom of the pay scale, without generating much employment loss for other workers. Extensions of the earned income tax credit would help, as would primary and secondary school reforms and universal nursery programmes for all poor children (2007:2).

We have learned how the working poor have problems, yet minimum low earnings are simply one of them. Finding full-time jobs is another as many of the least skilled experience frequent and prolonged periods of unemployment. In such cases, it is often not possible to qualify for a tax credit. For the women in this thesis the future may hold little positive for them. They need education and skills in order to

be able to compete with others, and they need money, the former creating substantial promise for the latter (Cheesman Day and Newburger 2002; United States Census Bureau 2002-online; United States Census Bureau 2003-online; Mosisa 2003), for with education and money come the possibility of social inclusion. It is possible, therefore, that focusing on the minimum wage creates a kind of pledge to social allegiance and a greater focus on poverty and the needs of the poor. As DeLong (1997-online), UC Berkeley professor of economics, advised the British Government, 'Whether a minimum wage is good social policy should hinge on whether its economic benefits exceed its costs--for there are many other ways to demonstrate the government's respect for the moral worth of low-wage workers' (DeLong 1997-online).

### **Why Wal-Mart Matters**

While many US companies are highly profitable, 'their success has not 'tricked down' to most workers (Fox Piven and Cloward 1993:136), many of whom are tenuously employed mothers working in overwhelmingly unstable, part-time retail sales and food service occupations with little or no benefits (Grubb 1996; Peck 2001; Edin and Lein 2003). Consider Wal-Mart. While the intention is not to scapegoat the company, it is an industry pacesetter in terms of operating ethos and it is an exceptionally large employer, providing work for as much as 2 percent of the average US county (Goetz 2006:212). Furthermore, it is currently the world's largest retailer of 1.3 million people, 70 percent of whom are women. By revenue, it is the largest company in the world (Goldman 2004) which ensures low prices by maintaining substandard wages, limiting employees' health benefits via high deductibles. While Wal-Mart refuses to divulge precise details, in 2004 the average annual income of Wal-Mart employees fell somewhere between \$11,000 (Robinson, T 2004:255) and \$14,500 (Metha C., R. Baiman, et al 2004:8). For a family of three, these fall short of the official annual minimum income by as much as \$4700 (Administration for Children and Families 2004-online) and by \$11,700 according to the Mississippi (one the least expensive states in which to live) Self Sufficiency Standard (Pearce, D. and J. Brooks 2003:8). Wal-Mart is currently involved in a class action lawsuit brought against it by more than a million current and former

female employees who claim it paid women workers less and gave them fewer promotions than men (Joyce 2004, Abelson 2004).

Furthermore, Wal-Mart receives significant tax subsidies in exchange for anticipated revenues and vice-presidential thanks for exemplary business practices (Cheney 2004; Metha, Baiman et al. 2004; Robinson 2004). These subsidies, Goetz (2006) suggests, should be reduced to offset the increases in the welfare payments and food stamps for which many of Wal-Mart's employees continue to qualify despite working full time (pp214, 222). While the company announces that a majority of its employees work full-time, it fails to state that 28 hours or more meets their definition of full-time status (Jacques, Thomas et al. 2003:518), that it has taken measures to avoid unionisation (p520) and that average pay is some 31 percent below industry standard (Dube and Jacobs 2004:4).

The net result of this is that fifty percent of all Wal-Mart employees qualify for food assistance, many of whom rely disproportionately on other forms of supplementary public assistance, for example, health insurance, at a cost of some \$550 per person per month (Robinson 2004:255). If the results of a California-based study translate nationally (which they may not as California tends to be a costly state in which to live), the authors estimate a total cost of public assistance at \$2 billion per annum (Dube and Jacobs 2004:7).

When women whose children are not covered by work-based health insurance, states generally assume the responsibility. This sanctioned coverage is already costly (although a bargain relative to European costs), but further expenses are incurred by clinics and hospitals obliged to care for the walk-in uninsured (All Things Considered 2004). In California the cost of health care for the uninsured is said to amount to \$32 million per annum (Abelson 2004:13). In Georgia, one in four Wal-Mart employees has a child insured by the state. The next largest employer is Publix, but where the ratio is one in twenty two. They comprise 6.2 percent of the total poor children covered by state funded health care at cost to taxpayers of \$10 million (Department of Community Health 2002 - online). A North Carolina hospital representative stated that 31 percent of 1,900 patients employed at Wal-Mart were

on Medicaid<sup>16</sup> and an additional 16 percent had no insurance whatsoever (Abelson 2004:13). In Washington State, the Insurance Commissioner, Mike Kreidler, said

If we all look to the greater good, we can begin to buck a national trend that is swelling the ranks of the uninsured and wreaking havoc in the health care system to the tune of millions and millions of dollars – money that is coming from the pockets of everyone (Office of the Insurance Commissioner 2004-online).

Thus, if they are able to access it at all, there are multiple costs exacted on the studied population by the low wage labour market: lack of primary health care means that sick people use accident and emergency as a walk-in clinic, but often not until their ill-health has been exacerbated. They are sicker, but have limited, if any, sick leave; therefore, they receive no pay for no work; this is also the case for annual holidays; they have families but limited work flexibility; and, lastly, low wages mean continued poverty and public support so the public pay for the support of private business. This is the current trend in the US and change remains unlikely in the foreseeable future.

### **(1.5) Education and Training Programmes' Effectiveness**

In a 1991 speech to the Democratic Leadership Council, then Governor Clinton promised to '... demand that everybody who can go to work do it, for work is the best social program this country has ever devised' (Clinton 1991-online). By 1997, in another Democratic Leadership Council address, he welcomed welfare reform with

Those who are better-educated ... flexible ... have skills and confidence to move on from one job to another and seize new opportunities, they are rewarded. Therefore, we must make education our most important tool in erecting this new social compact. We cannot rest until we know that ... every 18-year-old can go to college, every adult can learn for a lifetime (Clinton 1997-online).

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<sup>16</sup> Medicaid is the federal government's health insurance plan for the poor. PeachCare (peaches being the symbol for Georgia) is the name for Medicaid in Georgia.

Unfortunately, the opportunity to 'learn for a lifetime' is not what has occurred for many welfare recipients. What many of the lowest-skilled welfare recipients with low or no job skills have demanded of them is education and training not in excess of 22 weeks. Generally, these short-term trainings offer preparation for employment as childcare providers<sup>17</sup>, medical office receptionists, nurses' assistants or enhancement of workplace technology skills. Yet, those with diminished reading ability, other obstacles to employment notwithstanding, are simply unable to read the material required in the majority of the courses (Strawn 1999). As stated in Chapter 1, those who can succeed are likely to do so with little more than generalised guidance. For those in greater need, short-term training may be only marginally better than nothing at all and possibly worse, for it is understood that programmes for the least educated consistently fail to provide much in the way of useful services, programme administrators have little in the way of performance accountability, and most low-skilled TANF recipients remain 'within the system' (Ellwood 1986; Grubb and Kalman 1994; Murray 1996; National Center for Policy Analysis 1996-online; Haskins, Sawhill et al. 2001; Peck 2001).

Thus it seems clear that

For welfare recipients whose barriers to employment are extremely severe, supplementary services and special strategies are likely to be required... A push toward quick employment or an emphasis on education and training ... is [unlikely] to promote self-sufficiency (Polit, Nelson et al. 2005:Sum-43).

And yet, the least-skilled continue to be assigned to basic academic and work training that they are unlikely to complete. This attrition along with low motivation and trivial gains by students in welfare-to-work programmes has long been a topic of concern and discussion by policy makers and provider (Grubb and Kalman 1994). Yet, beyond anecdotal evidence by case managers and programme directors, there is little indication of formal research into the actual numbers of people who fail to complete programmes, for the data is unlikely to be collected by providers. Indeed, so poorly tracked are individuals studying Adult Basic Education (ABE) within colleges that one administrator referred to welfare-to-work programme students

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<sup>17</sup> Due to low pay, which places them below the federal poverty line, childcare providers have a chronically high turnover rate in excess of 35 percent per annum (Report on Salary Levels 1999-online).

falling 'into the black hole of ABE' without case managers really knowing where they are (quoted in Grubb and Kalman 1994:65).

More recently, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) attempted to track better than it had previously the work habits of students formerly enrolled in welfare-to-work programmes and showed that of 1,303 participants in 23 community organisations, some 62 percent did not work in the 90 days after they left. Those who did find work earned a median wage of \$7.76 per hour (Education Services Division 2004:12-13). By 2005, attrition<sup>18</sup> in education and training programmes in all of Washington State remained fairly high with some 42 percent of all training recipients departing short-term training prior to completion and with 75 percent of the lowest-skilled still workless in the quarter after dropping out (Education Services Division 2005:3, 8, 20). The findings concluded that 'Few [participants] have immediate job placement goals after [training]' (Education Services Division 2004:12).

Furthermore, efforts to teach and train appear fragmented and, not surprisingly, tend to focus on a relatively high skilled, more able, portion of the student body, while for those with the lowest skills, more structure and support is necessary (Grubb and Kalman 1994; Ikenberry 1999; Mazzeo, Rab et al. 2003). Grubb and Kalman (1994) suggest the effects of participation are three tiered, depending on the characteristics of those involved. In tier one, the highest skilled, most job-ready, gain the least benefit and generally move into employment all-but on their own; those in tier three also have insignificant benefits, while those in the middle tier gain the most, all which further the indication that those most in-need are by-passed.

It may be, then, that they receive little in the way of any tangible benefits as often they fail to meet mandated attendance requirements, which result in family sanctions. In real terms often this means that the most fragile, i.e., the least employable, of women are disproportionately negatively affected (Bryner and Martin 2005:336). Some find they are ultimately worse off for their incomes are

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<sup>18</sup> Porter, Cummings and Cuban (2005) suggest that those individuals with the lowest basic skills require one hundred to one hundred and fifty hours of instruction to increase one grade level but the average participation appears to be about seventy hours (p1).

reduced because they have had removed the possibility of picking up informal work and educationally they fail to progress (Holcolm, Pavetti et al. 1998; Haskins, Sawhill et al. 2001). This failure to attend and make progress, for all the myriad reasons it occurs, may be demoralizing for both students and teachers who try, against the odds, to engage the frequently disinclined (Seccombe, James et al 1998).

It seems self-evident that motivated individuals with high basic skills are more likely to move into long-term work than those with lower skills who are mandated to attend classes against their wills. What is less simple, however, is which welfare-to-work programme templates are the best for the population studied in this thesis. Certainly comprehensive programmes which pay the close attention to quality, and which provide an array of interrelated services such as education, vocational training as well as on-the-job training, assistance with job search, interviewing skills, and subsidised jobs appear to assist the most people into work, but they are thought costly, both politically and publicly unpopular and, suffer perennial funding problems (Grubb and Kalman 1994). In the experience of a long-term employment specialist at one of the Seattle area technical colleges, the most successful programmes tend to be lengthy (up to one year) and have a method of 'weeding out' the likely failures early on in the selection process (Placement Specialist 2004, recorded interview, 16 April). We will see in the next chapter what case managers have to say on this subject.

In 1986, Mead blamed the failure of American work creation and poverty elimination programmes on too few expectations of their recipients and a failure to inculcate values and (p10). In Canada, Mihlar and Smith (1997) warned of the lessons to be learned from the US experience with government-sponsored training programmes because 'these programs have virtually no positive effect on the economic prospects of participants' (p49). The authors suggest further research is warranted into the ability of the private sector to accomplish the same goals, although DeParle (2004) showed an exceptionally poor record of such a private sector foray. Murray (2005), suggests that all of these programmes have failed for more than 40 years because 'it is impossible to make up for parenting deficits through outside interventions' (p6), and Rossi states that the more confounding factors (in this case 'barriers') an evaluation study accounts for, the less likely it is to



show beneficial effects because none has produced long-term results that survive scrutiny' (quoted in Murray 2005:6). This may be because matters such as mental health and housing issues must be addressed before asking women to attend parenting classes or read to their children (Feinstein 2003).

While there is understandable alarm about the poor quality of education and training services (DeParle 2004), Grubb and Kalman (1994) suggest they are not ineffectual because the individuals running them don't care, they are ineffectual because 'no one has grappled with the magnitude of the problem, the issue of appropriate resources, and the question of appropriate pedagogies' (p58). Additional concerns suggest that providers replicate some of the worst practices of case managers by emphasising attendance and bureaucracy over programme content (Lens 2006:586).

Indeed, so widespread are the criticisms of programme curricula and outcomes in the majority of welfare-to-work programmes that Grubb (1996) suggests 'no second-chance system of reasonable cost could possibly help' (p104) those individuals lacking the most important of the soft skills wanted by employers.

... teaching social behaviour such as cooperative work, complex inference, or problem-solving in any meaningful way, because it fragments complex abilities, isolates learners from one another, and decontextualises skills in ways antithetical to 'higher order' capacities (Grubb and Kalman 1994:75).

Yet, in an effort to rush the exceptionally low-skilled into work, there has been an increased reliance on shorter-term training despite evidence that moving through basic education and job training can take more than a year but has ultimate payoffs in terms of longer term employability and income (Grubb and Kalman 1994; Carnivale and Resrochers 2000; Martinson and Strawn 2002).

## **(1.6) Conclusion**

While it may be reasonable to promote family childcare, job preparation, work, and marriage, a number of failings have been identified. We saw that federal funding of childcare, obviously an important part of creating the possibility of lone parents to

leave home for work, has been reduced (Mezey, Parrott et al. 2004), and that not only the quantity but also the quality of childcare available to the poorest single parents has been called into question (Adams and Rohacek 2002; Berger and Black 1992; Coley et al. 2004). Also, we learned that employers are less than inclined to hire the lowest-skilled welfare recipients, particularly during recessions (Holzer 1999; Holzer and Stoll 2002) and that education providers, whose job it is to increase employability, are held only marginally accountable for creating meaningful educational and employment services (Houser 2004; Grubb 1996; Lipsky 1980). With this in mind, if work is to be attained and sustained, governments will have to offer jobs of last resort to limit unfairly penalising those potential workers who remain unattractive to employers particularly when there is limited labour demand (Walker and Wiseman 2003:183). We witnessed, too, social exclusion by race with a plurality (38 percent) of “hard-to-serve” welfare recipients as black and who are often the recipients of substandard primary and secondary education in segregated poor inner cities, thus ill-equipping them for success in a competitive labour market. Because of this substandard education, they are least likely to be afforded access to the longer-term training and education programmes as they are thought to be unlikely to succeed in them. Therefore, realistic an approach or not, access to varying opportunities is applied unevenly (Kalil, Seefeldt et al. 2002).

Also we saw that for all the efforts to force work on the lowest skilled, still some 40 percent either do not leave the rolls or do not leave the rolls for work (Courtney and Dworsky 2006:5; Turner, Danziger and Seefeldt 2006: 237, 228). That they leave the rolls only is not a goal of PRWORA. This population is considered exceptionally disadvantaged (Haennicke, Konieczny et al.; Barriers to Economic Security 2001; Haskins, Sawhill at al.; Holzer and Stoll 2001; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002; Hamilton 2002: 11).

Further, we saw that the male counterparts of these women are a population of disadvantaged men, many of whom spend time imprisoned at immense and increasing cost to the public purse (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1998:11; Stephan 2004: 1-3). In the welfare debate, they have remained largely forgotten, and certainly unaddressed, yet they are intimately tied to the women who are the targets

of welfare reform (Edelman et al. 2005; Stack 1974; Becker 1973). Addressing the ability of this body of men to work, emotionally and financially help support their children, and form long-term, healthy relationships with their partners has major implications for policy but is one which should be addressed with immense sensitivity.

Surely the goal of PRWORA to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families is not regardless of the potential negative consequences for fragile families. For as long as these men are incompatible with marriage and parenthood, then the women who are the focus of this study should avoid long-term commitment to them and make choices based on family health and stability. That they are poor and can ill-afford parenthood will, no doubt, raise criticisms, but once their children are born, welfare reform's priorities must be flexible to the needs of families that are already in existence.

For all their efforts, government has failed on a number of critical levels. There has been a lack of investment into creating access to living wage employment; limited acknowledgement that the better women do in the labour market, the greater the 'positive psychological spill-over into the family' and thus generate real opportunities for their children later in life (Esping-Anderson 2002:67). But, the process of becoming virtually unemployable began many years, even decades, before and it is unreasonable to expect them to thrive in the competitive, low-end labour market. Therefore, what is necessary is greater focus on fragile families and communities. It hardly seems reasonable, and possibly counterproductive, that the political and social controls exercised upon welfare recipients are often rituals of degradation and well-established bureaucratic obstacles of disempowerment (Fox-Piven and Cloward 1993) and for whom appeals for their rights to assistance 'mistakenly are ignored or manipulatively circumvented' (p1044) by practices of withheld information, misinformation, isolation of applicants and demands for unreasonable amounts of documentation (p1006).

Handler (2003) suggests the lack of sufficient consideration for the poor is a considerable moral dilemma, which serves to devalue the intrinsic values of

citizenship for everyone by limiting access to one group of people and not others (p240). No country has yet devised a truly successful approach to attend to the neediest of lone parents. It is because of this lack of ability to fix 'the problem', the raised consciousness towards lone parents and enduring stigma that governments are sending the message that certain types of people have worth whilst others do not: a stay-at-home mother is deserving of her husband's support despite publicly paid tax-exemptions for such; a stay-at-home single mother is undeserving of public support despite the ramifications of neglect and the generally difficult environment in which they live (Gordon 1990:177).

It is possible that access, equity and the creation of economic security are what states aspire to for citizens in theory: 'Equality embraces numerous specific considerations like the right to education, equality before the law, equality of personal respect, equality of political and economic influence' (Furniss and Tilton 1977:29). But in practice the possibility remains that we will find competition, globalisation and the endeavour to offset high taxes with cheap labour will thwart plans to finance and regulate welfare states to adequate levels (Greger 2000). There is little wonder, then, that the resulting exclusion of increasingly insecure and isolated people living with social and economic uncertainty will lead to greater family disruption and potentially increased crime.

What it means to be poor and insecure traverses international boundaries. Although varied in degree and precise nature, the voices of the poor in the most impoverished areas echo those of the poor in the world's most prosperous nations (Seccombe, James et al. 1998; Seccombe 1999). Beset with a conundrum, Joseph Califano asked in 1981 the same questions being reiterated today,

Why is it so difficult to reform the welfare system, when everyone agrees it's a mess? ... Should the jobs pay prevailing wages to protect existing workers? What value should be placed on homemaking and mothering? Is that worthy of less pay than mopping floors? In a mobile society, with high welfare payments in some states and low wages in others, is it possible to implement a concept of always making more money working than on welfare without disrupting local, state, and regional economies? (p366).

With so many competing interests, welfare reform 'collides with the sad reality that Americans are simply not willing to invest the significant sums necessary for comprehensive welfare reform' (p366). Yet, without honest consideration and further development of realistic social safety net policies for the poor women in this thesis, the leaders of western nations may find their mental images of deprived populations mirrored in what many would regard as unlikely places. Hence,

The social isolation which separates underprivileged groups from the rest of the social order within nations mirrors the division of the rich from the poor on a global scale – and is usually bound up with that division. First world poverty cannot be approached as though it had no connection with inequalities of a much broader scale (Giddens 1994:148).

Whether whites base their evaluations of welfare on their images of black or white recipients matters because any racially charged debate of the relative virtuousness of support will have implications for future policy. We have learned that race remains a factor in poverty and welfare take-up: today African-Americans are often the last to be hired; they have the highest unemployment rates, the highest incarceration rates, the highest death rate and the shortest life-expectancy. They receive unequal access to quality education, welfare services, are over-represented in short-term welfare-to-work programmes for the least-skilled and which have high failure rates. If whites continue to have negative images of welfare recipients (Gilens 1996, 1996a; Hancock 2004), then this likely will result in greater opposition to welfare than would result if blacks were realistically represented in the public consciousness.

Ellwood (1988) may be correct when he suggests that everyone hates welfare. Yet there seems to exist evidence that the lowest skilled welfare recipients are mistreated *because* they are misunderstood. It is not that the 40 percent of lowest-skilled welfare recipients who fail in the labour market don't want to work, we are unsure of that, but they are sufficiently unskilled or damaged (Haennicke, Konieczny et al.; Barriers to Economic Security 2001; Haskins, Sawhill at al.; Holzer and Stoll 2001; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002) that special assistance is likely to be required for '...a push toward quick employment or an emphasis on education and training ... is [unlikely] to promote self-sufficiency (Polit, Nelson et al. 2005:Sum-43). While 'special assistance' may be available, we see it is distributed unequally and the least

skilled are most likely to be sent to the least helpful education and training. These programmes suffer high rates of attrition and low motivation (Grubb and Kalman 1994) the reasons for which may be that programme administrators have yet to grasp the magnitude of the problem to be addressed (p58). Further, it may be that welfare is 'a narcotic', but those who are least able to work gain little or nothing from their mandated education and training, nor is it likely to foster greater realisation of PRWORA's goals. This population is neither work-ready, nor short-term training ready. They need more than either of these has to offer.

The information presented in this chapter leads to the first empirical chapter. We learned here that many welfare recipients have immense problems. Case managers are charged with the task of ensuring that even the most compromised women take up work, or determine why they are unable to work and, if unable, respond to those barriers to employment with appropriate action. This may be too onerous a task. Thus the next chapter seeks to examine the work experiences, motivations, inclinations and capabilities of case managers in order to determine if they are consistent, competent and appropriate in their responses to the needs of their clients.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Interviews with Gate Keepers, Case Managers and Social Workers**

#### **Introduction**

This purpose of this chapter is to determine empirically the validity of some of the assertions made in Chapters 2 and 3 regarding case managers' unequal treatment and dissemination of support services to welfare recipients and, where this is found to occur, whether there are any positive or negative consequences.

This chapter addresses the empirical research in five parts. The first introduces the sample of interviewees, along with a justification for their selection, and describes and explains the interview process that was followed. The second through fifth parts discuss and respond to feedback from the interviewees to general areas that were outlined at the beginning of part two. These assess case managers' workloads to determine how time-compromised they are; the characteristics of their clientele to determine the difficulty of responding effectively to a work requirement; the limits to welfare eligibility which is intended to determine the likelihood that these welfare recipients would be sanctioned from support for failure to comply; and the perceived effectiveness of educational provisions and the reliability of outcome data to determine the perspectives of gatekeepers to education and training programmes provided off-site.

#### **(1.0) Interviewee Sample Justification**

##### **Administrators**

It is fortunate that Dexter (1970) was only partly accurate when he stated that agency gatekeepers are not necessarily good informants themselves but rather sources of access to better and more informants (p76).

One individual, The Director<sup>WM</sup> (superscripts indicate race and gender), was gatekeeper to the gatekeepers without the help of which there likely would have

been limited or no access to agency employees. He provided what I came to understand as directives to administrators to make available their offices and employees and has remained in contact for updates on research findings.

With the assistance of The Director<sup>WM</sup> (for relevance of this individual see Chapter 2) I interviewed four administrators, referred to as Alice<sup>WF</sup>, Angela<sup>WF</sup>, Anne<sup>WF</sup> and Arnold<sup>WM</sup> (names beginning with 'A' indicate the individuals are Administrators), each of whom manage some 30 to 60 employees and anywhere from approximately 550 to 6000 adult clients, depending on the size of the catchment area. All the interviews occurred in the area south of Seattle and central Tacoma and involved access to four of the five area welfare offices. These are all located in predominantly poor districts with higher than average unemployment and were chosen for the greater challenges they pose for case managers.

Three interviewees, all female, were so conversant and willing to discuss their various areas of expertise, and create access to not necessarily better but differently informed individuals. The most useful data gathered came not from not what was asked but that which was provided in the course of our meandering, but not aimless, conversations. In comparison, the one male administrator who was interviewed answered questions and provided access to two case managers but appeared either guarded in his speech or simply indifferent to the topic and my presence (Arnold 2004, recorded interview, 1 July). For more details on selection of and access to gatekeepers, see Chapter 2.

## **Case Managers**

Case managers are the 'street-level bureaucrats' who meet clients on a daily basis. It was imperative that I meet with these individuals serving the welfare receiving public so that it would be possible to determine on how and why they go about their work. With that in mind, I interviewed seven case managers who managed the welfare-related lives of their TANF clients. This number was originally intended to be eight, but Angela<sup>WF</sup> was leaving her position to take up employment elsewhere,



and thus I was short of two caseworker contacts in her CSO (Community Service Office or benefits agency). Yet, this came to seem of little consequence as she was extraordinarily helpful and, possibly, insightful. The case managers are: Clyde<sup>BM</sup>, Carla<sup>WF</sup>, Catherine<sup>WF</sup>, Claire<sup>BF</sup>, Chelsea<sup>WF</sup> and Chloe<sup>WF</sup> and Charlie<sup>WF</sup>. For ease of reference, names beginning with 'C' indicate case managers.

## **Social Workers**

Unlike the typical case manager, the function of the social services social worker is to determine what clients who are referred to them are lacking and what is inhibiting their employment. There is an important distinction to make at this point, however, and which addresses the qualifications of agency social workers. They are unlikely to be professional social workers with, say, the usual Masters Degree in Social Work (MSW) and clinical experience. Instead, generally they have risen through the ranks of agencies and may or may not have graduated from universities. Today, the qualification requirement for a position as a Social Worker, and there are four levels, is one to two-years as a social service agency employee at the previous level. They number comparatively few and are considered 'a precious resource for us because we don't have as many as we would like' (The Director<sup>WM</sup>) although all clients are, in an ideal world, supposed to see a social worker for employment assessment.

Anne Keeney, Director of Strategic Planning & Policy at the Seattle Jobs Initiative<sup>19</sup>, suggests these positions are frequently filled with individuals with few relevant skills and are 'too low paying [to make educational demands]'. When I was a case manager they said, "There you go. Good luck"" (Keeney 2005 Unrecorded interview, 7 January). Similarly, a professor at the University of Washington School of Social Work said

In every state, social workers have fought to have the term 'social worker' restricted to those with a professional degree, without much success. There has been some progress on licensing, but that does not solve this problem. The reason that many who work in state [government] do not have degrees is that the

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<sup>19</sup> The Seattle Jobs Initiative provides the training discussed later in this chapter.

pay is too low, caseloads too high.... Another issue is extremely high turnover ... but it is a lot to ask, for people with talent and skills, and a degree, to subsidize the state by taking much lower salaries (Pearce 2005, e-mail communication, 7 January).

Despite this conflict, and although they may not be social workers in the commonly understood sense, agency terminology for these employees is 'social worker' and I will continue to use the title here.

Three agency social workers were interviewed, not four as was hoped. The reason is the same as explained for the loss of two case managers. Further, two of these social workers, Clyde<sup>BM</sup> and Carla<sup>WF</sup>, were also case managers for the TANF population. Their names do not identify their dual professional status of case manager in addition to being social workers.

Carla<sup>WF</sup>, a case manager, and soon to be social worker, with an undergraduate degree in social work, believes 'there is an inherent conflict of interest in the [combined positions of] social worker and case manager' (2004). Although the majority of case managers are not additionally social workers, this situation was perceived by agencies I visited as being an effective, and cost effective, means to assess clients more reliably. And yet, the direction and details provided during the course of conversation with the lone individual not also a case manager, Patricia<sup>WF</sup> (2004 recorded interview, 30 June), were vastly different from her counterparts who held dual positions. She knew little in the way of precise numbers of TANF recipients served or percentages of individuals with problems but, rather, had more in-depth details of the hurdles her clients were most like to encounter and what, in an ideal world, she would like to see done. While an advocate of work as a means to limit the social exclusion of single mothers, she was also highly critical of the in-built inflexibilities of welfare policy generally. Furthermore, this was the only individual with whom I spoke who took exception to what she saw as a culture of manipulation and to the body of language in use (for example, "hard-to-serve") when referring to welfare recipients.

## **Social Workers**

The interview protocol served as a general guideline for gaining insight into the key areas of interest. A total of 24 interview questions (see Appendix A) were developed as an aide de memoire for interviews with all community service officers, which included administrators, case managers and social workers. All the initial face-to-face interviews were tape-recorded. Each lasted approximately 90 minutes or a little longer. In the case of Carla, this was closer to two and a half hours. Thereafter, e-mail correspondence was collected and saved and telephone conversations recorded. Further, we were free, and this was encouraged at the onset, to digress on topics relative to their jobs, clients and client management at will. The guideline for matters to be addressed was formed into groups of interrelated sections designed to assess four main areas needing clarity:

- case managers' workloads,
- client characteristics,
- limits to welfare eligibility,
- educational effectiveness and data reliability

Additionally, it was stated that in light of a desire to maintain confidentiality, and despite the fact that I was at the agencies in something of an official capacity by virtue of The Director<sup>WM</sup>'s sanction, that pseudonyms would be used when writing up the interview contents.

### **(1.1) Case Managers' Workloads**

Questions 1 and 2 (see Appendix A for a list of the questions) had comparable responses from virtually all administrators and case managers (Alice<sup>WF</sup>, Angela<sup>WF</sup> and Anne<sup>WF</sup> Clyde<sup>BM and</sup> Carla<sup>WF</sup>, Catherine<sup>WF</sup>, Claire<sup>BF</sup>, Chelsea<sup>WF</sup> and Chloe<sup>WF</sup>).

Neither one of these questions was intended to address quantitative issues so much as draw attention to qualitative issues. As Pavetti et al. found, the dissemination of large quantities of information may interfere with clients' ability to retain what may

be of use to them. Meyers, Glaser and Mac Donald (1998) found similarly that the communication of large amounts of data lead case managers to routinize their contacts with clients. Thus, the purpose here was to see if case managers appeared too busy or frustrated in their attempts to attend to the needs of individuals who may have been particularly time-consuming.

Anne<sup>WF</sup> confirmed that her case managers are exceptionally busy and recognized that part of the problem is that there is enormous staff turnover, which concentrates their workloads significantly more than is desirable. 'Finding good case managers is difficult'. She further acknowledged some discomfort in following policy and the pressure to push vulnerable people off welfare. While many case managers are willing to do precisely that, one individual in her department had caseloads that remained the same while those of her counterparts all decreased. 'She was simply unwilling to cut people off or hold them accountable for their behaviour'. Another problem is that caseworkers change caseloads routinely and for those areas with large populations of particularly needy clients, they have exceptionally large numbers of people with problems. While this is thought to defer job burnout, the relative concentration of people in need of enormous help 'was and still is a problem' (Alice<sup>WM</sup>).

Concurring with Ellwood (1986), Murray (1996), Edin and Lein (2003), Peck (2001) and Katz (2001), Anne<sup>WF</sup> offered that the current welfare population served were particularly compromised in terms of education, skills and attractiveness to employers, few were new to welfare and 'they are constantly cycling thorough the system'. Additionally, Alice<sup>WF</sup>, Angela<sup>WF</sup> and Anne<sup>WF</sup> estimated that some 30 - 40 percent of the TANF populations attending their agencies are in the 'hard-to-serve' category by virtue of their unemployability. Likewise, all the case managers consistently put this population at some 40 percent of their client base but one, Catherine<sup>WF</sup> (2004 Recorded interview, 30 June) acknowledged that she may think it's higher than it actually is because they are so burdensome. Still, this information concurs with data found in chapter 3 (Haennicke, Konieczny et al.; Barriers to Economic Security 2001; Haskins, Sawhill at al.; Holzer and Stoll 2001; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002). Carla<sup>WF</sup> (2004) added the caveat that her response to how many clients she considered 'hard-to-serve' was

... probably a little biased because, as a case manager, the people who want to participate and want to get a job, we don't deal with them on a daily basis. They're not the ones calling us; they're not the ones with the problems. The ones I'm dealing with every day are those ... [For them] there's always something going on. Their bills are going to be shut off. They don't pay their rent or utilities. And they're hard to work with. It's really hard to dig into their cases. We tried doing home visits for a while but ... what we found was that the client would just say what we wanted to hear and that was it. They wouldn't engage at all.

Later, a clearly frustrated Carla<sup>WF</sup> voiced her some of her concerns, 'I don't know what the answer is.... This system is a hard one and we don't have a lot of time or resources to really help these people'.

Lastly, despite its repeated invocation by everyone except the lone social worker who took great exception to it ('It's a horrible thing to call people' - Patricia<sup>WF</sup>), the matter of referring to clients as "hard-to-serve" proved of little concern. Yet, the term proved difficult to define either officially or unofficially. Arnold<sup>WM</sup>, the only male administrator interviewed, stated that anyone who fails to work full-time, and for whom that is the goal, is definitionally 'hard-to-serve'. For this reason, he declared 'I guess 100 percent of the population is 'hard-to-serve' because they're not working'. In a tangential discussion about poor single mothers having children they cannot afford, Arnold<sup>WM</sup> suggested 'maybe we should have a system like China' possibly implying that greater control over the reproductive rights of welfare recipients may be an appropriate direction for policy makers to consider (this, despite the fact that China limits children for everyone and not just the poor).

## **(1.2) Client Characteristics**

Several questions were asked in an attempt to establish the characteristics and the relative likelihood of this population of women acquiring employment. Again, there was significant agreement by all the administrators on the characteristics of the 'hard-to-serve' population, who spend an average of two years on TANF with a range from a few weeks to many years. They tend to have inadequate education (stated as probably the most common problem), little work experience, limited self-

esteem, drug and alcohol problems, problems with domestic violence, children with special needs, behavioural issues not easily compatible with full-time work and, not infrequently, limited proficiency in English. Alice<sup>WF</sup> said that although lack of education was recognised as a major obstacle to work ‘student status is not particularly well supported’ (2004, recorded interview, 30 June 2004). By early 2005 Anne<sup>WF</sup> had said, ‘there is some evidence that they’re going to be going back to focus more on education’. This, however, refers to Washington State only, and the plan is in an embryonic stage. ‘Not even past the drawing board ... it could go the other way just as easily’ (e-mail correspondence, 7 January 2005).

Carla<sup>WF</sup> said there is a loophole in the law which states that if a caseworker thinks that not having a high school diploma or a GED (see Chapter 2 or Glossary) will hinder a client’s ability to work, then there is an education-only option, but this has to be individually approved and is difficult to get because ‘I probably shouldn’t be saying this, but the state doesn’t really like that’(2004). Angela<sup>WF</sup> voiced a concern over the impact of limited education on job prospects, ‘particularly in this economy’ (2004, recorded interview, 1 July) and said she was part of a team that lobbied the state for ‘permission to pilot a study which would put GED completion before job search’<sup>20</sup>. So important a matter did she consider access to education that she planned to fund the study regardless of state approval. Without necessary levels of education, these clients, she said, ‘would find themselves permanently unemployed or in retail, trade, fast-food, laundry room jobs in hospitals... with limited opportunity for moving up’. Further, she underscored that another confounding factor to any employment is felony convictions. This may be because her agency is located close to a Tacoma prison for women, and as a result she has a larger than average number of ex-offenders, or that the proximity of the prison ensures criminal convictions weigh more heavily on her mind than that of other administrators. It is known, however, that a criminal history is a major obstacle for many people seeking employment (Nurse 2001; Kovac, Dion, Markesich and Pavetti 2002). Angela<sup>WF</sup> also commented that another confounding factor for women seeking employment is their inability to pass drug screenings. When they tandem with felony convictions, ‘frankly we aren’t sure what to do’. Anne<sup>WF</sup> (2004) commented that regardless of

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<sup>20</sup> It was denied in August 2004.

the barriers to employment, she believes some welfare recipients don't want to work. She gave an example of a young woman who was asked by her caseworker if she liked her life. The response was that 'she was happy - no worries - all her bills got paid'. Likewise, Catherine<sup>WF</sup> said 'In my opinion, most of them ... just don't want to work' (2004). A WorkFirst programme supervisor<sup>21</sup>, Danielle<sup>WF</sup>, said 'once they stop cooperating it's hard to get them any kind of help because some of our clients have made a conscious choice not to talk to us (2004, recorded interview, 30 June). To this Charlie<sup>WF</sup> (2004) added, 'People in Section 8 [council houses] are the hardest to get into work', and suggested that that the low rent, which is charged on a sliding scale, makes their lives relatively easy and creates disincentives to seek and obtain work (Recorded interview, 28 December). On addressing the nature of the low-skilled labour market and the relative difficulties for the "hard-to-serve" of securing and sustaining work, case managers tended to see their clients are not particularly different than them. General commentary tended to run along the lines that they, the case managers, were raised in environments where work was normalised and welfare recipients do not work because work was not expected of them. There is more on the comments of case managers on this subject later in the chapter.

Carla made a final comment about the length of time women remain on welfare and admitted to case managers feeling immense frustration that the five-year lifetime time limit to access benefits came and went and that virtually no changes were made.

When it first started, we tried really hard to tell clients they need to get going on this because 'you only have this much amount of time'. But the clients knew, and they were laughing at us the whole time, like, 'Yeah, right, you're not going to cut off our benefits'. And that undermines us, too. It takes away the authority we have (2004).

This sense of frustration and discontent with policy and employment outcomes was palpable in the vast majority of those who were interviewed.

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<sup>21</sup> Typically case managers were selected and introduced by the Administrator. This individual, however, was a manager of the case managers and was selected by the Administrator as being in a better position to know the skills and knowledge of the case manager whom she would then choose for the interview.

### **(1.3) Limits to Welfare Eligibility**

Determining the probability that low skilled mothers would lose state assistance if they failed to take up work was of some importance. Given their lack of attractiveness to employers because of limited education and work experience and the possibly of limited 'soft' skills (the variety of people skills necessary for dealing with members of the customer service seeking public) meant that they could relative easily find them selves sanctioned off welfare for non-compliance with work mandates. Losing this support would be likely to leave them enduring extreme financial hardship and, to compound matters, being off the welfare rolls would also mean they would be without the assistance, such as it is, of case managers.

How likely a welfare recipient with one or more barriers to employment would lose TANF was unanimous but clearly Washington State specific. At the time the interviews were conducted, completely losing did not occur but there was significant dissatisfaction with the toothless threat of complete sanction without case managers' ability to follow-through.

The last state governor, Gary Locke, was responsible for this policy and determined that forcing women with small children entirely off TANF would only serve to harm their children. Typically, when women were sanctioned for not complying with the requirements of their case managers, they entered a new category called 'Safety Net' which became 'a real pain in the neck' for recipients (Alice<sup>WF</sup>). Case managers expressed great dislike for it because of the bureaucratic paper trail that was required (Carla<sup>WF</sup>; Catherine<sup>WF</sup>, Claire<sup>BF</sup>, Chelsea<sup>WF</sup> and Chloe<sup>WF</sup>), and which, in practice, ensured they were likely to do nothing. This policy continued until 2006 when the new Democratic governor, Christine Gregoire, revoked even marginal support in an effort to encourage more take-up of work for those seen to be resisting efforts to take up employment. This was met with enormous philosophical support from all but one case manager (Claire<sup>BF</sup> 2004 Recorded interview, 1July). Precisely what has happened to these women severed from TANF since September 2006, when the law was implemented, remains, as yet, unclear, but data from Chapter 3 suggests that many of them many not be faring well.



During the initial round of interviews in 2004, the female case managers, social worker and administrators had not supported the elimination of welfare in the form of cash assistance, but only a few years later they had grown grateful that their threats could no longer be undermined by lack of ability to follow through with sanction and elimination of assistance. Arnold<sup>WM</sup> and Clyde<sup>BM</sup>, however, had always believed it was unfair to allow welfare recipients to benefit from their individual lack of responsibility. Early on, Clyde<sup>BM</sup> had stated that Clinton's welfare reform was 'a step in the right direction' insofar as it removed the notion of entitlement. Among a total of twelve interviewees, it was of some interest that the two males had similar responses to one another and may have signified their lack of understanding of how children compromise women's ability to take up work, particularly low-end work that typically is inflexible in terms of scheduling. All the administrators acknowledged that neither full nor partial grants were sufficient to sustain families and there was widespread agreement that recipients surely must receive assistance from elsewhere (the suspicion was that there was illegitimate work being performed, along with borrowing and stealing). Thus eliminating their grant was not likely to curtail their income entirely. Such belief corresponds with DeParle 's (2004) experiences during his study of welfare recipients and who stated 'their means of survival [is] a national mystery' (p185).

Thus, in the comparatively liberal state of Washington benefits are now terminated entirely, either at the first point of noncompliance or after a period of noncompliance. This greatly increases the power of case managers to follow-through on their threats to terminate assistance. This, however, is despite evidence which suggests that recipients who have left welfare as a result of sanction, have been shown to be particularly vulnerable: they have more work barriers, including lower education levels, mental health problems, and child care and transportation difficulties (Fein and Lee 1999). Moreover, former recipients who left welfare because they were sanctioned are much less likely to work than those leaving welfare for other reasons (Taylor and Barusch 2000). Regardless, the support for the ability to sanction off welfare was relished for its ability to enforce what was broadly seen as personal responsibility.

Addressing welfare recipients' barriers to employment, which are thought to have a direct relationship on educational outcomes, proved to be of some importance. Alice<sup>WF</sup> responded to a question about evidence of learning disabilities by stating that the job market was the most reliable identifier of individuals' barriers to employment. She also indicated that 'There are laws which say we have to provide these [assessment services] to people but there's no money to do it'. Anne<sup>WF</sup> agreed that the law requires learning disability assessment be made available 'but [we] don't test because [we] have no money for either testing or the follow-up'.

They all agreed, however, that it was the responsibility of case managers to detect and respond appropriately to their clients' employability but that effectively accomplishing this posed several challenges much of which involved immense time constraints. It may be important to note a comment from Anne<sup>WF</sup> who offered that many of the case managers have little education themselves and were simply not qualified to assess some of the complex problems that clients bring to the table. Furthermore, one case manager, Charlie<sup>WF</sup> clarified precisely what kind of commitment such responsibility could entail.

Charlie<sup>WF</sup> enrolled in a programme for case managers and other community service providers who work with members of the TANF receiving population. The classes are a combined effort with Antioch University in Seattle '... so that graduates could emerge with a proper certificate' (Keeney 2005). It involved a total of sixty hours of training in evening and Saturday classes, so, although it was offered to all of her colleagues, only two case managers (out of 50) accepted the offer. It was as a result of this course that Charlie<sup>WF</sup> felt she had developed the skills that not only helped her better distinguish her clients' needs but also, because many of the necessary contacts for those needy clients were taking the course with her, she had ready access to them. She said

I used to just be writing away taking notes when clients would talk to me. All I would think was, "I need to get you here" or "I need to get you there". I don't do that anymore; I just listen. Now I find that as they talk I pick up a lot more. And, with the help of this training, I may think 'Oh, that sounds like a learning disability' or 'there are anger management issues here', or 'I

think this might be a mental health concern'. Also, because of the training, I know how to get them to precisely the services I anticipate they need.

They're telling me more, too. And I think this is because with these new skills I'm asking better questions. One client told me about her felony conviction from twenty years ago, and after spending a day, *a whole day*, with a King County superior court judge, I understand now how to go about getting a conviction expunged from the record, and that's what I'm working on with her.

This explanation of the new approach taken by Charlie<sup>WF</sup> to addressing her clients' needs responds positively to some of the criticisms of case managers that were raised by Meyers, Glaser and Mac Donald (1998) earlier in this chapter and in greater detail in the section of Chapter 3 entitled 'Culture of Condemnation of the Undeserving Poor'.

Both Angela<sup>WF</sup> and Anne<sup>WF</sup> indicated that educational level, training and attitudes towards the welfare population impacted case managers' decisions regarding their clients. But, while her hands are somewhat tied in terms of allocating time off from work obligations for new parents, Carla<sup>WF</sup> found herself attracted to the notion of fewer work hours demanded of working mothers with small children who are still receiving benefit.

When I had my son, I used all my [maternity leave] then I had to use all of my [annual holidays]. I like the way that Sweden does it ... But the mentality of these women is, I think, a generational thing. I think that for a lot of these women their mothers were on welfare and that's the way of life that they've seen. Some [see it as an entitlement], like we owe them and we need to be taking care of them. That population is the hardest population; they're going to be on TANF as long as they can and a lot of them are in sanction because they just want to take the money and do whatever they want to do (2004).

Carla<sup>WF</sup> (2004) recognised a problem with employability of her clients and lamented the impermanent and tenuous positions they occasionally are offered.

The temp' jobs really do cause problems when it comes to TANF. When a client comes to me and says she's got a temp job, I think '[groan], well, OK'. Often, they only last weeks or days and by that time they're already off the rolls and when they come back it's like starting again.

Similarly, 'Those clients who do get jobs often get them in places that are not the best .... Many are in retail, which requires them to be really organised with their childcare. Evenings, weekend work and so on...' (Charlie<sup>WF</sup>).

Whilst not entirely downplaying the notion of the impact of barriers to employment, Clyde<sup>BM</sup> and Carla<sup>WF</sup> (2004) concurred on the matter, but Clyde went further by indicating that he has witnessed women coming to the agency with their pregnant 15 and 16 year old daughters and showing them the ropes. 'They see it as basically a graduation where the prevailing philosophy is "there you go, you made it. If it was good enough for me, it's good enough for you"'. He was emphatic about this.

These people are existing in these false realities where they have to do nothing. And that's not how the world operates. If you don't have the skills then you have to figure out something. People are not intrinsically motivated. I work because it's a necessity. I have to. It's not a choice.

When pressed into addressing the difficulty some women with few skills have in making decisions that will be of benefit to them, he said 'They don't [have the skills] because they've been allowed to exist in this fantasy world. I honestly think, I really do, welfare created the inability for people to make good choices'. Tangentially, Patricia<sup>WF</sup> commented that she approves of the work mandate, 'I think it's condescending to tell someone "We have no hope for you; we have no expectations"'. I like the idea of "OK, you need a job; what else do you need?". In conversation, all of this social worker's language was littered with comments such as, 'getting clients what they need so they can lead healthy, happier lives' while the language of her colleagues was erratic, fluctuating from understanding, to frustration and hostility during the course of our conversations and multiple e-mail exchanges.

Responding to questions regarding learning disability and mental health assessment, those made by Alice<sup>WF</sup>, Angela<sup>WF</sup>, Anne<sup>WF</sup>, conflicted with those of Arnold<sup>WM</sup> who said assessment for learning disabilities and mental illness is an available service to all those who need it. This clearly conflicted with the comments of his three counterparts who all said the availability of funding was exceptionally limited and sporadic. As Alice<sup>WF</sup> stated, 'they do not offer it as often as they should'. Patricia said learning disabilities 'are periodically acknowledged as a big problem and

periodically funding is available but not consistently'. Likewise Angela<sup>WF</sup> said 'some CSOs couldn't pay service providers enough and they [the providers] decided not to renew their contracts'. In a general reference to support provisions, Patricia said, 'A big problem is that so many ... services come and go it's difficult to know what's available at any given time.... The system is unstructured and ever-changing. It's hard to keep track of'. Another caseworker (Catherine<sup>WF</sup> 2004) commented,

... that's actually been a major issue in this office because we don't have any place where we can send people to be tested. There are sometimes funds for that. But then they stop it. I have clients who have never even been to school. Ever. They are so difficult to work with. But people with those kinds of issues are pretty good at bluffing they're way through [life]

Another, Clyde<sup>BM</sup>, referred to mental health assessment as

... a lot of garbage. Even if it's not, if you think, 'I have problems', then you're going to have problems. Anxiety, depression, PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] does not mean they can't work. What does this mean, 'they can't work because of depression'? We've created a monster and I feel powerless to do anything about it. On the one hand I feel kind of schizophrenic about this. They need to go out and get jobs, but it's one thing to send people to work without any tools but getting those tools in not cheap. The education system is inadequate.

Just as was found by Gilens (1996,1996a) and Hancock (2004) in Chapter 3, this case manager clearly felt ambivalent and frustrated. 'We're going to a system of call centres for social services, so, I don't know, that's just kind of crazy. They don't fit right together – *at all*'. He addressed a need for an early emphasis on the educational needs of poor populations and suggested

It the desired outcome you want is a critically educated mass of people, then that is the kind of system you've got to have, but if you don't want an educated mass of people, then you've got to have one like ours where we do things like No Child Left Behind<sup>22</sup>... Sound good; looks great, but there's no money to support it. We have to start earlier with the kids and help people have the tools to succeed, but I don't know how to do this. That's the hard part. I just don't know...

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<sup>22</sup> The No Child Left Behind Act was signed by George Bush in 2002. It is intended to focus on the educational needs of at risk children.

This lack of financial support may well be born of a lack of much philosophical support for the publicly subsidised (Mead 1997; Loury as quoted in Solow 1998; National Opinion Research Center 1998-online) which, as Hancock (2004) stated in the previous chapter, results in the population of single parents being too easily stereotyped, an effect of which is the limited resources made available for their care (p14).

Interviewees at the benefits agencies all agreed that determination of a need for remedial education and training is made by case managers who have considerable autonomy to deny access to educational provisions, particularly since the State has an interest in clients working any job that is available and as soon as possible. One case manager, Catherine<sup>WF</sup>, commented on the degree of professional autonomy, 'It depends on the age of the client how long I will give her to get her GED. And where she's been and what I think would be reasonable. Generally, the younger the client, the longer she'll get. Really, it's up to me' (2004). Carla<sup>WF</sup> (2004), however, voiced some frustration at the number of clients with far too little education and stated a lack of responsibility on behalf of the State.

This country seems to set people up for failure at a very young age [because of a] of lack of quality education, [which] then just continues as they grow up. It is very frustrating working for the state knowing we are just putting Band-Aids on the problems. One of these days I am going to get out of here and be in a position where I can really help people.

Catherine<sup>WF</sup> was the only individual who felt comfortable with a new responsibility of marriage advocate assigned to those in her position. 'I have no problems telling them they should get married' (2004). When I readdressed this in an e-mail at a later date and stated that there appeared to be little evidence that married poor single parents were any better off emotionally because their partners were not reasonable marriage or parent material (see chapter 4: Edelman et al:2005; Stack 1974; van Poppel 2000) she suggested 'my job is to get them off welfare as best I can. If that involves urging them to get married, then that's what I have to' (Catherine 2004). In contrast to this, the social worker said that with high divorce rates she wasn't 'one hundred percent sure that wanted that responsibility for [herself], let alone be in a position to suggest marriage for someone else'.

#### **(1.4) Educational Effectiveness and Data Reliability**

Local community and technical colleges almost always provide remedial education. But, in asking a question about possible problems between social service officers and education providers, we learn that difficulties do exist. 'Yes, there are problems with education providers who would prefer to try to circumvent the system and try to get students into more study, not work' (Alice<sup>WF</sup>); 'Yes, we see a lot of providers showing our clients how to circumvent the law' (Catherine<sup>WF</sup> 2004); and 'No, not really. Well sometimes' (Anne<sup>WF</sup> 2004). There was widespread frustration with this. 'Frankly, we don't really know what they're doing [at the colleges]' (Clyde<sup>BM</sup>). This concurs with the empirical findings of educational providers (Kane 2004, recorded interview, 22 April; Steps-to-Success 2004, recorded telephone interview, 19 April; State Board 2004, recorded telephone interview, 19 April) contacted in the next chapter and of Holzer and Stoll (2003) all who recognise that the better skills and education gained by their clients, all of which takes time, the better their long-term life chances.

Overseeing the quality of and content in educational classes is another problem,

There is no mechanism in place [for determining quality and content]. We don't follow those who've been in education and training programmes. Colleges don't track it. South Seattle [Community College] tracks job placement rates but not recidivism to welfare. And CSOs don't get this information (Anne<sup>WF</sup>).

This administrator also suggested that some case managers don't support educational options for welfare recipients because sometimes they don't have any more education than their clients and resent that it is being received for free.

Another administrator recognised,

... colleges have good programmes for higher-level students but CSOs are struggling with what can be provided to those with few skills. Colleges complain that CSOs aren't sending enough people. CSOs say they don't have the higher-level clients colleges provide for. Community Jobs<sup>23</sup> did a pretty good job for those who have never worked, but their funding just keeps getting cut and now the training is too short (Angela<sup>WF</sup>).

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<sup>23</sup> Akin to the Interim Labour Market

Clyde<sup>BM</sup> lamented a recent reduction in funding and ensuing time allotted to academic learning and on-the-job training for students in the Community Jobs programme, all of which amounted to a curtailment from twelve months to four months long. 'I liked the transitional jobs approach' because it 'gave them the chance to change their behaviour'. This matter of changing behaviour has been raised before and amounts to what Mead (1997) stated in Chapter 3 as expressing a desire by the public that welfare recipients be seen to be behaving more like the generalised and moral 'us' (p13) and less like the generalised and undeserving 'them'. Never stated in this always implicit message is that the way the moral 'us' behaves is superior to the way the undeserving 'them' behave. In many ways it is not dissimilar to the argument made about why Africans (or other) have so many children when they cannot afford to raise them.

In a conversation about the community college welfare-to-work programmes, even an officially federally recognised programme has credibility problems,

Colleges have no accountability and refuse to send data. And no, Shoreline [Community College] *isn't* doing a good job. I know this because I tallied who had been sent to education and training and then individually tracked clients by Social Security Number.... If you really look for the numbers they're not there! No one was looking at exit numbers, only entry numbers (Alice<sup>WF</sup>).

This administrator was clearly frustrated and critical of 'whether or not schools are providing what they're supposed to be providing. I raised the topic of accountability at a meeting recently and was told that it is not currently planned....'

Likewise Clyde<sup>BM</sup> thought that

Sending people to short term training is a big waste of time. It's busy work. They go, complete their training and come right back here. Twenty-two weeks is not adequate. Everyone says, 'Oh, the programme is very successful' but one thing they're not talking, one thing that's dropped off the conversation, and that is retention. We never hear about retention any more.

One case manager thought there were indeed ramifications for poor quality education and training.

I think so, but not in the way that you probably mean. Over time, we can see if students attending classes are getting jobs. And if they're not, then we



don't refer them there. The problem is, though, in my opinion, most of them, not all, but most of them, don't want their GEDs anyway. They just don't want to work (Catherine<sup>WF</sup> 2004).

An entirely different perspective was taken by another case manager, Chelsea<sup>WF</sup>. 'Students can be short sighted. They want a GED certificate, but aren't critical of the delivery' (2004 Recorded interview, 1 July). Yet, this may be an unfair expectation since many students have had years of negative experiences with education, or little experience at all, and are hardly likely to be in a position to critique delivery in any constructive way. A case in point,

What accountability do colleges have? They don't have any. And clients sometimes say training is 'just crap'. Others say they don't know who the teacher is; there are no classes; they turned up and nothing happened.<sup>24</sup> The feeling [by us] is that colleges feel sort of accountable because [we] are the referral agency (Carla<sup>WF</sup> 2004).

Likewise, Clyde<sup>BM</sup> said, 'I hate to be pessimistic but I really don't see a lot of good coming out of it [training]'. Yet, elsewhere, another black case manager, Claire<sup>BF</sup>, believes, '...education provision is probably cheaper in the long-term because it gives people choices'. Furthermore, she sees the requirement of women in welfare-to-work programmes as being ultimately positive since, 'staying at home and not having any money is isolating'. While she says this process 'is good for some. It doesn't work for everyone; it's the case manager's job to motivate clients, but quite a few, about 25 percent, don't want their kids in childcare'. 'But whatever happens', she said, 'don't stop the money. It hurts the kids'. Conversely, Chelsea<sup>WF</sup>, her office mate, said 'The free education they get pisses me off because I didn't get it for free.... No, stop the money. There is just no end to this. Many of them don't want to work'. Changing disposition quickly, this last caseworker says that for clients their social service contacts 'become like family. We are the one consistent

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<sup>24</sup> Whilst it would be easy to dismiss the negative comments of potentially disgruntled students mandated against their collective wills to attend educational classes, this particular benefits office sent students to the college where the author was once employed. It is true that during mid-term spring 2003, their computer instructor was overextended with other classes and not infrequently left her unsupervised welfare clients instructional directions on the board. It was the last class of the day and most would leave early. Some of these students could barely read and were inappropriate on a number of levels for this class. Furthermore, this same welfare-to-work programme re-organised its medical office training class during the same mid-term but students still had to physically be at the college, or face sanction, despite there not being an instructor or classes in session.

factor in their lives'. Evidence of an ability for interviewees to switch between sympathy and hostility towards their clients proved somewhat commonplace and provides some credence to support the assertions of Meyers. Harper, Klawitter, Lindhorst (2006:25) and Meyers, Glaser and Mac Donald 1998:10) in Chapter 3 who found that case managers provided inconsistent service to their clients.

Based on the conversations, responses to several of the questions about educational outcomes' data collection in the aide de memoire could have been predicted with reasonable ease. Already we learned from Alice<sup>WF</sup> and Anne<sup>WF</sup> that data are not collected on welfare clients who return to education and that there are few, if any, effects on education providers who do not provide effective services. For students who fail to complete their courses, there are also little in the way of ramifications. Failure to complete the required hours of education and training per week is cause for sanction unless an excuse is accepted by her caseworker as reasonable cause. Furthermore, the use of sanctions as a behaviour modifier 'doesn't mean a whole lot' (Clyde<sup>BM</sup> Recorded interview, 30 June) and '... has become a pain. It's too time intensive. One case manager here wants to put more people into sanction, but it's too much work to do. Clients belong in sanction but aren't there'. Later she said, 'A lot are already in sanction but clients do pretty much whatever they want to do. I mean ... I work, that's just the way I was raised... There's a different mentality here. Some see welfare as an entitlement' (Carla<sup>WF</sup> 2004). While this case manager was not explicitly moralizing, the conversation was clearly reminiscent of the writing of Wilson (1997), Chapter 3, who drew our attention to a body of language in use by political actors who respond with paternalism as a result of their inability to separate sexuality from morality and fail to connect sufficiently well humanity and charity and poverty (p333).

One administrator, Alice<sup>WF</sup> was highly critical and clearly frustrated by a lack of research and general disinterest in the future planning to evaluate colleges' instructional effectiveness, 'It isn't [collected] and this is a real problem...'. In fact, some information is collected. Although the effectiveness of specific programmes and length of training is not addressed, overall figures of TANF clients moving into work via previous enrollment in education are available, but duration of employment is not collected. Furthermore, all of the education and training programmes, short,

medium, and long-term training are tallied together; therefore, it is difficult to determine definitively which ones are the most likely to create future workers. With that in mind, however, it may be reasonable to assume that the longer-term programmes with higher entry skills requirements may turn out individuals who are more employable than those who have graduated from exceptionally brief training, for those people approved for brief training are not thought to be particularly employable by case managers. A WorkFirst manager, the case managers' supervisor, offered that the situation 'is awful. Data accuracy is all over because of how the statistics are gathered (Dana<sup>WF</sup> 2004 Recorded interview, 28 December). Her colleague at another CSO added 'The best you can do is get a picture' (Danielle<sup>WF</sup> 2004, Recorded interview, 30 June).

### **(1.5) Conclusion**

As we have seen, an individual's relationship with her case manager, in addition to funds available, and knowledge of existing services governs what kind of training and education, in addition to other support services, she will be approved for. None of the various training programmes are accessible without the explicit and officially documented approval of the case manager. Further, while the extent to which an individual can be sanctioned for failure to comply with her employment plan is fixed according to TANF law, there exists significant room for manoeuvre in decoding the meaning or intention of the law, deciding whether or not to apply the sanctions, whether or not to provide access, in addition to type and duration of access to education and training services or, indeed, mental health and learning disability assessment. Access to assessment of learning disabilities is scant. This is despite a law requiring that those with disabilities receive accommodation. But accommodation comes by way of diagnosis, and diagnosis is often unavailable because there is limited and only periodical funding to pay for it. Availability of what are commonly understood to be qualified social workers is equally negligible if it exists at all. Currently in Washington, case managers are advised to provide access to basic skills training and education to welfare recipients who are determined to have the greatest difficulty transitioning into employment as soon as

possible. To be eligible, a woman must have been on TANF for two and a half or more years, within one year of eligibility expiration, or have exhausted her lifetime receipt of TANF. Or she may simply be considered to have limited employability predictive of long-term welfare dependency. This vagueness and scope of the eligibility fits in well with Lipsky's (1980) definition of street level bureaucrats who manage in their positions with significant room for manoeuvre.

McCrate and Smith (1998) referred to welfare agencies' policies as 'fostering a climate of suspicion to low-income women' (p77), while DeParle felt from his informal case study that case managers were 'rigidly clerical and chronically discontent' (p50). Of her own experiences in the position of counselor and student advocate at a Seattle-area technical college, Nguyen (2004, recorded interview, 13 April) suggests case managers permit irregular access to services and exhibit a lack of knowledge of TANF law. While it was not able to be determined absolutely if case managers were discontented, there existed more than mere hints of such in our conversations. Case managers clearly enjoyed their opportunities to vent and Carla, Chelsea and Claire stated as much. Additionally, many felt overworked, frustrated and sometimes resentful. Still, discontent need not necessarily sow the seeds of poor performance. The same could be said for fostering a climate of suspicion. We learned that several case managers seemed to believe that some women simply do not wish to work, although they had not learned this empirically but from hunches, possibly educated hunches, based on their experiences. Regarding irregular access to services, this much is evident, but it is evident for all of the reasons stated at the beginning of this paragraph including, possibly, a few others that are difficult to determine such as client/case manager rapport.

Further, Lipsky had forewarned us that due to chronically inadequate resources relative to the task at hand, policy implementers, i.e., case managers and social workers, are forced to ration services. This, too, was clearly true of the situations for the gatekeepers interviewed. With this in mind, discriminating between clients becomes an inseparable part of their jobs and so some clients are served at the expense and exclusion of others. Ultimately, this may make it possible for them to remain blind to the demands of clients, because clients have limited recourse if they

are unsatisfied (Lipsky 1980:27-28), and, given the realities of politics, any successful reform will take place 'agency by agency and issue by issue' (p 211). Again, it is noticeable that administrators have some latitude in determining agency policy, and case managers have further latitude to determine how they will approach their clients, all of which ensures unequal distribution of services not only amongst agencies, but also within agencies. Some clients may be fortunate enough to have the an attentive case manager such as we saw earlier in this chapter, who had a small caseload and time to spare while the frustrated, ambivalent, conflicted and occasionally angry case managers may prove of less help.

Krueger (2002) suggested that this process of client management is complex and that 'Monitoring performance is imperfect. If an employee performs poorly because he or she feels poorly compensated, others may suffer' (p7). Or they may not, but certainly what appears true is that it is difficult to monitor performance, particularly when the performance guidelines are inconsistent and when clients perform poorly in terms of leaving welfare for employment. Such is the environment in welfare recipients and their case managers must operate to get as much as possible from as little time, skills and resources as are necessary or available.

The most palpable discovery from the interviews conducted was the enduring frustration and variability in the attitudes benefits agencies' employees have toward their clients. They are frustrated that a large percent of their clients seem to be lost causes. They are frustrated that welfare-to-work programmes seem to be ineffective. Finally, they are frustrated that after all their efforts, little happens to their neediest clients. As Clyde<sup>BM</sup> had stated earlier in this chapter,

On the one hand, I feel kind of schizophrenic about this. They need to go out and get jobs, but it's one thing to send people to work without any tools but getting those tools in not cheap. The education system is inadequate.

As an onlooker, it was clear that all but one saw their responsibility to help women find work as somewhat exasperating and burdensome. Case managers voiced deriving some pleasure from being able to vent, and Clyde<sup>BM</sup> made it clear as we parted that he has a limited amount of patience for enduring work at social services.

All of this may be understandable. It was repeatedly estimated that some forty percent of clients, often about fifty to sixty people on any one case manager's caseload, do not find employment. To obviate 'burn out' case managers are regularly reassigned to manage the cases of different welfare recipients. This generally occurs every six to twelve months and is thought beneficial to all involved. Yet, it may be that Charlie<sup>WF</sup> had such a small caseload because she was knowledgeable about community resources to which she could refer clients. This then left her more time to focus on what few clients she did have and which limited her need to routinize her approach to addressing clients' needs as Pavetti et al (2004 and Meyers et al. (1998) found. Certainly the effort she expended on attending to the specific needs of her clients *seemed* to be more concerted and concentrated than of her colleagues elsewhere, but this may be simply because I had met two of them and had specific questions for her regarding her challenges with them. The efforts expended by the likes of Charlie<sup>WF</sup> were of some importance, suggested The Director<sup>WM</sup>, who had concerns that an over-emphasis on caseload reduction had created the unintended consequences of eliminating people from access to assistance who remain vulnerable and still in great need of support. 'What is needed', he said, 'is leaving welfare as an outcome, not as a goal'. He then criticized an aggressive culture at agencies that forced exceptionally needy clients from the TANF rolls and where case managers rang a bell to announce the dropping of a client from his or her caseload.

With this in mind, it appears that the empirical evidence concurs with published research indicating uneven dissemination of services. But, in condensing the evidence presented to-date, it could be said that case managers are not wantonly unevenhanded, that their efforts to ensure employment are frustrated for a multitude of reasons, and that their approaches to tackling clients' problems both are and are not in their hands. Regardless, despite intentions, there may be unintended and negative consequences to unequal dissemination of services.

Still, we learned that because policy requires that clients are involved in some form of work activity, they are sent to training that is acknowledged as questionably effective at best. Since welfare recipients must do something, and since the

questionable training is all there is for those with low basic skills and limited or no work experience, then the choice of case managers is really a matter of no choice, or they take the path of least resistance. Necessarily, all this planning and movement of individual clients from one required pursuit to another generates activity and large amounts of electronic data, signed copies of which training institutions require for enrolment. This, too, is time intensive and clearly bureaucratically burdensome.

The awareness of limited welfare-to-work training effectiveness was most evident amongst administrators, The Director<sup>WM</sup>, and Carla<sup>WF</sup> and Clyde<sup>BM</sup>. Yet, it is virtually impossible for agency employees to police the relative usefulness or content of education and training. As we learned, training providers do not track students' placement in work, although their funding institution does (i.e., the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges: SBCTC). This lack of data is a point of some contention. At this juncture, it may be reasonable for social service agencies administrators to submit to the State Board requests for Public Disclosure. Of course, this may add to the bureaucratic work requirements of managers unless the documents could be furnished with relative ease. Work placement and duration of employment is the only reasonable way to estimate programme effectiveness. Still, even when colleges make attempts to track former programme participants, the resulting data is not considered reliable at the Washington State TANF data office (DSHS Research 2004 e-mail correspondence 24 June). In this, however, there is a caveat that raises another purely academic concern regarding poor services, one about which little can be done, but makes for an interesting point.

Could poor treatment, or the lack of ability to effectively address the needs of the least employable women on public assistance cause them no longer to tolerate inadequate services and, as a result, deny themselves any support by leaving the welfare rolls voluntarily? In Chapter 7, a single mother is interviewed. Sarah (2004) perceived that the bureaucracy, hassle, and unkindness of case managers were what created the impetus for her to leave welfare. Having said that, she took eighteen years to do so and not until she had reached a period when her three children were old enough to afford some flexibility in her work life (Unrecorded interview, 8 December). Certainly low-skilled students in welfare-to-work classes

say they feel their time is poorly spent, and we may remember that one case manager said clients sometimes say training is 'just crap' (this chapter). When they fail to return to classes, generally they have become either one of the many who make up the large numbers of programme drop-outs or have taken any job, however temporary and incompatible with their lives, simply because they can no longer bear to remain in a class. That they take any job, however short term, is a positive outcome for programmes, but both examples require payment for services rendered.

Further, we learned from administrator Anne<sup>WF</sup> that case managers have little training and education of their own, and it may be because of this that the limited compensation that was referred to is the result<sup>25</sup>. What they do have, however, is excellent job security within social services. Therefore, in some sense it is a good job. Also, the State of Washington is likely in no position to demand high skills and education of employees in return for meagre salaries and little job satisfaction. Of some interest would be the findings of additional study into the relationship between the Case Management Best Practices training Charlie<sup>WF</sup> took and case management outcomes. With better-trained, motivated and skilled managers, in contrast to those who are disinclined, frustrated and conflicted, significantly smaller caseloads may result, in addition to positive outcomes for clients. Smaller caseloads mean more income (by way of performance bonuses) for agencies, but done the right way, it may not be at the expense of those in need. According to The Director<sup>WM</sup>, this was precisely the result several years ago when the 'any job is a good job' philosophy was emphasized somewhat more than it is today. In turn, should the State be willing to provide greater remuneration for skilled case managers, it is possible that it would gain the attention of those, like Charlie<sup>WF</sup>, who are willing to spend time enhancing their skills on evenings and weekends. Whilst it is understood that fiscal conservatism is enforced in agencies, we also learn that learning disability testing, mental and physical health assessment and psychiatric counseling are available only sporadically. Without adequate and consistent acknowledgement of the effect these can have, administrators will not find their case managers' work rewarded with

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<sup>25</sup> In fact, it's not clear that they are particularly poorly compensated. In 2005, the pre-tax monthly income of Clyde and Catherine, Patricia was \$3818. Carla made \$3460 and Charlie \$3291. At the highest end of the income scale, is the Director's at \$5260. While none of the front line workers would have much, if any, disposable income left for incidental purchases, the minimum income here still equates to greater than \$20 per hour (<http://www.ofm.wa.gov/persdetail/2005.pdf>).



reduced numbers of clients who have, in fact, moved on to better lives as opposed to those who simply leave the welfare rolls.

One critic of the case for enhanced skills and qualifications for case managers stated, 'I'm not sure that better qualified and paid staff is the answer if there continues to be insufficient jobs or too many trash jobs for clients to move into' (Roberts 2005, e-mail communication, 11 January). The response to this is two-fold. As was indicated earlier in the chapter, a skilled case manager does not necessarily help create employment in the short term. Whilst work is certainly the goal, there may be more pressing considerations to address in the short term if any employment is to occur in the long term. Indeed, for those welfare recipients with problems, and there seem to be many, enduring work is unlikely to result from the 'any job now' philosophy. Additionally, while the matter of insufficient and trash jobs is reasonable to approach here, recessions come and go, and whilst welfare-to-work programmes must respond to the market, they and their clients can have little effect up on it. The overarching purpose of welfare-to-work programmes is to give women on public assistance the opportunity to take up education and training that will make them stronger candidates for jobs than the next person. There will, however, likely always be some next person to bear the burden of the vagaries of the employment market. With that said, Sarah (2006 Unrecorded interview, 28 January), from the final empirical chapter, Chapter Seven, stated that she preferred to work for her small wage than be under the authority and constant scrutiny of case managers as she says she was for 18 years. This makes complete sense since at the Washington State minimum wage a person need work only 36 hours *per month* to meet the amount of a TANF payment for a family of two. In states where the federal minimum wage applies, the monthly hours required would reach just 52. Sarah, however, had great flexibility in her position and was able to self-select the hours and days she worked so long as they did not exceed 20 hours per week. Such flexibility remains unusual for most entry-level jobs and still may well be unsuitable for single parents with young children. That is, the labour market cannot simply be ignored in any discussion about very low-skilled welfare recipients and the press for their employment.

Finally, single women on welfare are overwhelmingly from poor homes and continue to remain poor. Their parents are unlikely to have attended higher education, indeed, many did not complete high school, and growing up there is often limited focus on educational attainment. It is no coincidence that attitudes to education within the family are communicable to family members. It is also no coincidence that children who attend private schools tend to have more opportunities and respond to them accordingly. But the children of poor families rarely attend these schools. Instead, they receive sub-standard schooling in crowded and often disrupted classrooms filled with children very similar to them. Overhauling the system of primary and secondary schooling, which would be excellent, is not central to this thesis, however. For many, by the time they have reached the welfare office they are pregnant and have little to show for their decade in the state schools. For this reason, the skills of case managers and social workers may matter greatly. It is not difficult to imagine a team of highly skilled case managers who have the ability to ask the right questions of their clients, detect problems as they arise and be part of a network of interrelated, readily available quality assistance.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Interviews with Welfare-to-Work Programme Employees**

#### **Introduction**

At this juncture, based on my interviews with case managers and administrators, there is little doubt that many of those individuals involved in helping social service agencies meet their goal of helping welfare recipients to prepare for and ultimately take-up work take their task seriously. That said, prior to recent policy changes that tightened work requirements, several felt undermined by lack of ability to follow-through on threats to discontinue benefits, and were cynical and frustrated with the few positive outcomes for what was perceived to be a compromised population amounting to some 40 percent of their caseloads. They wanted the women to seek and find work but felt that some don't want to work and that colleges tried to circumvent policy-based work requirements by attempting to retain students in education for longer periods of time than permitted. Furthermore, few had faith that the colleges could adequately prepare the lowest-skilled women, suspected that stated programme outcomes were poorer than presented and that whatever approach to work taken at the colleges had proven ineffective for their least-able clients.

With this knowledge, the next task was to determine if, indeed, colleges were undermining the case managers' work plans, if there were consequences to this, and if it was likely that the students were in positions, emotionally, intellectually and circumstantially, where they could increase their employability through training and education at these colleges. This chapter, then, details in-person and telephone interviews in addition to email communication over time with the staff in colleges which provide education to the welfare population residing in the areas around the welfare offices approached in the previous chapter in addition to several peripheral others who advocate on behalf of socially excluded welfare recipients. In an effort to compare programmes, programme managers from agencies recognised as providing exceptional services to the lowest-skilled were also interviewed.

The chapter is arranged into four main areas of enquiry that emerged over the course of interviews with welfare-to-work programme employees (for a list of questions used as guidelines, see Appendix B). The first area of enquiry attempts to clarify how education providers identify the “hard-to-serve” population and their potential barriers to employment and focused on the difficulties encountered in programmes attempting to increase the employability of the ‘hard-to-serve’ population. The second area of enquiry focused on the nature of educational provisions at colleges to determine how they address the needs of the ‘hard-to-serve’. Interview question 2, whilst appearing quantitative in nature, was actually intended to provide qualitative information about programme comprehensiveness, since research appears to indicate that the most effective programmes are often comparatively large and have long-term involvement with employers and social service agency support. Of course it may be that large programmes are large because they have grown and developed coherence and community connections over time, whereas the smaller programmes are newer and have yet to attain much size or credibility. The purpose of the third area of enquiry is to determine the nature of communications between programme directors and case managers and if this has any broader ramifications for clients or implications otherwise. As we saw in Chapter 5, agency employees seemed frustrated, possibly even resentful, of what they saw as college programme directors’ attempts to circumvent the work plan for ‘hard-to-serve’ clients by attempting to get them to remain attending education and training. These questions were drawn up in a way so as to approach what may be a sensitive topic in an apparently innocuous way. Finally, the purpose of the fourth and last area of enquiry is to assess programme outcomes and therefore determine effectiveness in meeting employment goals.

#### **(1.0) Identifying the “hard-to-serve” population and their potential barriers to employment?**

In the course of conversations with programme directors, one manager and other both central and peripheral figures in the field of welfare-to-work education and training on college campuses, it became clear that they thought similarly. There

existed a sincere belief that increasing the chances of employment could best be attained through a strong emphasis on education and training with close ties maintained between programme directors, welfare recipients, their case managers and local profit and non-profit employers. On this matter, employees of benefits agencies and education providers seemed to concur. There was, however, widespread dismay amongst programme employees that much of the permission given by case managers for basic skills instruction and training was exceptionally short-term and unlikely to create change for the population. Also there was acknowledgement that onerous barriers to work existed in the form of emotional and circumstantial problems that compromised tangible skill enhancement in the classroom setting and this appeared to ensure they were difficult to assist in terms of increasing employability.

In attempting to clarify the meaning of the term “hard-to-serve”, interviewees offered no clear agreement on a definition, although the expression is very widely used, and it clearly meant different things to different people. ‘At the State Board, we argue that lack of education is a big factor impacting people ... but taught in tandem and in context with training, it is shown to efficacious ... However, technically, I’d say ‘hard-to-serve’ means no work history’ (State Board 2004, recorded telephone interview, 19 April). Another interviewee saw ‘hard-to-serve’ as referring to, ‘those who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. The working urban poor. That’s how I personally see it’ (Kane 2004). In another case, ‘hard-to-serve’ was ‘obvious[ly] it’s a single woman ... usually that means there are childcare, transportation, domestic violence, drug and alcohol issues, low education, very low work experience and other things that [involve generational use of welfare] (Community Jobs 2004 Recorded telephone interview, 19 April). Whilst these responses embodied the spirit of all the reactions to the meaning of the term, it was clear that the challenge to define ‘hard-to-serve’ was personally tempting because, in fact, there exists no definition of ‘hard-to-serve’ at social services. What there exists is an understanding that certain people are less employable, or more resistant to employment, than others. Still, there was exceptionally broad agreement that the women involved in training have multiple personal life challenges and have been seen to have alcohol, drug and mental health issues, along with felony convictions,

personal habits incompatible with work along with a general lack of coping skills. 'They have a hard time with alternative A, alternative B ... one more problem and it just stacks on top of what's already there' (Placement Specialist 2004, recorded interview, 16 April). A family therapist referred to this as 'like peeling an onion - one problem dealt with just exposes another layer of issues below' (Gordon 2005: Unrecorded interview, with family therapist 14 August). The perceptions of Gordon compare well with the results of outcomes by multiple investigations (Barriers to Economic Security 2001; Haskins, Sawhill et al. 2001; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002). Similarly, Haskins, Sawhill and Weaver (2001) , Holzer and Stoll (2001) and Danziger and Seefeldt (2002) all found that welfare recipients frequently had exceptionally low skills and encountered difficulties in attaining or maintaining employment.

Furthermore, all but two of the central figures involved in welfare-to-work programmes concurred that the population of welfare recipients in education and training programmes is becoming harder than ever to assist into employment, and those who are fortunate enough to find work tend to cycle back into programmes within a relatively short time. This, too, corresponds with previous research (Jencks and Swingle 2000; Peck 2001; Martinson and Strawn 2002; Kaufman 2003). 'Usually the reason has something to do with their personal lives: sick kid, no supportive network, alcohol, drugs, criminal backgrounds ... We're seeing more and more folks with criminal backgrounds and that makes them very hard to get employed' (Steps-to-Success 2004, recorded telephone interview, 19 April). The prevailing thought is that programmes are 'seeing more people with bigger problems than ever. With the big caseload reductions, those who can work *are* working. Most of those who leave for work and then return or who don't leave at all are those who are lacking in attendance and punctuality and other soft skills' (CalWorks 2004, recorded telephone interview, 14 April). Danielle (2004, recorded interview, 30 June), a manager of a WorkFirst programme suggested that 'those who are least employable are those most likely to take part in Community Jobs (CJ) where they can spend their time building the skills employers want'. Unfortunately, the CJ programmes are in a position to take those most likely to succeed so their programmes have better outcomes (which generally translates to adequate funding),

and those most likely to succeed are not the population who are the least employable (Carla). At a CJ programme, the director agreed that her programme had better outcomes than many college-based programmes, but that the reason was because a training setting that involved too much classroom time was unlikely to work for individuals who had experienced very little success in a traditional school setting (Community Jobs). This concurs with the findings of Grubb (1996) in chapter 3. Another director stated, 'Before [welfare reform] they were fairly employable and we were [able to select the most likely to succeed for our programmes]. But at this juncture we're dealing with those individuals that [benefits agencies] wouldn't send before because no way they're going to make it. Truth is, those who can't get and keep a job, can't stay in school either' (Steps-to-Success 2004). Lastly, this matter of ability to maintain employment is of some interest. In theory, for colleges and case managers to receive credit for a 'successful' placement of a welfare recipient in a job, the standard is set fairly low: job placement within ninety days of leaving the programme and holding onto that job for thirty day or more (Placement Specialist 2004 Recorded interview, 16 April). In practice, there is very little tracking of employment that occurs.

Two individuals disagreed with the notion of an increasingly needy TANF population but they had different perspectives on the causes from one another. And yet, the statement of one ultimately amounted to an agreement with those stated above. He suggested, 'I would have said that was true before the economic downturn, but nowadays even people with good skills are still unemployed' (Goodwill 2004, recorded telephone interview, 14 April). This matter of the relative vigour or sluggish nature of the labour market impacting the hiring of welfare recipients concurs with the findings of Holzer (2001) as stated in Chapter 3. The individual at Goodwill Industries (above) also referred to a study of welfare recipients commissioned by the State that found programme participants had an average of eight barriers to work and which did not include childcare and transportation problems. 'Probably the biggest problem is felony convictions'. Another suggested, 'The number one criterion for being 'hard-to-serve' is lack of work history. The University of Washington says there is no causal relationship with anything else' (State Board). However, lack of a work history may be derived

from the various barriers to employment mentioned above. That is, the causation may be linear. Individuals with criminal backgrounds, mental health problems and few skills or education are less likely to have a work history because these problems compromise their employment prospects. While the reverse may be true and lack of work increases the likelihood of poverty, depressed physical and mental health and crime, the fact remains that the women in this study are not attractive job candidates and increasing their attractiveness to employers has proven onerous for a multitude of reasons (for more on this, see Walker and Wiseman, 2003; Holzer, 2001 in Chapter 1 or Carnivale and Desrochers, 2000; Peck, 2001 in Chapter 3).

Still, there exists the perception that there are some individuals for whom the biggest barrier to employment is that they don't want to work (Charlie 2004 Unrecorded conversation with case manager, 28 December; Danielle 2004 Recorded interview, 30 June; Placement Specialist 2004 Recorded interview, 16 April). 'They're third generation and fourth generation welfare recipients ... but we come right out and ask them "wouldn't you like to have something better for your kids?" and some of them turn around... We're in the salvage business – about one in ten we can salvage ... (Placement Specialist). This matter of being generational welfare recipients addresses the cultural transferral of behaviour and ideals initially raised in Chapter 3 (Wasonga and Christman 2003; Berube and Tiffany 2004; Dye 2005; Patterson 2006) but which may be more ambitious and complex a task than simply teaching academic and work-place skills in the classroom.

### **(1.1) Assessing the needs of the "hard-to-serve"**

Requirements for admission into programmes vary greatly but are, mostly, based on the results of academic pre-tests, students' articulated self-interests matched with specific training and the amount of time permitted for training by case managers. Further, it is fair to say that individual welfare-to-work programmes are really many programmes, which exist under the auspices of a larger, sometimes much larger, body. One California programme, for example, has 124 distinct training courses available (CalWorks 2004). None of the Seattle-area programmes have more than



eight different education and training opportunities and the majority has two to three (Education Services Division 2004a-online). Those less likely to place students in employment have fewer course choices and those choices have limited educational requirements, childcare provider and medical office worker training, for example (Employment Security Department 2004-online). Since employers state that they are increasingly likely to need more skills and place greater demands on employees (Holzer 1999), to some extent the outcomes seem sensible. Still, in order to fill classrooms, one college did not limit classes that required greater academic ability to commensurately educated learners, and this hindered the ability of students to successfully graduate. This programme funded students on a per capita basis, not only through block grants (block grants paid for salaries and supplies), and was reimbursed by social services according to how many of their clients were enrolled. Thus, in some way it behoved them to place as many students as possible in classes regardless of educational attainment (CalWorks 2005 Recorded interview, 12 May; Placement Specialist 2005).

Elsewhere, there existed the understanding that sending employers unqualified job candidates was counter-productive. 'What we have here is linkages. We have higher placement rates because we have linkages to employers' (Placement Specialist). Those close ties to employers seem critical to success. 'If we don't send [the employers] what they want, pretty soon they won't want to do business with us. We'd be wasting their time and employers just won't have that. They're in this to make money (ibid). A long-standing Portland, Oregon, programme has a large community of private and non-profit employers who provide on-the-job-training to students, but the essence of this is obvious: students with more to offer are more likely to be presented with employment opportunities (Steps-to-Success 2004). As a result, it is unsurprising that those programmes that place greater academic requirements on students also have higher placement rates of those students in jobs than programmes which admit the very low skilled. This concurs with the statement of Angela, an administrator interviewed for Chapter 5, who understood that typical welfare-to-work programmes cater to the more skilled because they are the individuals most likely to attain employment. What is increasingly clear in this picture is that the short-term training of twenty-two weeks

can and does accomplish little because those admitted to short-term training are the individuals with the fewest skills, yet they have the most to learn. The vast majority of employment emerges from programmes that are nine or more months long (CalWorks 2004; Employment Security Department 2004; Steps-to-Success 2004). But the least-skilled can't gain access to these programmes because they fail to meet the lowest academic threshold requirements to enter them. Still, even with this level of skill, it may be reasonable that they not be admitted to some of these programmes since the skills required for gaining and maintaining employment aren't necessarily so different than those necessary for adherence to academic studies. As 'Steps to Success' said earlier in this chapter, 'those who can't get and keep a job, can't stay in school either' (2004). This matter is an enormous challenge to address. Short-term training accomplishes little for the least skilled, and yet long-term training is no more beneficial because they have academic, circumstantial, and cultural impediments to long-term commitment to such programmes.

## **(1.2) Communications between college programme directors and case managers**

Here we will see a little of the importance of the relationships between agency employees and educational programme directors. The better this relationship, the greater the number of referrals to any welfare-to-work programme regardless of how well the programmes meet their outcomes of creating future employees. And, when programmes are thought to be operating under the covert plan to try to maintain students in programmes rather than getting them into work, case managers feel undermined and are less likely to refer clients.

In an interview with a ranking member of the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, the problem with policy and also, but to a lesser degree, the direct relationship between case managers and education providers, is that policy demands welfare recipients 'go get a job and be like everyone else' but with inadequate preparation to do so (State Board). '[Clients] are supposed to have access to education, but they're lucky if they [get it]. The case manager may not

know or even care to pass on information about educational opportunities ... There's a total information gap' (ibid). This individual argued that 'the mantra at [social services] of "any job's a good job" is untrue and *not* any job's a good job'. More time to train and learn would mean access 'to a better job, not just any job' and that the ability to move up and ultimately find employment with work benefits has long term positive outcomes 'but arguing that was like swimming upstream ... They absolutely sabotaged the notion of education. They didn't care. It wasn't their outcome' (ibid).

There also appear to be concerns of inflexibility, personal and structural, at social services. Indeed, it was the view of one programme director that case managers took personal exception to matters of entitlement to benefits for clients (this was evident from some of the comments made by case managers and an administrator in the previous chapter). 'That attitude is still there. [Also] the morale [of case managers] when their clients didn't get cut-off welfare after the five year limit and after everything [they] said, means nothing. ... this really strained their relationships with clients (Community Jobs). Clients 'are lucky if the so-called caseworker ... even cares to tell the client [what educational options are available] (State Board). Clearly the frustration felt by individuals involved in the education of welfare recipients was reflective of some of the experiences and stated dissatisfactions and frustrations of case managers in the previous empirical chapter.

A seemingly typical example of personal and /or structural inflexibility occurred at CJ, which had referred to it by social services a woman with very low basic skills and no work history. CJ's assessment of her was that she had too many current problems to attempt to engage in 40 hours per week of training and education.

On the one hand we had a mental health professional [here] saying she can't go to work, and on the other hand there's a DSHS mental health worker saying, 'well, she *has* to go to work'. So, we arranged a [meeting] with all parties involved and realised that no-one had actually formally communicated about the matter. This is pretty common. Sometimes we have good relationships with case managers and sometimes we don't (Community Jobs).

The Placement Specialist disagreed with the idea raised in Chapters 4 and 5 and above that case managers were in any way disaffected yet added 'There's definitely some animosity [towards clients] but it has to come with fact that, in their hearts, they are generous case managers and they don't want to sanction someone, they want to fix someone ... they have the best interests of the client at heart'. This individual was of the opinion that some case managers are excellent but that 'the really bad ones get promoted to supervisor so that they no longer have to work directly with clients ... [All I want is for] them to follow the rules [by providing access to educational services]'. So, in the view of this education provider, case managers have what they perceive to be the best interests of their clients at heart, but their frustrated attempts at work placement leave them with feelings of antagonism, a matter that may foster a situation where they do indeed operate in a 'climate of suspicion toward low-income women' (McCrate and Smith 1998:77) or are the objects of management, administration, intervention, policing, discipline and coercion into particular patterns of behaviour (Krieken 1991) as was suggested in Chapter 3. Assuming for the moment that this is true, if the antagonism towards the individual client is felt or acted upon, then this could reasonably be expected to have negative implications for the women who need their care and attention.

### **(1.3) Assessing the programme outcomes**

On the face of it, there appeared to be a correlation between programme size and relative successfulness but what was not clear was whether or not there existed causation: that success caused programmes to continue to exist and therefore have the opportunity to expand. The three programmes recognised as exemplary were all large, serving student populations of anywhere from 900 to 15,000 annually (CalWorks 2004; Family Development 2004, recorded telephone interview, 23 April; Steps-to-Success 2004)<sup>26</sup>. The six programmes not officially recognised as exemplary were far smaller with student populations of some 35 to 394 per year. Yet, large size may ensure programmes are simply more visible than those that cater

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<sup>26</sup> It should be clarified that comparing Family Development to other programmes in this study is somewhat limited because it also serves a rural population in addition to urban and suburban. Yet, it may prove useful insofar as we can begin to develop a picture of essential features for successful programming.

to relatively few. Of all the smaller welfare-to-work programmes in the Seattle/Tacoma area, these six appear to have greater longevity, longer established employer ties, closer knit and relatively agreeable relationships with benefits agency employees, and longer-serving directors and more full-time support staff than those programmes with smaller placement rates into employment<sup>27</sup> (Employment Security Department 2004a-online). Given that benefit agencies are associated with particular colleges (mostly this is a relationship of convenience based on proximity), with some certainty the differences in programme effectiveness can be extrapolated from State-generated data, which indicate job placement rates according to agency. It doesn't, however, take into consideration the challenges that some offices have specific to their welfare population or the fluctuating unemployment rates of various districts and thus makes straightforward evaluation difficult.

At Community Jobs we heard that

a number of these women have been in GED prep[aration] classes for a long time. They've been in and out and in and out...and still have not [made any gains]. Sometimes they have learning disabilities, or maybe they do but they've not been diagnosed. I'd say that is probably the majority of what is happening.

In tandem with exceptionally low skills and leaning difficulties, the women entering this Seattle-area programme now appear to be the very lowest skilled and least employable. 'It would take a lot of time and a lot of discipline, probably one-on-one tutoring, to get them the help they need and that resource is just not there' (Community Jobs). For this reason, the CJ programme's outcomes have diminished and, suggested the director, the employable students exited the programme for work and left behind those who are less able. To complicate matters, a programme such as this demands forty-hours of classroom and on-the-job presence per week, a matter that may be too great an imposition on the most compromised and which case managers seem to recognise (as per data indicated in Chapter 4 and by Steps-to-

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<sup>27</sup> Precise placement rates have proven difficult to calculate. Washington State's DSHS has data available according to region, but the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges should have precise data for individual college welfare-to-work programmes. Unfortunately, the State Board's site requires a password to access this information and several personal requests proved unsuccessful although the data comes under the freedom of information act.

Success above), as being a task unreasonable to demand of their 'hard-to-serve' clients.

In addressing a question about percentages of students who have neither a GED nor a high school diploma, the intention here was to assess a qualitative issue vis-à-vis the relative neediness of the student bodies. Establishing this would help clarify relative difficulty of the task of helping them increase their employability. Yet, seemingly, data on numbers of students who have not completed their secondary education is not kept, anywhere. Other than, 'I really couldn't say, but quite a few' (CalWorks 2004) or 'a lot' (Community Jobs), very little data is available and therefore questions about approximate percentages of students who do not have a GED or high school diploma and how many enter with a grade equivalency of 7.0 or less were only marginally answerable. In Portland, there appears to exist a perception that the percentage of students with very little education is large. Overall, Oregon has managed to reduce its caseload 60 percent in recent years.

Before that [we] were dealing with about 10 percent of [the overall caseload] and they were fairly employable ... but at this point we have those leftover.... Today, if someone comes to us who's even remotely employable, we've got the skills to get them to work ... but the current administration [Bush] does not believe education is the way out of poverty. They've come to believe it will happen with work experience (Steps to Success 2004).

Yet, we have seen that without skills and education, this population of potential workers appears unmistakably unattractive to employers (a matter which concurs with the findings of Holzer and Stoll, 2003 in Chapter 3 in addition to the experiences of two gatekeepers in empirical Chapter 5). Comparatively, this Portland Community College programme is unmistakably innovative. It seems to have struggled with how to serve best the low skilled population and recently 'brought outside work from non-profits into the computer lab' where students do data entry work for some five to 10 hours each week. 'We're trying to be creative about education while also meeting the work requirements'. Yet, one year on from my first conversations with the Portland Steps-to-Success programme director, the situation appeared to be growing increasingly grim and programmes were having more difficulty than ever staying financially afloat. 'Because of the limited time the welfare student has to complete educational programs, low skill levels and low

assessment levels really present a great barrier to overcome' (Steps-to-Success 2005, Recorded telephone interview, 15 April. Similarly, the interviewee from the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges voiced great frustration at the lack of opportunity to address the educational needs of welfare recipients, '[We've] lost the battle with DSHS on the educational approach to work because it's initially expensive while possibly cheaper in the long-term...The principle [at DSHS] is "you're a bum; go and get a job"' (State Board). At this point the interviewee made reference to having argued at the State policy establishment level that it was possible to offset agencies' costs by suggesting that there would be a transferral of funding to unemployment benefits once recipients had worked for a period of time, but DSHS had expressed disinterest in such a matter because their goals focused on employment acquisition in the short-term regardless of any rationale about work preparation for a slightly better job being a superior approach to enforcing the take up of simply any job or a discussion about individuals' differing personal circumstances. 'They've increased the work requirement and decreased access to education ... [The prevailing thought is], "we're not going to treat you any different than we treat everyone else, even though everybody else may have better circumstances and are, arguably, more privileged to start with...". The way [politics] is going, it's going to get more difficult to get education to welfare-to-work clients' (State Board).

This current approach may be short-sighted. A study at the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation went further than just suggesting access to education for low-skilled single parents, '...a comprehensive set of student services – academic guidance and counseling, academic support, personal guidance and career counseling...' all make important contributions to students' success, and particularly for single parents, particularly when these services are readily available in a single location (Purnell, Blank et al. 2004:36). The whole gamut approach to education and training in addition to other support services for the welfare population seems to be a complicated task requiring the skilful interconnection of and cooperation with several departments in an effort to provide effective 'wrap-around' services.

This de-emphasis on education in favour of work was considered a policy error by everyone interviewed, 'Lack of a GED is a huge problem for accessing jobs. Certainly it is for any kind of occupation beyond fast food'. Indeed, in this Seattle programme, students, 'can't even go on to externships without a GED or diploma. I think it's almost impossible to have a living wage job without [these], but, of course, they need the skill set too' (Kane 2004). The externships, external placement of students in off-site, subsidised work, was an element of the training considered as one of the stronger components of the programme because of a belief in the practicality and efficacy of on-the-job training.

Whilst there exists great variety in the training opportunities available in some programmes, all of which cater in one way or another to those in need of elementary academic, English skills and job skills, as we have learned, the prospects for those who undergo short-term training generally is limited. Says Sean Kane of Seattle Vocational Institute (SVI), 'I have very little confidence in training that's less than twenty-two weeks. Sometimes I have a lack of confidence in those which are longer than twenty-two weeks, too ... With [short-term] training it's hard to go from unemployable to employable'. Indeed, at SVI, which has comparative longevity and comparatively effective programmes, most of their courses last twenty-two to forty-four weeks and require a reading level of grade 8.5 or higher. Other courses have far greater educational demands and last longer still. At the same time, some 60 percent of students have no GED, and of them 70 percent have reading levels of less than seventh grade (Kane 2004). For this significantly sized population, they require access to long-term educational enhancement opportunities prior to becoming eligible for further training, but, evidently, they do not receive it for most fail to gain case manager consent to attend.

Furthermore, those who speak marginal English have compounded problems for they tend to receive limited useful attention, the care of which is often outsourced to unaffiliated refugee and immigrant agencies. To exacerbate their already marked labour market exclusion, the California programme has a large population of Spanish-speaking students, and yet training is only available to those who already speak English 'pretty well' (CalWorks 2004). Likewise, in Washington '... not a lot happens with [the limited English speakers], they do Job Search, but, frankly, not a



lot happens' (Anne 2004). By all accounts, the situation appears similar elsewhere (Family Development 2004; Steps to Success 2004; Placement Specialist 2004).

In terms of assistance with job search and placement, the picture everywhere appears much the same. 'Finding jobs is part of the CalWorks programme, and they get interview practice, résumé writing ...' (CalWorks 2004). All of these programmes' directors stated that having a coherent résumé (or curriculum vitae) was important to employers and hence the focus on the creation of one, but it is difficult to conceive of how individuals with few skills and work experience can complete a meaningful résumé of interest to employers. Additionally, prior to any college-based training, Washington State requires welfare clients attend a twelve-week, forty hours per week, Job Search course. This is widely perceived to be an exercise in uselessness with much derision from college programme directors one of whom suggested that 'The Job Readiness classes ... are taught by people who are not teachers and they're totally unprepared for the limited skills of some of the people in front of them (Placement Specialist). The relative utility of this training is a topic of further discussion from the perspective of the welfare recipients in the next chapter.

What vocational training classes or programmes are available to students is really a question burdened with politics. The answer is that it depends. It depends on the college and the training it has available. It depends on where the client lives and is how far she is willing or able to travel. It depends on the decision of the case manager and his or her rapport with the client. It depends on the relationship between college employees and case managers, regardless of past programme effectiveness. Finally, it depends on the culture of the agency, and as administrators come and go so, too, do functioning philosophies. 'Burien CSO used to be one of our closest partners, but they've got a new administrator now and have gone to the philosophy of pressuring their clients into work. So, we're seeing less referrals' (Kane 2004).

Jean Coleman (2004, recorded interview, 23 January), Director of Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition, a welfare advocacy group, says

DSHS doesn't know what to do with this population; the system doesn't know what to do. They've forgotten, or ignored, everything they had learned prior to 1996. But what you have here is a really unequal power relationship. It's all about power and control. So part of our job is to empower the mother with information. Part of [the] job is to work with the mothers so they know what policy states and this is how we interpret it. We want these women to have access to education, but case managers use a club to tell them what they can and cannot have and for how long. This legislation ignores the fact that even two parent families struggle to balance work and family.

If Ms Coleman is correct, and data found in Chapter 4 suggests she may be (Hancock 2004; Meyers et al. 2006) and if welfare-to-work programme managers are correct, then there is little to feel optimistic about with regards to the future for hardest-to-serve welfare recipients. We know there is confusion about how best to cope with this needy population, yet welfare mothers have been the objects of scrutiny for years. Further, many programmes have shown somewhat promising results for up to sixty percent of their student bodies, but what remains is the omnipresent number of forty percent, the same number benefits agency employees say are all-but unemployable. Also, we know that programmes with positive employment outcomes are unlikely to admit the lowest-skilled. For them, this makes complete sense; the better skilled students will make the most progress in the limited time allotted to them. And, since grants are the bread and butter of education and training programmes, outcomes, should they ever find themselves examined, are what matter the most to credible programmes. Lastly, we know this in-need population needs time to make change and receive education. Yet policy dictates there is no time; the only time that exists, is allocated to the pursuit of employment that they seem unlikely to acquire

From mid-2005, the anticipation of further reductions for access to education had become a reality, 'We are looking into it for the next fiscal year but with the Federal reauthorisation of TANF and with DSHS overspent by 15 million, we are not sure of the future of WorkFirst right now' (Project Coordinator 2005, e-mail communication, 28 March). Such reservations were prescient, for the US House of Representatives, in an attempt to offset the costs of the war in Iraq and decrease the deficit, which had reached \$412 billion in 2003 (Congressional Budget Office 2005:xiv). And, with the US having become the world's biggest debtor (Bureau of the Public Debt 2006), passed a bill in late 2005 to cut \$51 billion over five years

from programs such as Medicaid, food stamps and child-support. A further governmental proposal ended the Community Services Block Grant, a \$637 million, federal anti-poverty programme serving fifteen million people (National Association for State and Community Service Programs, 2004:1).

Ultimately where this will leave welfare-to-work programmes is unclear, and programmes continue to operate but are in a state of flux. One Seattle-area college initially took a 20 percent funding cut for 2006, but \$81,000 in unanticipated additional funding materialised in early December 2005 which virtually returned them to 2005 levels (Project Coordinator 2005a, e-mail communication, 9 December). Another programme sustained small cuts that will impact their programme insignificantly (Price 2005 e-mail communication, 9 December). For the fiscal period of 2006-2007, overall budget cuts to the State Board, the overseer of education and training, amounted to 7.1 percent. Community Jobs sustained a 12.1 percent cut. Education providers will be required to do more with less and be required to save the State money by enhancing efficiency (Harrison 2005:9,12). All educational programmes have been notified that they 'can do better ... need reform ... a renewed sense of mission' and more money to work effectively (Gregoire 2005:5). Addressing the problems of the most disaffected has been neglected in terms of assistance outside the realm of education and training (although there is some discussion that they may now be permitted to attend more than 22 weeks of training) yet benefits agency support services for clients will be cut for 2007 by 24.7% (Harrison 2005:12).

#### **(1.4) Conclusion**

It was never clear that colleges try to circumvent the intentions of case managers by attempting to maintain low-skilled students in education and training programmes. Yet, with some concerns about the usefulness of long periods of time spent in classrooms, what was clear was that educators see attention to educational deficits as a requirement for increasing employability. But, in light of short-term provisions only, to-date there has been little to feel optimistic about in terms of making

employable the least attractive job-seekers who endure 'limited skills and work experience, [who are] often burdened by guilt, self-doubt, and the scars of physical and emotional abuse' (Walker and Wiseman 2003:178). From the perspectives of education and training programme employees, seemingly those who are able to work are already doing so. Those who have not yet found work either remain on welfare for the time being or they have left the rolls and count as successes by virtue of their having departed from public assistance. That they have left the welfare rolls is not an indicator of employment and many 'remain unstable and extremely vulnerable' (Taylor and Barusch 2000:5)

College welfare-to-work programme staff are at somewhat of a loss with what to do with the lowest-skilled and, while case managers and most administrators clearly recognise this and are not entirely unsympathetic, they are also conflicted. Further, from some of the comments made by case managers in Chapter Five, and those of the programme director at Community Jobs, the Placement Specialist, State Board and Steps-to-Success in this chapter, it seems evident at this point that there exists potential for conflict to arise in the relationship between education providers and case managers and that this creates the possibility to give rise to negative ramifications, such as denial of access to services for welfare recipients. At social services, one case manager felt Clinton's welfare reform was 'a step in the right direction' (Clyde 2004, Recorded interview 30 June) insofar as it removed the notion of entitlement and the CJ programme director had correctly sensed that some case managers took personal exception to matters of benefit entitlement for clients (Community Jobs 2004, Recorded telephone interview 19 April). This same director made a statement that concurs with Carla-the-case manager's comments in the previous chapter. Namely, that case managers felt frustrated and undermined that the policy promise to eliminate public assistance after five years came to nothing (Carla 2004 Recorded interview, 30 June). That is, while clients are still entitled to financial help and access to education and work training, it comes begrudgingly. With that, and the autonomy had in their positions, it is plausible that case managers may not create equal access to these services.

To complicate matters, whilst it is true that many welfare recipients are not work-ready, for all the myriad and potentially long-term reasons that occurs, for all of their efforts education providers are achieving poor results. Case managers are aware of this, but they seem to consider it a failing of the education providers' strategies towards the lowest skilled and less of a failing of the larger system of welfare establishment to provide adequately in terms of health care and nutrition, early childhood education, and, possibly, quality home and community environment and parenting for them years prior. Still, the personal feelings of case managers aside, with policy still in a work-first approach, and with states being sanctioned for not depleting their welfare rolls, the matter of entitlement and work policy becomes complicated by state mandates to hurriedly deplete caseloads regardless of the consequences for the families of the mothers who are least able to work.

Thus, we have an enduring image of resentment towards a policy of services provided for the lowest skilled and the possibility of that resentment transferring to case managers' clients and denial of, or minimal access, to those services. Also we have an understanding that welfare-to-work programmes serve the education and employment skills needs of the lowest skilled exceptionally poorly. This is often for a multitude of reasons. They include the fact that welfare recipients have too much to learn in the short amount of time allotted to their education and training and they live in emotional and social circumstances which are not conducive to their effectively engaging in these activities. Because of this, case managers consider them appropriate for short-term training of questionable use only and are rendered relatively powerless to adequately acknowledge or address the effects physical and emotional as discussed by Walker and Wiseman (2003:178). Yet, the argument has now become circular: short-term training because of low skills, but continued low skills because of short-term training. What remains is of little use to them in either the short or long term, but these programmes must exist to ensure policy mandates that 'idle hands are kept busy'.

So far, in this and the previous chapter, we saw the implementation of welfare from the perspectives of individuals who act directly upon welfare recipients. This following chapter is the final empirical chapter. In it are presented three women, all

on public assistance, who were nearing the end of their lifetime allowance to welfare. Their circumstances were the subject of investigation to provide a final perspective of the effects welfare implementation as executed by the groups in the first two empirical chapters.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Case Studies of Welfare Recipients**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter details the pursuit of three welfare recipients through two years of their lives. The rationale for this is to undergo an examination of the lives that they lead and of their experiences with case managers and educational pursuits mandated by policy when they are not employed. It was also intended to give them the opportunity to voice their experiences of being on the receiving end of management, understand their perceptions of how they came to be welfare recipients, what they hoped for in the future and predict what they could reasonably expect from life in the future (Glaser and Strauss 1968; Henn, Weinstein, Foard and Wenn 2006). With this in mind, the chapter is divided into three main sections each of which introduces and explains the circumstances of the interviewees and aims to create an image of the lives and assess the prospects of the women involved. Each section concludes with reflections on their situations.

Agency administrators came to my aid to locate members of the necessary population with offers to arrange meetings with a number of clients. While I was able to acquire two interviewees who expressed interest in meeting and talking to me over time, both of whom came from the office of Charlie, few others showed up for their meetings and those who did could not be defined as “hard-to-serve” and were not close to exhausting the limit of benefit available to them. One stated that she would take part in the study but only if she was exempted from her work-search requirement. This was not permitted. With just two welfare recipients, and because I had grown unreasonably concerned that agency employees would engineer meetings with ‘good examples’ of their work, I began a personal quest to find TANF recipients who might be willing to talk to me. This process began, and ended, at a sports centre where an African American cleaner, Sarah, works twenty hours each week. Although not exactly part of the study (she was not “hard-to-serve” because she was no longer attached in any way to Social Services), there were some facets of Sarah’s life that were instructive for the light that was shed on the possible consequences for children who have a parent available to them full-time.

Sarah is a single parent born of a single parent. She has three sons, thirteen, sixteen and nineteen. She had received welfare for 18 years and left it some two years prior to our meeting after she had grown frustrated with the social service agency bureaucracy and what she perceived as case managers' disrespect for her, that she took any job she could get 'because anything was better than that'. When asked precisely why she waited so long to find work, she said 'who was going to look after my boys?' (Sarah 2004 Unrecorded interview, 8 December). It fits that she would need significant employment flexibility while still in the position of raising three children and her job at the sports centre proved to be precisely what she needed at the time she got it (her twenty hours of work was able to spread over the course of the week at any times most convenient to her. Technically, she was supposed to work seven days a week, but after a few months of this, she told her manager that she would no longer be available every day and he agreed to a five-days-a-week schedule. That she waited to work until the oldest was seventeen and the youngest eleven meant that she could remain available to them and watchful of their behaviour and whereabouts during their formative years (I can confirm that Sarah was something of a disciplinarian but seemed to be tempered and fair with it). All of this seemed to have ultimate pay offs in so far that her oldest boy was 'college bound' and the middle boy also appeared to be heading towards higher education, a matter that proved to be a source of immense pride.

Today she relishes the relative freedom that work affords her. On 1 January 2005, she received a pay raise, which increased her earnings from \$9.50 per hour to \$10.00 (6%). In January 2006 she received another raise of 25 cents (2.5%), a matter that caused both annoyance and puzzlement for her since she was unsure if it was a reflection of her work performance or employer parsimoniousness and she didn't have the confidence to ask. Either way, these sums ensure she remain firmly entrenched in poverty but also receive a significant annual tax credit so long as she remains working sufficient hours. Additionally, she makes far in excess of what TANF would provide her. Still, Sarah seemed predisposed to optimism and soon grew pleased. 'That's more than I've ever earned. Makes me feel pretty good...'. In conjunction with some income from her two older sons' jobs, 'We're making' it. We manage' (2006 Unrecorded interview, 28 January). Although Sarah had a



number of her own colourful stories to relate, she wasn't quite what I was looking for. She did, however, help immensely by introducing me to Lucy.

## **The Interviewees**

### **(1.0) Lucy**

When we met, Lucy was a thirty six year old, single, black woman with a six-year-old daughter named Riley. She proved to have a compelling and apparently atypical story to tell, the details of which serve to underscore some of the major challenges she is facing, despite, in a number of ways, being comparatively advantaged and seemingly quite able.

Lucy graduated from high school on time, had attended various liberal arts classes in three colleges and appeared to have an extensive work history involving clerical work. Yet, she had not worked since Riley was born in 1999. The whereabouts of the child's father were unknown and it seemed that he did not pay child support. 'They can't find him. He keeps moving jobs, so by the time they think they've found him, he's already gone' (2005 unrecorded interview, 25 February). At this time, Lucy had received TANF for six years and, until recently, her case manager had pressured her to 'get off welfare and get a job'. This, despite having failed to receive any job offers and after repeatedly expressing interest in a nurse training programme<sup>28</sup>. The matter of training is complicated by the fact that she owes the federal government \$3000 in unpaid educational loans. For this reason, her transcripts have not been released from the colleges where she studied and so she has no proof of any higher education<sup>29</sup>. The latter information was discovered after I spoke with the college and arranged to drive Lucy to the financial aid office to clarify her standing. So long as she has this debt, which has been accruing five percent annual interest for over a decade, she will be ineligible for further financial aid and refusal of college services. Furthermore, should she find work, she was

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<sup>28</sup> One professional interviewee said, 'At the CSOs, the philosophy is "Anyone over sixty months [on TANF]: no training. Get a job' (Placement Specialist 2004).

<sup>29</sup> The college provided a copy of the classes Lucy was once enrolled in, however, but she put the document away quickly. The brief look I did get of it gave the impression she had attended very few classes and not done well while there.

advised by the college that she would likely have to forfeit her tax credit in loan repayment, the very credit that ensures her friend Sarah is able to cope with the costs of urban living.

Two months after visiting the college with Lucy, she had not contacted the government loan agency as advised by a college representative, and she had not told her case manager of the block on all college enrolment so long as the loan remains outstanding. Also, she was not looking for work. Rather, Lucy was waiting. She was waiting for an additional three months to see if she would receive a disability benefit from the State. She was waiting to hear from her case manager for permission, which she would not get, to enrol in a nursing course. Finally, she was waiting for the Department of Housing to grant her subsidised accommodation. Without the disability benefit, 'I guess I'll just have to find a job'. Later, when she talked about completing her undergraduate education, I addressed the matter of her being denied access to higher education until she re-paid her loans but with a wave of her hand she partly dismissed this important complication saying 'Well, there is that' (2005).

Lucy's mother, Carol, a never-married auxiliary nurse who from the age of twenty-one was also a single parent, 'just chose to raise us kids alone but my father denied paternity anyway', said Lucy. From 2002-2004 she lived with Beth, a friend of her mother's, where she and her daughter rent one of the two basement rooms for \$250 per month. This amounted to fifty seven percent of her monthly welfare payment. The other room belonged to another single mother with a fourteen-year-old daughter. Of the situation she said 'It's hard. It's very depressing. Carol's husband [Joe], doesn't even like me to receive phone calls here'. This matter concerned Sarah who already knew about the limitations on phone use, '... what if she gets called to an interview? Then what's she going to do? She could come and stay with me, but I suppose that's not much better' (2005). Lucy had more immediate concerns regarding what she saw as Joe's copious consumption of alcohol around her daughter, 'I don't know if he's an alcoholic, but he drinks a lot of beer' (2005), so Lucy and her daughter spend most of their time at home within the confines of their small bedroom.

The living situation was unplanned and Lucy just went along with an idea of her mother's that metamorphosed into living in the basement. The owner of the house, Beth, is ill and needs a live-in carer. At the suggestion of Carol, Lucy moved in to become her full time care provider. In return for this, she would have received a legitimate income from the State and have a stable home for herself and her daughter. That was the plan. But these went awry when Joe's second wife died, and after thirty years of divorce from Beth, returned to her and who, somewhat remarkably, 'didn't mind at all' (Sarah 2004). He moved Lucy and Riley out of the upstairs rooms and confined them to the basement and, she said, showed his resentment towards their presence every day. 'Sometimes he throws my daughter's toys downstairs and tells her to keep them in her room. But he's getting better. He's not as bad as he used to be'. Sarah believed Lucy's living situation was squalid, and whispered 'They shouldn't be living like that' (2005). Yet, the house was not so much dirty, although it wasn't clean, as neglected and extraordinarily austere. The appliances were decades old; there were three aged televisions stacked behind the front door; the carpeting was comprised of filthy remnants and at the kitchen door entrance, the linoleum was ripped and worn through to beyond any vestige of a pattern.

Despite a clear need, for some reason, hopefully other than 'She's just a mean old woman' (Sarah 2006 Unrecorded interview, 28 January), Carol initially refused to share her two bedroom flat with Lucy and Riley. Further, Lucy thought her mother showed hostility to her when someone offered help by withdrawing contact and refusing to baby-sit. 'She gets all huffy and says, "You don't need me". I don't know why she's like that. Lucy's really nice' (Sarah 2006). Lucy was more forgiving of her mother and considered it reasonable that Carol had reached a point in her life where she relished privacy for herself and her boyfriend.

To compound a less than ideal living situation, Lucy's problems seemed aggravated because, she said, 'I'm sick a lot and I feel like my kid's getting that way too'. Certainly it was true that her daughter was often at home on school days. Furthermore, each day she took forty milligrams of Paxil, a prescription anti-

depressant medication<sup>30</sup>. At times she seemed anxious and it was impossible not to wonder if her poverty, lack of a stable home environment, physical and social isolation had a relationship with her depression, but in which direction is the cause is difficult to discern. In her own mind the two are undoubtedly related. Compounding matters, there may be some family history of depression as her sister survived a suicide attempt in November 2004.

With her good manners and composure, outwardly Lucy seems employable, and with her high school diploma, some college and an apparently not insignificant work history almost certainly would appear so to a case manager. Yet she also appears crushed, deflated in a way that only an emotional battering would incur. She had some job interviews in early January 2005, 'One was at the airport but it took too long to get there'. Some of the others were '... at delis, Pizza Time, a hair salon but I've not heard back. I think they've just decided to hire another candidate or there's a hiring freeze'. She doesn't understand why she can't find work, 'I mean, I have a driver's license, a clean record. I've never taken drugs.... I don't get it' (2005 Unrecorded interview, 25 February).

Her case manager must have considered Lucy in need of supplementary support, and as a consequence she was assigned a social worker (see Chapter 5, Interviews with Gate Keepers for a discussion of social workers' qualifications). But, while 'She's pretty nice, they're not really helpful. The best I can say is that she was really professional' (2005). Furthermore, Lucy has felt greatly offended by past case managers because they're '...abrupt, cruel; they just put you down. They just treat you like you don't matter'. Recently,

One said I should go to church. If I went to church, then maybe things would work out for me.... I had a few caseworkers tell me they were sick of my shit. The DSHS office isn't in a safe area either, so that's another problem. I tried to get my caseworker moved to Capitol Hill, but they wouldn't let me. I just feel really abused and misunderstood (2005).

Very little appears to have worked well for Lucy since she moved to Detroit in 1998, 'I never should have gone there; that was when everything started going wrong for

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<sup>30</sup> Google.com reveals this to be at the higher end of the usual 10 – 60 mg dosage.

me' (2005), and it is where she says she got pregnant. She attended her last compulsory Job Search course through Social Services in August 2004 and, unlike many welfare recipients, she considered it helpful and fairly comprehensive. Yet, it appears she began the twelve weeks of training several times,

... although they provided day care nearby, I got sanctioned after taking my kid to the doctor. And I had to turn in thirty job leads a week!<sup>31</sup> ... I just felt that DSHS (social services) and ES (Employment Security) were inflexible when it came to wanting me to be in Job Search for forty hours a week... After that I lived in a hotel for about 2 months. Welfare paid for that (2005).

It seemed, she said, 'that everything I tried didn't measure up to what I needed. I had a constant battle with them [DSHS]. I had too many hours travelling and DSHS would only give me one bus ticket so I had to walk home. Then I went to WROC<sup>32</sup> and got involved with another welfare rights agency because they reduced my food stamps'<sup>33</sup>. She has applied for a council flat 'but they're still dealing with applications for 2003' (2005)<sup>34</sup>.

Asked why she is loath to apply for temporary agency work, Lucy said,

It's too erratic, and I don't think it's a smart thing to do in terms of finances.... A couple of temp' assignments will only screw up my [DSHS] paperwork. You never know how long the job might last. I need stability.... I've turned up for several temp' positions; one I had to go to Kent [twenty miles] on the bus, then when I got there I wasn't the only one who turned up and was told someone had already got the job (2005).

Her caution may be reasonable. As Carla, a case manager, stated in Chapter 5

The temp jobs really do cause problems when it comes to TANF. When a client comes to me and says she's got a temp job, I think "[groan], well, OK". Often, they only last weeks or days and by that time they're already off the rolls and when they come back it's like starting again' (2004, recorded interview, 30 June).

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<sup>31</sup> The required number is actually three.

<sup>32</sup> Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition is a non-profit advocacy group for welfare recipients.

<sup>33</sup> Her food stamps are worth \$190 per month.

<sup>34</sup> The typical wait for this sort of housing is eight years but single parents are supposed to be provided with the ability to fast-track their housing.

Lucy both is and is not emblematic of the average welfare recipient. She is black, a single parent and her mother is a single parent. Yet, her mother and only sibling both have full-time, semi-professional, jobs and her sister is married with two children born inside marriage. Furthermore, Lucy appears to have more education than many recipients and a fairly stable work history prior to becoming a mother. Together, these comprise access to all the trappings of the American dream; she had a job, disposable income and choices to make. Still, the one obvious factor that has led her down the road she is currently travelling, the one where she is reactive not proactive, is a child.

‘What I really need is four things: a car, a place of my own, a job and childcare’ (2005). Without these, visibly downtrodden and frustrated in her attempts to recover her life, Lucy says she will look for evening work. She says her mother might take care of her daughter, but with Carol’s erratic disposition, Lucy would be hard-pressed to rely too heavily on her mother. In the meantime, she has applied for disability benefit based on her depression and after saying she has seizures, but, as appears routine, her application was denied the first time around. The second application was pending when we first met but was expected to take another year to complete. That was November 2004. More than a year on nothing had changed. When she did receive notice of the decision in summer 2006, her application for disability had been denied and she had to look for work as per the instructions of her case manager.

It is difficult to tell if Lucy is still unemployed because she is holding on to the vision of something better than temporary work in a relatively poor economy or if there is something else about her that leaves employers wondering if she is worth the trouble. She certainly displays an emotional fragility despite apparently having the necessary skill set to execute a handful of jobs. Currently there are so many facets of her life that need to alter before reasonably she could be expected to enter the ranks of the employed. But she is enervated and says she feels utterly powerless. Both of these seem evident when spending time with her.

For several months during 2005, I lost touch with Lucy. I had attempted to make contact with her but her telephone had been disconnected and no one answered the

door at the house where she lived. Finally, through Sarah I learned that Lucy had left the run-down house and moved in with her mother. But things were not going well and Lucy's life had changed from predictable and bleak to unpredictable and equally bleak. When Lucy and I finally met, I learned that her mother attempted to control or question all aspects of her life: with whom she spoke, from whom she received phone calls, what Riley could and could not do and what they could and could not eat. Still, living with her mother meant a room in a modern, two-bedroom flat and a familiar face. Yet, to Lucy's disappointment, her mother took all of her welfare cheque for rent (2006 unrecorded interview, 11 January).

In this world according to Lucy, what was real and imagined was now particularly difficult to determine because her conversations had grown increasingly rambling over time. Further, she spoke of taking herself off her prescription depression medication 'because it made my head feel weird' (2006) and gone was the mostly placid woman I had met a couple of years previously. She now seemed increasingly agitated and nervous although still spoke of needing privacy and control over her life. I gave her \$20 and we immediately went to buy cigarettes, which she chain-smoked.

By early November 2005, she had not coped well living with her mother and was using the spare room at a friend's home, but soon had to move out to make way for guests. After then, clearly she went somewhere but failed to leave any forwarding information. Six months later Sarah suspected that Lucy had returned to Detroit and would get in touch at some point, but where and when was impossible to predict. Mostly alone, and certainly feeling alienated, she drifted from one situation that she found intolerable to another, and with no effective means of assistance other than a few hundred dollars per month, she and her child fair poorly and continue their unstable existence.

It is hard to imagine Lucy's life changing positively in the near future. She has now long-surpassed the five-year time limit at which point her case manager would have rescinded her already meagre funds by forty percent. Fortunately for Lucy, however, the safety-net law changed and halted the threat of curtailment, at least for a time. Had it not, at that point her income would no longer have met the cost of

rent and both Carol and Jim seemed unlikely to let her remain residing with them as a gesture of goodwill. Her education remained unrecognised because of the lack of access to her transcripts and she had done precious little to rectify the matter. And, while her case manager clearly was increasingly demanding that she obtain employment, she had not worked for more than seven years. Furthermore, it appeared unlikely that she would find the kind of flexible employment such as Sarah had that would make sustainable employment possible. It was just as Lucy had said, although possibly for different reasons: 'What I really need is four things: a car, a place of my own, a job and childcare' but that 'everything [she] tried didn't measure up to what [she] needed. First she needed stable living arrangements for her and her daughter, but she had not yet managed to secure that. It was impossible to distinguish to what extent, if any, her mental health played in her tenuous living arrangements, but as a casual observer she never seemed emotionally stable and without that she would be unlikely to sustain employment should it come her way. Thus, a mental health assessment referral from her case manager seemed a reasonable starting point, but this appears to have never been made available, possibly for the financial reasons stated by Patricia in Chapter 5.

So, what would be Lucy's prospects? At our last meeting in late 2005, her position in life appeared no better than it was when she first received welfare seven years ago. She appeared unemployable in light of her erratic emotional state, a matter that Sarah, the long-time family friend who knew Lucy well, considered indicative of a family problem with depression, and thus possibly unable to meet the work requirements of PRWORA. Without a mental health assessment with a sanction not to look for work, her case manager would soon have to rescind her welfare. It may have been that such an assessment was unavailable or unknown to her case manager, that the case manager was not sufficiently apprised of Lucy's problems thus making Lucy's evaluation of being 'misunderstood' as correct. Or it is possible that Lucy was truthful when she said that her case manager was 'sick of her shit' and that, indeed, her case manager didn't care for her or that Lucy was attempting to swing the lead. Accurate assessment of these things is fundamentally irreconcilable because Lucy had not been formally evaluated and neither did it seem likely that she would be. Regardless, her child, Riley, seemed frequently to be absent from school, and moving her residence meant that she had further to go to school, would change



school districts, thus creating academic disruption and lack of continuity. The result, then, is a disordered, unstable and chaotic life for Lucy and less than adequate prospects for Riley.

### **(1.1) Tammi**

Tammi is a young white woman. We met for the first time in the lobby of her local social service agency. She was alert, exceptionally chatty, evidently on friendly terms with several employees and fashionably dressed in Wal-Mart clothing. She was keen to discuss the details of her life, at volume, in the waiting area until her case manager, Charlie (see Chapter 5, Interviews with Gate Keepers), arrived to take us to a private room.

Then at twenty-three, we learned that Tammi left home at the age of twelve, at which point, 'I went away and did pretty much my own thing until I was fourteen'. She stated that her reason for leaving home was that she refused to transfer to another school when her mother moved. 'I'm stubborn and hard-headed and I get my way. I told them if they transferred me I wouldn't go; so they transferred me and I didn't go. So, that's kind of my problem; I don't think things through all the way' (Tammi 2004, 28 December 2004). Then she got pregnant in spring 2006.

When we met Tammi had an eight-year-old daughter, Shanta-Ann, born of a fleeting encounter with an African American boyfriend when she was 14. At this point, she had received TANF for five and a half years. She would 'change nothing' about the life choices she had made thus far and stated that she was pleased to have had her child early in life. Prior to being on public assistance, she had been denied aid 'because I was [living] with my mom. But my mom wanted me to pay rent. Her thought was that if you have a kid, then you get to do other adult things like pay rent'. The outcome was that she was indeed supported by her mother during which time she received only minimal assistance from the State. When she moved out at 18, she became eligible for welfare for herself and Shanta-Ann. Her father has never been a part of her life, but her mother has 'had husbands here and there'. The current stepfather is 'pretty much my dad. He's a good guy'. Her only biological

sibling (there are eight step-sisters and brothers), was once married to a white man until she got pregnant, had a baby, 'and the baby's not white, but her husband's white, and my sister's white...'

Over the last six years, Tammi had attended and graduated from two short-term welfare-to-work programmes. 'I got my Retail Skills Certificate and I did Job Readiness', the latter of which 'was pretty helpful because they helped me with my résumé and do mock interviews. That was really good, because I'd get so nervous [in interviews] and sweat and not talk'. Also, over the course of the last six plus years she has lived in five different places with her daughter for whom moving is 'really fun', but, at least for the time being, her current home, in state subsidised housing, appears stable. Her sister lives close by and Tammi seems to rely emotionally on her for support. Yet, the dynamics of the relationship between them remain unclear. Tammi acknowledges, 'my sister's complicated'. But while she obviously reveres her older sibling, she followed her into pregnancy at a very early age and similarly abandoned school early on. Furthermore, she speaks defensively of the sister who left her first two children behind when she separated from her partner, who has now had them formally removed from her care, and who 'was not so faithful after about four years of marriage' (2005 unrecorded interview, 11 January)<sup>35</sup>.

Tammi says she's always been treated well by her case managers. However, also she says, 'All [they] say is "you need to go work; you need any job now". That's what I like most about being here. I kind of know that they want us to get a job, but in my situation, the last grade I completed was seventh, so Charlie really supports my decision to go back to school' (2004).

The local community college is where she was enrolled in a GED class from September until November 2004 and where she took and passed one of the five tests required to get her certificate. Asked why she was on welfare for four years before pursuing academics, she said, 'Well, I tried to enroll, but I got the run around.... So I said, "screw it". I gave up. I get frustrated very easily' (2004). This type of

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<sup>35</sup> They were married for a decade from when the sister was 17.

response was fairly representative of my own experiences of the lowest-skilled welfare-to-work students, and who appeared to have any number impediments to their chances of academic success: little tolerance for boredom, repetition, mental exertion, and, possibly of greatest significance, the diminished ability to cope with frustration.

After receiving her GED, she aspires to 'be a mechanic, but all their classes are full right now', or attend business classes, 'because I want to have my own business'. All this, she anticipates, would be supported by the welfare agency. On GED completion, however, Charlie says Tammi will have to engage in a serious search for work. The case manager said she has had 'many problems with Tammi. 'At one point I enrolled her in anger management classes and that really helped. Now you can see her looking at you and processing what to do next. She wouldn't do that before' (2004 Recorded interview, 28 December).

Tammi's first job was just after she turned 18.

I worked in a motel – that lasted three and a half days. That wasn't pretty because I was housekeeping and the things you find.... Then I did [installing of plaster board] for six weeks. When my sister left, I left too. I loved doing that and carpentry. Then I did telemarketing for three months. It was OK... but I was like a machine. The last thing I had to do there was to find out people's opinions about abortion. That was the last straw.... I prefer to be outside anyway (2004).

Her last job was several years ago when she worked at a petrol station for one month before getting fired for selling cigarettes to a minor. 'At this point', she said, 'I have a lot of skills but it's my education that employers want'. 'In the past the kind of jobs I had were entry-level, but the ones I'm hoping for now I need the education to get' (2004).

She did appear to have at least one marketable skill. It seems she has taught herself to cut and style hair but because she is self-taught from working on the hair of her friends and daughter's, so she has no formal qualifications. She correctly believes this rules out work in a hairdressing salon because a professional license is required

to use chemicals on people's hair and she has no interest in pursuing the necessary qualifications.

One skill Tammi seemed to lack was the ability to put into practical use the eight weeks long retail sales training (which she said was more learning about yourself than about selling) that she received in a welfare-to-work programme. Without a doubt, she appeared in want of the fawning style of customer service that many American employers seem to prefer. Yet, it is in the service sectors where most of the low-skilled jobs lie. She exhibited a very strong personality and takes apparent pride in saying what she thinks.

I'm a very outspoken person. I say what I feel. I want a job where I can boss people around, but in a nice way, so that that's why I'd be a good manager. I absolutely hate retail, though. I don't like routine. I get bored easily. What I don't want is to get up at seven am every day. I want change' (2004).

She had worked intermittently but made little progress towards self-sufficiency. She lacked any formal qualifications, had few academic skills and was unlikely to complete her GED in the near future. That pushed her dream of enrolling in a business management programme further away and even then only in the unlikely event that her case manager would authorise it, assuming she still had one. She stated that by September 2005 she hoped to be 'half or a quarter way done with my business management classes'. But a check with the college revealed that the programme lasts two full years. Should her case manager have consented to the take up of WorkStudy<sup>36</sup>, which she did not, she would have been forced to attend classes part-time thus extending her course work to four years. But, said Charlie, 'The department supports ... a vocational education course for one full year as long as it is accompanied with a part-time job of at least 20 hours per week. If [her course] does not meet these criteria, she would not be in compliance'.

Adding up the months available to complete her GED and be involved in the business management classes left the impression that she was correct in her self-evaluation when she stated, 'So, that's kind of my problem; I don't think things through all the way'.

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<sup>36</sup> WorkStudy is a combination of working for your welfare cheque while also studying,

Seven months following our initial meeting, Tammi still had two of the five GED tests, maths and writing, left to take. She had abandoned plans to be in business or a mechanic and instead enrolled in an eleven-week physical therapy aide's course with stated hopes of finding full-time employment in a nursing home or as home help on completion (2005a Unrecorded telephone interview, 28 July).

There is another problem, however.

'I don't trust people too well with my child because I know how I raise my daughter. I know how I want her raised and to be treated, and I don't trust other people to watch her.... They [case managers] don't care where we leave our kids as long as we're doing what they want us to' (2004).

Because Tammi was an unusually young parent, she received particular attention from her case managers. Yet, by spring 2005 she was 24 and had joined the ranks of the poor, single mother masses. Increasingly she found herself on the receiving end of less attention and patience, and by March of that year Charlie had said that Tammi must get a job. Should a case management shift occur, as it always does, she would likely find that her good fortune and the attention paid to her wants and needs had been exhausted.

And so it was. The anticipated case management shift occurred and Tammi found herself with the same manager she had several years previously. 'Remember the one I told you I tried to get fired? Well I have her back'. Furthermore, although she completed the physical therapy aide's course 'The class was bogus because', she says, 'employers really want employees to have their own transportation and nurses aid' certification'. Yet, to be a nurses' aide in Washington State, she must have her GED, which she does not, and be employed for twenty hours per week. Despite the former acrimony with her case manager, Tammie was adamant that she would not have any problem getting funding and permission from the benefits agency for her most recent short-term educational plan to be a nurses' aide. Yet, as we have learned, this was complicated by her lack of qualifications and the fact that she was not pursuing them.

Tammi is intelligent and vivacious. But she, like Lucy, was in no better a position in early 2006 than she was seven years previously. Indeed, she may be worse off,

for she was about to see what it is like to be virtually forced into a job, any job. Or this would have been the case had she not been pregnant the last time we met in spring 2006. Despite the fact that the pregnancy was unplanned, she appeared very pleased with herself and the fact that her new case manager is 'off my back'(2006 Unrecorded interview, 26 May).

In the long term, there is no question that she Tammi could have successfully attained her educational goals and moved off welfare to a more fulfilling life, the kind of life she imagines having. But the time to have done this was while she was unusually young and had the attention and patience of case managers on her side. But an appropriate concern now lies in addressing her ability to quell her impetuosity and stop fantasising. She took summer 2006 off from looking for work (although she was 5 months pregnant) that she says is unavailable and, in fact, undesirable, and then decided she no longer wanted to work caring for people at all. Yet, she could have had all the frills that go along with the thus-far elusive life that she so much seems to want, but it requires she take a more pragmatic approach to her plans. Had she followed-through on her educational plans and gained some work valuable experience via Community Jobs, for example, she might have had a chance. As it is, there are plans, but there is little follow-through. All she has are grand ideas, a baby, diminishing tolerance from case managers and limited prospects for future work and, therefore, income and choice.

## **(1.2) Margie**

In 2004, Margie (2004 Recorded interview, 28 December) was a 51-year-old white Texan with a developmental disability of which she was aware. 'That don't mean that I don't know nothing but [I know things] in a different way', and a speaking impediment not associated with her significant drawl. She appeared to be 'an open book', entirely transparent in the naiveté born of her disability. Yet, conversations with her were frequently difficult as she was not talkative. For this reason, fleshing out details became something of an onerous task, but when they emerged, they were anything but trivial.

Shortly after our initial meeting, I learned that Margie had an eight-year-old boy named Russ who has no father to speak of. Also she had a 19-year-old son, Ben, who was removed from her care when he was eight. This occurred after her first husband sexually assaulted him, a crime for which he was convicted and served a ten-year sentence. Since it was the husband who was seemingly responsible for the crime, it is not clear precisely why Ben was removed from the home and she says she feels uncomfortable talking about it because 'I feel like I let him down' (2005 Unrecorded interview, 14 March). The reason for his removal, then, may be that the authorities agreed with her evaluation. She was next reacquainted with Ben when he was fifteen and Russ was four. Shortly after this, however, the elder son was found performing fellatio on Russ (I was never quite able to discern who discovered the two), an offence for which he was jailed.

In February 2001 she moved to Washington State after a 'friend' (whom she did not remember) from her middle school rang her several times and, ultimately, suggested she move up north to live with him. This she and her son did, but by early 2004 the boyfriend was drinking heavily and had hit Russ several times. The last incident left the boy with multiple contusions and unconscious all of which involved an emergency visit to hospital. Whilst there the police were informed of the assault, and the resulting charges ensured the man was imprisoned. He now has a no-contact order against him. Margie has chosen to remain in the Seattle area because, 'I'm not going to be scared of him anymore ... and it seems like Washington in a very good state if you need assistance. Besides they drink too much in Texas'. Initially I thought Margie also had that wizened look of a long-time drinker but she said, 'I never did drink much myself'. She explained that Yoakum, Texas, is an oilfield town near to the Gulf of Mexico and that part of the culture is heavy drinking.

Born the youngest of twelve children, she left school at fifteen.

I really didn't want to quit, but I always wanted to be with my mom and help her. I was the baby of 12 kids, and she was always washing and cooking and cleaning. We didn't have any hot water in the house, so all the water had to be heated on the stove. The bathroom was outside, too, until I was sixteen. Then my dad asked the pastor to help us put in a spare bedroom and an inside bathroom'.

Margie is not work-shy. She has a long work history, all of which occurred in Texas, but never made enough money not to qualify for supplementary income support. As a result, she has received some form of public assistance since she was eighteen. Occasionally she was employed as a cleaner but mostly she worked as an auxiliary nurse in homes for the elderly. 'I love that kind of work. I love to work with nurses because they show you new things'. Most of these jobs lasted several years, but in Washington State, where criminal background checks appear to be more routine than in Texas, she found that very soon after a job presented itself, her employer felt compelled to let her go after the background check was complete.

What the background check reveals is a twenty-year-old conviction for fraud after Margie wrote several cheques for money she didn't have. 'The plan was always to pay it back, but I never had enough money.' This is where the training of her caseworker, Charlie, has proven useful for she began the process to expunge Margie's fraud from the record (see Chapter 5, Interviews with Gate Keepers). Still, although only fifty-one and slim, as she ages Margie says she grows slow, 'I wouldn't like to go back to working in a nursing home; I would like to go to work in a hospital'. She aspires to being 'on the computer. I'm a slower speed now and I feel like I would fail [in a nursing home]. In a hospital I think I would be better off with the gadgets'.

Of her educational background, she states proudly, 'I'm still trying to get my GED at the business college' but dropped her studies after Russ was last hit. Clearly she is unaware that she will not gain her certificate for it is evident from her disability that she would be unable to pass any of the tests. This inability to get a GED will dash her hopes of being a nursing assistant. The Certified Nursing Assistant qualification, which she had in Texas, had long expired but, regardless, would be invalid in Washington State and colleges performing the training require a GED. Presently she feels the need for a car, but whilst she was able to pass the reading portion of the test in Texas, so far she has been unable to pass the same part of the Washington State test.

In summer 2004, work as a dishwasher presented and, although she divulged her criminal conviction, Margie was offered and accepted the job prior to discussing any



of the details. Yet the work schedule was incompatible with her life, which she knew, but she had hoped for an opportunity to negotiate. The schedule, 6:30am until 2pm and 3pm until 6pm, is somewhat typical of the flexibility required of minimum wage service positions. 'So the manager said, "Well then, I cannot use you". So that was that'.

By January 2005 another job, as an ice cream parlour assistant, arose. This time Margie was more circumspect about divulging her crime and called for advice on whether she should be truthful about it. My view was that she should, if only because of the likelihood her felony would be discovered in short order. She agreed in principal but for different reasons, 'It's always better to say the truth'. The job, another split shift, was from 10am until 2pm and from 6pm until 10pm.

She didn't get the ice cream parlour job and by April was hoping to work as a receptionist at the school where Russ receives speech therapy. She said that she can use a computer 'real good' but has difficulty typing. This greatly reduced her prospects and, as could have been predicted, she was not offered the position.

It is clear that Margie has difficulty in self-assessing her skills and appropriateness for work. She has a pleasant manner but constantly seems both fearful yet eternally optimistic. It is not apparent whether the fixed frown and hesitation in her voice is part of her developmental disability, but it certainly would raise a flag to potential employers that something may be amiss. As for the optimism, intuitively it seems that her outlook is born of a lack of understanding of what are realistic work options for her, particularly in the comparatively (to Texas) regulation-focused Washington State.

As with Lucy and Tammi, Margie's situation at the time we last spoke in spring 2006 was no better, or even particularly changed, than at any time in the previous several years. It is possible that with significant help from her case manager she would have had her criminal record expunged, but at this juncture, that likelihood seems to have slipped away. Related to the earlier criminal conviction, so far as is known, Margie continues not find employment. Yet it is not from want of enthusiasm. Further, although she has the freedom to return to Texas where,

possibly, her employment opportunities may be an improvement on those in Washington State, she did not want to return and had no financial means of actually getting there. Lastly, at least for the moment, the welfare to which she is still entitled is greater than in Texas, her case manager remains an excellent advocate on her behalf and a return to Texas would return her to a 'small town filled with drunks', a prospect she did not find attractive.

### **(1.3) Conclusion**

For a long time a question I had wanted to ask Lucy, Tammi and Margie why they would consider pregnancy when their work lives would be compromised and when public assistance in the form of TANF is minimal at best. This was a question I found personally discomfiting to ask and one that took me a year to pose, but it was one that I felt may prove useful in understanding their motivations.

For Lucy the matter was simple; she was engaged and in love. These, she felt, were the perfect ingredients for getting pregnant and so she did. She didn't, however, discuss the possibility with her fiancée and yet at no point had she imagined the relationship failing before the child was born, the father abandoning her and for her previously orderly life to dissolve. Of course, Lucy also said in previous conversations that she had moved to Detroit, where she says she got pregnant, to get away from family problems in Seattle. So, there may be evidence of family alienation. Already we are aware of depression. But over the course of many conversations with Lucy, it was difficult to gain much of a purchase on the truth. During our last conversation she made a passing comment about the father of her child living in Seattle and that she doesn't see him much. This was merely one of many inconsistencies that surfaced during the course of dialogue with her. Yet, Lucy was only moderately coherent when she stated this. Indeed, despite the appearance of a lack of veracity, it seemed to matter little for certainly there was something always amiss. She had excellent manners, was softly spoken, typically was composed, voiced specific and articulate concerns for her future but seemed to suffer from what appeared to be a fairly debilitating depression or enervation. During the three years I knew her, she appeared to navigate her life with only

marginal competence, and it is possible that an affirmative nod from the disability agency may have relieved her from work obligations. This, however, was denied, so the best that she could have hoped for in the foreseeable future was the consent of her case manager not to seek work while she awaited results of a resubmitted third application for disability. As it is, she left the area and, to-date, has failed to leave forwarding information even with her mother, sister or her friend Sarah.

Tammi was somewhat representative of the many welfare recipients I have met over the years: a young, impetuous, somewhat flippant, thoroughly charming optimist and know-it-all with myriad prospects but little concept of deferred gratification or planning. Asked why she had a baby she said, 'Well, I figure if you're willing to spread your legs, then you'd better be willing to have a baby'. What is most evident in Tammi's life is lack of planning beyond the immediate. Like a car without brakes, she is not in control of the direction her life is taking. Having two children, one very young, may have slowed her down enough for her to take stock of her situation, but without listening to guidance, or the simple voice of reason, she remained clueless as to what are practical options for her. Now that she has a small baby, she has entered the social service category of P to E: Pregnancy to Employment. For the time being she will be left alone (up to twelve months but only with the consent of her case manager), but because the relationship with her current case manager has a history of acrimony, she may find herself mandated to employment sooner than she would prefer. Regardless, completing her secondary education will take significant dedication and focus, neither of which she has shown any appearance of developing, and which will be compromised further by the addition of a second child and what likely will be a mandate to work. Yet, any work she may find is likely to remain at the bottom end of the labour market which overwhelmingly offers continued economic risk and instability.

On the face of it, Margie's circumstances appeared less complicated than either Lucy's or Tammi's. Asked why she had a child, she said, 'Well, I didn't give it much thought. But when I got pregnant I wasn't going to give it up. That's not the way I was taught was right'. While she may be 'slow', she is not work-shy, and, therefore, when and if she is able to secure suitable employment, she will remain securely within the confines of the working poor. There are some aspects of her life

that remain a mystery, however, such as why she said her first husband sexually assaulted her youngest son but it was the oldest son who was jailed. Her lack of a sufficiently clarifying response to this question may be indicative of embarrassment or a simple lack of her own understanding. Knowing her reasonably well, my sense is that both are involved. Still, the future for Margie is fairly clear. She will either find work or she will not. Certainly, she is constantly looking for employment, and happily so, but her criminal history remains on record and it is as serious an encumbrance to her work prospects as is her young son and the need for flexible work hours that provide her with the ability to be available to him as necessary. Either way, she will remain poor and, either way, she will remain permanently attached to supplementary benefits and entrenched within the system.

For these three women, welfare reform's goals of providing assistance to them so that their children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; ending their dependence on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (United States Government Printing Office 2005) have fallen short of success. None of them has worked in several years; therefore, they all remain dependent on benefit. So far as is known, Lucy remains fragile and unable to cope with managing her and her child's life without, at a minimum, particularly competent and knowledgeable assistance. Her housing situation typically has been tenuous and typically stressful; her diet is poor; she is stressed and depressed and apparently either over or under medicated. None of this amounts to a nourishing environment for her daughter, Riley. Tammi is erratic and not in a position, at least yet, to make realistic plans for the future. When she does, she will need public assistance to help her because she has failed to attain the bare minimum of educational qualifications necessary for even most entry-level work. That this work overwhelmingly continues to be inflexible and hostile to the needs of poor single parents with few resources is another matter of concern. Of Margie, she would willingly work, but it evades her because of a criminal background and, because of her limited skills, the work she is offered is also incompatible with the flexibility she needs to be able to attend to the

needs of her son. Such is the situation for all single parents with limited skills or family support.

In an ideal world, these women would not need the attention of case managers. But they have children, are mandated to work, and yet they fail to attain employment. Thus, they are being supported with government funds in a managed environment which is unable to flex to their needs and expected to work regardless of the hostility of the low-wage work environment to single parents of few means. Sarah was fortunate, but the employment flexibility afforded her was unusual: twenty hours per week at times and on days that suited her best. That Lucy, Tammi and Margie would secure such work is not likely even if they were in positions to sustain regular employment. Lucy is not able to do this yet. Tammi would be able to if she were less impetuous. Margie would willingly work, but it, too, evades her.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

This thesis challenges the commonly held belief that welfare reform has been a success and that policy is on a steady road to progress. However, since the onset of this research, I was thwarted in my search for something better than current system of administering welfare to those who are least likely to be offered work. Much of what emerged were exercises in futility and continued exclusion for unskilled single parents. It was not so much that other systems work equally poorly as the American system does in caring for its most difficult to employ; rather, they are sufficiently different as to render them incomparable because nowhere had a similar approach or philosophy. At least not yet.

It would have proved gratifying to have had the opportunity to tap into the financial self-interests of politicians and taxpayers by showing how the support of poor lone parents with young children has long-term benefits. But this proved futile, for adequate support over the long-term is difficult to tabulate, likely would cost more than the current TANF amount of less than one percent of the US GDP and is, therefore, outside of the realms of what can be expected in terms of a policy shift. Of course, there are many ways to calculate the data on cost, although I have not done it (indeed, it seems not to have been quantified in aggregate), and various methods have been suggested as ways to offset the TANF only costs. Fundamentally, these could be attributed to quality early childhood education and family support counsellors (which together may reduce the numbers of single parents), health care and adequate nutrition. Also there is the matter of the creation of better support services to make employment more possible and, ultimately, the payment of taxes more probable. At that point, should re-unemployment occur, unemployment benefit, not TANF, would initiate support.

In the UK, the Pathways to Work programme claims to have saved money by assisting lone parents into work, but unemployed lone parents in the United States

receive such minimal cash assistance that such cost savings are unlikely to be so great. Scandinavian countries have public support for high taxes, high benefit rates and limited persistent poverty. Whilst they have their own challenges with social and economic change, many people have become accustomed to the approaches taken and are largely comfortable with the benefits derived. Should they critique the system, it is often in favour of minor change or increases in resources diverted to public services.. Despite an enduring ethos of independence from state welfare, even policies in those countries with an Anglo-Saxon model reflect greater tolerance for the support of single parents than exists in the United States, for these countries, too, have varying degrees of embedded safety nets. Americans have no such embedded system to defend.

As time passed, a Henry James quote grew increasingly applicable, 'A second chance, that's the delusion. There never was to be but one'. Maybe for the women in this thesis, there is no second chance for I am unable to offer one that would be adopted. They are poor, uneducated, have few work skills and they will remain poor, uneducated and fundamentally replaceable. What little they have to offer, few employers want. They may cycle from time to time into the labour force only to exit again in fairly short order. Federal and state policies are unforgiving and inflexible. Case managers can also be unforgiving, inflexible and erratic, so much so that it is impossible not to wonder if free market scorn for public services and its salary structure foster third-rate public servants with limited understanding of the circumstances of their clients. Such was the philosophy articulated by of one benefits agency administrators.

Short of revolutionary change, the least work-ready single parents are unlikely to get a second chance. Not only is the prognosis poor for them, they are reasonably likely to create a new generation of welfare recipients in their children. As the lives of these women change and their children grow up, they no longer fall into the category of scorned lone parent, but little else changes and what changes do occur are often complex, unpredictable (for them) and not an improvement.

This concluding chapter responds to why policy responses to this population have ensured that these women remain insufficiently addressed. With this in mind, the

chapter has seven sections. The first of these addresses problems with politics and inadequate evidence-based policy directed towards those who are unable to work. The second part confronts the politics of the 'undeserving poor' and why responses to them are inadequate and ensure an enduring poverty cycle. Part three presents consequences of a failure to provide acceptable levels of education during the life course. Part four revisits the overall effects of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act and the consequences of unequal and sometimes inadequate levels of service from case managers. Part five responds to the conundrum of Americans' values with respect to their responses in addressing poverty and which, thus, pose another challenge for effective policy implementation. Part six responds to the challenges being posed by single parenthood and calls for new thinking on how best to assure the needs of this population and their children are met. The chapter concludes with a section that outlines suggestions for policy.

### **(1.0) Policy-Based Evidence Making**

We saw how current welfare policy germinated from the need for governmental intervention during The Depression. In the decades since there have existed many incarnations of workfare and educational services designed to prepare for the future employment of the lowest-skilled poor. Each one of these has been beset with problems reflecting financial and programmatic inadequacies and was ultimately replaced or collapsed altogether. Further, we saw how racial inequality in modern America persists. It remains virtually impossible not to consider that the twelve percent of the population who represent thirty-eight percent of welfare recipients is not symptomatic of enduring institutional racism and a failure to confront the problems of inherited cultural capital. It is at this latter point that welfare reform may have made its greatest error, for it is here where one of the biggest challenges to success lies. Simply enforcing work without tackling the far more complex, multi-faceted matters of ghettoised neighbourhoods, under-funded schools, under nourishment, ill-health and social exclusion for millions is flawed.

... people experience a social isolation that excludes them from the job network system .... And as the prospects for employment diminish, other



alternatives such as welfare and the underground economy are not only increasingly relied on, they come to be seen as a way of life (Wilson, 1987:10)

Something exceptional is required of the ghetto inhabitant who aspires to enter the middle class. Yet, none of this seems to matter a great deal. The fallout from Hurricane Katrina's exposure of America's poor, black underbelly created a flurry of self-analysis and recrimination. Yet, within weeks of the flooding of New Orleans, the conversation had virtually stopped.

The many problems involving the implementation of workfare are so complex and intertwined that it remains unsurprising that debate continues. And, although the matter of simply supporting single, virtually skills-less parents is of no practical significance in today's America, it is, regardless, where I have chosen an appropriate response to the problem lies while at the same time advocating a myriad of other support services intended to create positive long-term change.

We have seen, too, how many of these single women experience complicated, often long-term, life struggles. Services designed to address them fall short, for they are abbreviated and delivered by individuals insufficiently skilled to cope with complex problems. And, when single women are not particularly debilitated, it seems that poor skills, limited academic education, few community ties and support mechanisms, and responsibility for a child complicate their lives sufficiently so as to render them virtually unemployable. Should they be fortunate enough to be even marginally employable, we learn that employers generally prefer to look elsewhere for staff because the pool of qualified, childless applicants is suitably vast to fill the unstable, low-skilled, shift and weekend jobs. Taking and sustaining such employment often requires significant outside assistance, assistance that is generally limited in quality, quantity, scope and duration, along with sufficient competence to orchestrate one's life on multiple levels. Thus begin the challenges of low-wage work for single mothers.

When they do work, we learned in Chapter 3 that there exists evidence of inadequate childcare, both in terms of quantity and quality, along with providers' reticence to take the children of welfare recipients whenever private payees exist in sufficient

numbers. Additionally, low-wage work may bring greater income than welfare, but the working poor remain firmly attached to public assistance, for even with full time work they fail frequently to extricate themselves from poverty.

This upcoming generation may be of particular importance. With low rates of reproduction and higher life expectancy most western nations are in want of workers and US born welfare recipients may find they have to compete with a new population of low-skilled immigrants (see Lee and Miller 1998:192 in Chapter 3). This recipe may equate to a worsening economic situation for these women and children. Given the nature of the US, a country of immigration with great competition for low-level jobs, an unregulated labour market, a minimal minimum wage and tenuous safety nets, not requiring women to take employment in the first low-wage work they find may prove far-sighted. Given their inability to work, their children's unlikelihood of firm attachment to work, and their combined difficulty to compete in the labour market, it is possible, instead, that providing access to tangible resources of some use to them and their children could be effective, perhaps even cost-effective, in the long term.

Still, the apparently noble goals of workfare notwithstanding (reduce the cost of welfare, require recipients to contribute to society, raise the living standards of families), what appears to have materialised in the policy-making process is a predisposition for working backwards from the remedy to a partisan and palatable cure. It is known that these women endure numerous problems and that a second chance is unlikely to change much for them, yet we encounter a case of policy-based evidence making versus evidence-based policy making and constant use of the term 'personal responsibility'. But in pursuit of what is palatable to the American public (working for one's welfare), the problems encountered by this large population are ignored because little is known how to effectively engage them in work.

### **(1.1) The Undeserving Poor**

This population of non-working, unmarried mothers is largely seen as undeserving of public support. We learned early on (Chapter 3) that the public have always

perceived a deserving and undeserving poor. Indeed, today, 'In a large measure, Americans hate welfare because they view it as a program that rewards the undeserving poor' (Gilens 1999:3). Within the context of this thesis, the deserving poor came by way of the bereavement and widowhood of white women, but single, never married mothers are, and always were, undeserving. Therefore, they are afforded little in the way of tolerance or stable and predictable services. Historically, the undeserving have needed demoralising and re-moralising in socially acceptable ways to make them conform to given social mores. While demoralisation may no longer play an overt part in the socialisation of poor single mothers on public assistance, it is evident from both research and the interviews conducted for this thesis that this occurs.

This admission to the undeserving club comes by way of the ultimately sinister and complex social structures coalescing the myriad aspects of society that serve to ostracise individuals and ensure they have few life chances. And yet, Roosevelt understood that public assistance was needed to safeguard the unfortunate against unforeseen circumstance, although with the caveat that assistance be administered judiciously so as not to 'destroy the human spirit' (Roosevelt 1935-online). Yet, few are the discussions of igniting the human spirit when it has never been previously lit. Years later, RFK, with whom JFK concurred, agreed with the principal of providing welfare, but he famously criticised what was perceived as substandard social services on offer to the needy that were unlikely to accomplish much other than destroy 'any semblance of human dignity among the poor' (Kifner 1967:1). And therein lies the crux of problem and which has existed since the inception of assistance: Partisan and ineffectual policy foisted upon the undeserving poor, which is frequently delivered by disgruntled and erratic social service employees.

Roosevelt may have endeavoured to 'safeguard the unfortunate against circumstance', but we know the circumstances that create social exclusion generally begin early. Within the confines of this exclusion, the learned expectations and behaviours of transferred cultural capital along with few marketable skills ensure the possibility of lifelong segregation from the larger part of society and any number of a constellation of inaccessible privileges. For this reason the children of lone

parents are an indivisible part of any discussion involving assisting women with few skills into the labour force. Without any intervention, lack of achievement,

... becomes a very powerful and permanent influence.... [Yet] It is possible to devise programmes to reverse that effect and people from disadvantaged areas can gain enormously from such interventions (Silva, as quoted in Hill 2005: 9).

Whilst it is now clear that programmes are mostly ineffective in reversing the effects of exclusion, workfare continues to receive positive reviews by the government, despite the fact that those individuals who use workfare to access the labour market are little more than half of the welfare population and many who leave welfare fail to leave it for employment (see Chapter 3). Fostering the employment of the remaining forty or more percent, or approaching one million women, has so far proved elusive. Often they are unable to find work, or receive offers of work, and often they are unable to find work that is sufficiently flexible to permit them contact with their children as necessary.

During the US economic boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s, welfare 'reformed' thousands of women with limited skills off benefits and into work. The jobs they got were seldom 'good'; they lacked health insurance, holidays, sick pay and afforded limited assistance with childcare, but it was work and welfare reform, 'the Middle East of domestic politics' (Califano 1981:364), was deemed successful. Indeed, work was to be 'enforced by public authority' on those who 'make demands on government rather than vice versa' (Mead, 1986:13). Murray (1996), like Mead (1986), asserts that work is best achieved via the imposition of reciprocal obligation. This matter is of some of importance. Murray suggests welfare creates dependency, but the argument is circular because welfare recipients had to be dependent, in the sense of being needy, to qualify for benefit. For the lowest skilled, they are poor and unemployable and depend on assistance to feed, clothe and house their families. Frequently they live in areas paralysed by limited prospects. Therefore, poverty and lack of sufficient income to support families, not to mention racism, created a need for welfare, and alienation and lack of opportunity all work to sustain the status quo.

Today, welfare reform remains 'successful', despite an economic slowing and the re-unemployment of many of the same population who were the welfare-to-work miracles of only a few years ago. Initially positive employment indicators have slowed or reversed. The numbers of families leaving assistance have fallen. Employment has fallen and applications for food assistance have increased along with child poverty (United States Census Bureau 2004-online). Former recipients are 'unstable and extremely vulnerable', more likely to leave their small children alone, and be investigated by Child Protective Services (Taylor and Barusch 2002: 5,7). They are also likely to remain closely connected to needs-based benefits (Dube and Jacobs 2004: 7; Office of the Insurance Commissioner 2004-online) and qualify for state-supported health care despite their occasional employment in places inflexible to the needs of poor single parents (Robinson 2004:255; Abelson, 2004:13).

### **(1.2) Problems with Attending to Education**

In Chapter 4, we learned of the mismatch between available jobs and the literacy and employment skills of those chronically unemployed. We learned, too, that unemployment and low literacy are highly related to dependence (Barton 1998; Kirsch, Jungblut, Jenkins and Kolstad 2002). We saw a template for success in the comprehensive programmes which pay close attention to quality. Such programmes provide an array of interrelated services such as education, vocational training as well as on-the-job training, assistance with job search, interviewing skills and subsidised jobs. But they are costly and politically and publicly unpopular. Furthermore, the most successful programmes tend to be lengthy (up to one year) and have a method of 'weeding out' the likely failures early on in the selection process (Placement Specialist 2004, recorded interview, 16 April). Conversely, the brief programmes on offer to the lowest skilled, 'have virtually no positive effect on the economic prospects of participants' (Mihlar and Smith 1997:49), and what limited effects they do have 'diminish substantially over time' (Michalopoulos 2005:21). Murray (2005), citing Rossi's Iron Law of Evaluation, tells us that programmes are ineffectual because 'None produces long-term group results that survive scrutiny' (p6). This is hardly surprising. In Chapter 3 we saw that evaluated

programmes were expensive and cumbersome to operate and that the War on Poverty had failed to fully follow through with the promise to create a skilled body of professionals to help achieve programme goals.

All of these problems exist today. We saw that colleges that provide training have part-time staff working in tenuous jobs. Murray (2005) tells us that programmes don't work *not* because the programmes themselves are poor quality, but because the 'immoral', 'irresponsible', single parents in them are untrainable and society, indeed the students themselves, would be best served by the imposition of social segregation (p6). Yet, programmes fail for myriad reasons. In essence, they fail because interventions are irrelevant or insufficient. In essence, long-term programmes may admit the brightest and best but short-term programmes are too abbreviated and come too late to make much difference.

The underlying premise of the culmination of this thesis is that there has been never been a concerted effort to tackle poverty, lack of skills and the cycle of welfare. At the CSOs, concern about the quality of educational services was repeatedly expressed (Alice, Clyde, Carla 2004, recorded interviews, 30 June; Anne 2004, recorded interview, 8 June) and by numerous researchers (Chapter 4). Providers, it is thought, are not subject to sufficient 'accountability or oversight to make sure they produce tangible results for welfare recipients (Houser 2004, recorded interview, 15 July). We should, however, understand that greater accountability has arrived while at the same time support services will be significantly curtailed along with a reduction in funding to education and training providers (Harrison 2005:12; Gregoire 2005:5). This may all be grist to the mill and lead to more and better support services, but it remains inconceivable that a few weeks or months of training will do much to mitigate the effects of a lifetime of few skills and education, a culture of no work, marginal living conditions, inadequate nutrition, ill health and social exclusion.

The fact remains that the most needy need more help than is available. As a result, particularly disadvantaged welfare recipients in training speak of unhelpful programmes (Seccombe, James et al. 1998; Klavitter and Christensen 2004) and a Seattle area case manager says that students sometimes suggest that what colleges

offer is, 'just crap' (Carla 2000, recorded interview, 30 June). These programmes are not ineffectual because the individuals running them don't care; they are ineffectual because 'no one has grappled with the magnitude of the problem' (Grubb and Kalman 1994: 58).

So what does this mean for our low-skilled women? By all accounts, what it means is maintenance of the established order. From 2000 to 2003, states' use of TANF funds exceeded their grants, greatly depleting the reserves accrued during the first three years of welfare reform when so many people left the rolls. Welfare-to-work programmes are faring poorer than ever now that they can no longer take the 'cream' of the population of single parents to bolster their outcomes (Steps-to-Success 2005 recorded interview, 15 April). Research (Ikenberry 1999; Mazzeo, Rab and Alssid 2003) validates one administrator's judgment (Chapter 5).

... colleges have good programmes for higher-level students but CSOs are struggling with what can be provided to those with few skills. Colleges complain that CSOs aren't sending enough people. CSOs say they don't have the higher-level clients colleges provide for (Angela 2004, personal communication 1 July).

There are also questions that arise when dissecting the problems associated with training and education. How do the states benefit from the existence of welfare-to-work in its varying incarnations? Must states be seen to be tackling the unemployed of publicly supported single parents and therein lies the benefit? Grubb (1996) suggests this is more palatable to Americans than the alternative of allowing individuals to live at public expense without working (p104). For this reason, the US is unlikely to abandon education and training for those least likely to benefit from it. So, the daunting task remains to improve the existing infrastructure. And yet it is not clear that there is much incentive to rigorously critique the outcomes of what learning, and ultimate employment, occurs at the provider level.

Also of some significance is the matter of reporting the programme outcomes at state and central government levels. Some of the smaller, short-term, welfare-to-work programmes dabble in education and training and hire replacement staff every year or two to operate their 'new' programmes, and their outcomes fail to improve.

Indeed, tenuousness seems pervasive. E-mail correspondence with the project coordinator of an office of workforce training in urban Washington State went thus:

Currently our Medical Office [programme] requires a GED or High school Diploma ... and our General Office [programme] requires 3 GED tests taken before they can start. The only [training] that does *not* have skill requirements is the Childcare class, and that class has been cancelled [because] our [funding cut] required us to cancel one of our programs. We chose Childcare because of the low wage (Project Coordinator 2005, recorded interview, 28 March).

What this signifies is that the low skilled women comprising the 'hard-to-serve' now have no choices of training at this college. Others have followed suit. Further, because the option to receive education only is practically and philosophically unsupported by social services (see Chapter 5), case managers state they are in a quandary what to do.

It is not that poor women who have children, few skills and little work experience should not work. But if they are to gain and retain employment, if their children are to have the attention they need and escape poverty and welfare themselves, if they are to gain access to higher education and greater choice, then they must be supplied with tools delivered using appropriate paedagogies to create the necessary skill set. However, not only do they need tools (such acquisition may be possible, but only over the long term), they also need access to jobs that permit the flexibility necessary for single parents struggling with sick children and school holidays. Already we have learned that employers are not likely to choose welfare recipients as employees, and that many of the most disadvantaged are likely to require more help than the average employer, or programme, is willing to tolerate (Grubb 1996; Olson and Pavetti 1996). So, the task to help them find not just work, but appropriate work, complicates matters further. Collectively these considerations help explain why US welfare reform has been unable to make progress with a significant population of single parents.

There will always be a group of individuals who will find the transition to work more challenging than others, but it is costly, both economically and socially, not to



take the task seriously enough for it to traverse four-year election cycles. To be sure, if the findings on public opinion towards welfare recipients were correct, then any politician would require a hearty constitution to seriously challenge the principle of 'any job is a good job'. But, if the American public knew that the thousands of women and children leaving welfare were en route for silent destitution along the fringes of society, would they care? This, too, lies at the heart of the problem because without consideration, then no policy to truly tackle the welfare of fringe dwellers would pass muster.

Everywhere, nation states are facing greater demands: higher unemployment, ageing populations, health care cost increases, smaller families, post-compulsory education and more single parents. These demands have forced reform everywhere and in America particularly. With its proclivity for selective government intervention and limited social safety nets, this has meant greatly limiting the meaning of entitlement. Yet, single parents are a special case everywhere. Further, in the past when there existed labour shortages or inaccessibility to the labour market, the American public agitated en masse and were appeased by increased governmental involvement in creating employment or by widening employment opportunities for excluded groups. In the early twenty-first century, however, we find recession and exclusion for hundreds of thousands of single parents but they are powerless to agitate and relatively simple to ignore. Less simple to ignore are their advocates, but, according to Diana Pearce, (2005a, e-mail communication 6 May), presidential administrations did stop listening in 1994 when the US Congress became Republican.

On welfare reform particularly, the 'deafness' started under the elder President Bush.... The difference in hearings was palpable. Under [the] Democrats, [the] numbers were balanced - though they started welfare reform - but everyone got heard. Under the Republicans, first they cut back on Democratic witnesses, one or two out of twenty, then none. Then they just dispensed with hearings altogether. ...Clinton held administration hearings to gather ideas, all over the country; they listened and engaged.

The matter of inadequate and ineffectual training and education is of critical importance, particularly now, when it is understood that first chance education failed to meet the needs of our studied population. This may be the last opportunity, if it is an opportunity at all, to get the recipe correct. But without an attempt to seriously

tackle second chance education, then what makes welfare reform work forever will be theoretical. Self-direction and the ability to look beyond the immediate, to defer gratification, are tools of education. And, while education may not ensure the development of life's necessary critical thinking skills, lack of education is surely an inhibitor to their development. 'Education, understood in a broad sense rather than purely vocationally, was to be the main instrument in cultivating initiative and responsibility' (Giddens 2000:87). As was discussed in Chapter 4, parental involvement in the educational pursuits of their children is associated with class position and the social and cultural resources that social class yields in society (Lareau 1987:81; Werts and Watley, 1970:193). As a result, an important part of the goal of second chance education is to foster a spirit of learning and pursuit of education in the children of low skilled mothers by way of development and transferral of those values from their parents.

It is with all of this in mind that that a case can be made that the government is in moral and financial deficit. There are reciprocal obligations between governments and citizens with states responsible for securing the 'conditions upon which its citizens are able to win by their own efforts all that is necessary to a full civic efficiency (Hobhouse 1911:158). Despite being almost a century old, these words resonate today.

Equality and inequality don't just refer to the availability of material goods – individuals must have the capability to make effective use of them... Disadvantage should simply be defined as ... not only loss of resources, but loss of freedom to achieve (Giddens 2000: 87-88).

Likewise,

The 'right to work' and the right to a 'living wage' are just as valid as the rights of a person to property... they are integral conditions of a good social order. A society in which a single honest man of normal capacity is definitely unable to find the means of maintaining himself by useful work is to that extent suffering from malorganisation (Hobhouse 1911: 159).

Therefore, states, owe to poor single parents and their children significant support in compensation for renegeing on the promise of access to decent schools, disregarding

their health, and the isolation and lack of opportunity that low skills and learning difficulties bring to the real world. 'It is not [her] fault if there is overproduction in his industry, or if a new and cheaper process has been introduced.... [She] does not direct or regulate industry. That is why it is not charity but justice for what [she] is asking' (p159).

Indebtedness aside, single parents physical, mental and intellectual health impediments have far-reaching consequences for generations. 'The social influences creating underclasses are structural before they are cultural, but once in play they may bring demoralization of a profound kind (Giddens 1994:147). The structures to which Giddens (and Wilson 1996) refer are the collections of poor people living in ghettos where learned ghetto-specific behaviour leaves them unlikely to postpone gratification by looking to the long-term for positive change. Wilson himself grew up in a working poor family in rural America, and his family spent some time on welfare after his father died of at the age of thirty-nine. But what he had that many other poor blacks have not was a college-educated role model in the form of an aunt. In turn, he served in the same position for his younger five siblings. This is precisely the reason why education and training for impoverished, low-skilled women with limited work history should occur from within the larger community of adult education students, instead of within classes of welfare recipients only) so that positive cultural transferral, or mitigation of a 'contagion of bad example' (Hobhouse 1911: 151), has an opportunity to develop.

### **(1.3) Welfare Reform 1996: 'Not "Two Years and Work," But Two Years and Have a Nice Life'**

Such was the comment of DeParle (2004:114) in response to Wisconsin's approach to welfare. Yet, so many of the details we learned in Chapters 3 and 4 appear to have been forgotten, ignored or disbelieved as presented by 'liberal ideologues' when the source (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee –UW-M) was considered (DeParle:76). Rector (1997) supposed that Wisconsin's programmes had debunked the myth that,

Recipients really want to work but jobs are not available; the lack of day care makes employment impossible; education and training are the key to reducing dependence; and it costs more to reform than to continue the status quo ... (online)

Yet, Quinn, Pawasarat et al. (1991) suggested that not one of the state's 'successful' projects worked well.

Indeed, we learned in Chapter 4 that jobs for the least employable are hard to come by, hard to keep or both. These women often lack the skills required: positive attitudes, habits, communication, tact and punctuality (Anderson 2004; Del Rosario 2004). They are burdened by 'guilt, self-doubt, and the scars of physical and emotional abuse' (Walker and Wiseman 2003:178); health, criminal records, lack of work experience, transportation and child care problems, substance abuse, domestic violence issues, low basic skills and learning disabilities (Haskins, Sawhill et al.; Holzer and Stoll 2001; Danziger and Seefeldt 2002).

In light of the current government plan to further limit the treatment of mental health disorders, substance abuse and other barriers to three months, there appears little reason to feel positive about outcomes. At best, Peck (2001) states,

Welfare strategies appear to make sense when the labor market is generating large numbers of contingent jobs; the presence of such jobs facilitates the deregistration of welfare recipients; which in turn means that the policy is perceived as successful. Never mind that the argument is circular, that the jobs are unstable and poorly paid, that the programs are clumsy and ineffective, the overall picture continues to appeal to politicians as an alternative to 'welfare dependency' ( p342).

At worst, welfare strategies simply do not accomplish that which they endeavour.

Programmes do not

... produce a sizable impact on the more disadvantaged, who make up a significant percentage of the program caseload.... In addition, because the more disadvantaged tend to become long-term [welfare] recipients, achieving greater impact for them is the only way – by definition – that [the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills programme] can fulfil its legislated mandate to reduce long-term dependency (Friedlander and Burtless 1995:198).

On the face of it, 'a work requirement is not a penalty. It is the pathway to independence and self-respect. For former welfare recipients, this path has led to a new and better life' (Bush 2002a-online). But we have seen time and again that the path to independence and self-respect is either left unmarked, or too rough a trail to follow. On the one hand, we may (or may not) know how to get there, but the means are unavailable to too many people.

Continuing to present welfare as credible at this point is subterfuge. With many reservations, it could be described as a 'success' for some, but now that it has worked for some yet has failed others, a Plan B is required. We can look to history to see that again welfare has 'failed as an anti-poverty weapon' for least able (Kifner 1967:1). More than forty years later, the view from the stands looks surprisingly familiar and the conversation remains virtually unchanged.

The women I met during the course of this research were very different yet all spoke similarly of a lack of consistency in attention by their varying case managers and mixed access to services. One interviewee has been on welfare for some six years, appears to be entrenched, mostly enjoys her visits to the agency and her current case manager. She has a mobile phone and cable television. Her subsidised housing is all-but cost free. For her, life is momentarily fine, particularly now that she is happily a new mother. Another felt poorly treated by case managers and after years on welfare found herself no longer willing to endure the feelings of denigration. When a job offer presented, she joined the ranks of the working poor, qualifies for a sizable annual tax credit, monthly food stamps and social housing. Today she remains firmly attached to supplementary benefits, 'but anything was better than being on welfare'. Another's situation is intermittently deplorable. She has intermittent and tenuous housing with seemingly abusive homeowners and is welfare entrenched, emotionally fragile, unhappy and feels victimised by case managers. A final interviewee was keen to work, but a criminal record, exceptionally low skills, and the promise of only split shift work ensured employment had evaded her.

The matter of the behaviour of case managers warrants some reflection for it has been a consistent theme visited within this thesis. In Chapter 4 we saw how, 'Some research suggests that states use sanctions against families that do not understand

why they are being sanctioned and that sanctions are sometimes applied inequitably' (Haskins et al. 2001:4). The UK's Social Exclusion Unit considers mutual respect, courtesy, consistency and relevance of interventions vital elements to creating positive change (Social Exclusion Unit 2004). This may also be the official philosophy at US benefits agencies. Yet, welfare recipients and case managers frequently speak of acrimony in their relationships with one another and a commonly used phrase, 'help and hassle', refers to the approach to welfare recipients that is used within agencies. But the issue of devaluing and intimidating individuals who have little to offer and much reason to take is too important to set aside hastily, and one wonders if sensitivity training should be made compulsory for agency employees. Such was the belief of one agency administrator (Anne 2004, recorded interview, 8 June). And yet it was lack of respect from case managers that forced Sarah, in Chapter 7, off welfare and into work, although her children were all virtually grown and thus she had greater work availability. Is it possible that Demoralisation by Design has a purpose?

#### **(1.4) Americans' Values**

Further confounding problems is the topic of low wage work. How much, if at all, can low wage work change the life trajectories of any of these families? The UK has focused on tackling the social exclusion of lone parents by attempting to increase levels of employment in tandem with enhancing services such as early education, childcare<sup>37</sup> and family support. In America, the mandate is to work and the recommendation is to marry. But the mandate conceals a lack of support for making work possible. Furthermore, it is true that American men are now worse off than their low skilled European counterparts and black men are now less likely to be employed than black women (Census Bureau 2003). For these reasons, while two parent families tend to be better off than single parent families, for the women in this study marriage is not necessarily a rational solution to their problems. Moreover, the jobs of the lowest skilled are unavailable in sufficient numbers to draw the very lowest skilled into work. If they present at all, usually they are thankless and

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<sup>37</sup> Both quality and quantity of childcare remain of concern.

inflexible, incompatible with the needs of families, often involuntarily part-time and 'dreadful...' (Grubb 1996:94).

The assumption behind the work mandate is that single mothers have the possibility of employment and self-sufficiency if only they would try. Yet, many do try. If they meet the minimum educational requirements programmes impose, they enter and exit 'one time only' training and education intended to increase skills and create employment. But each time they begin, they have good reason to believe that their needs will not be evaluated, let alone effectively addressed, and their time will be wasted because they are unable to advance. If they fail to meet minimum education standards, their choices, and life chances, are bleaker still. For those women who do find work, they find it in tenuous jobs with few benefits of any kind, and they are precisely the people who need benefits. They need medical care for they are less healthy than those more affluent. They need access to time off when their children are ill, and they need access to days off for no reason other than having the ability to reorganize or mentally unwind from awful jobs that demand much and pay little.

Furthermore, one wonders if saturation theory is at work in US society. There is some evidence to support the fact that as education levels and standards of living increases, people grow less tolerant of financing welfare for excluded populations. This may be the case with members of the middle class and its aspirants, who, forged by self-interest, grow more individualist in their approach to support services. It may matter little the reasons for public willingness to cut benefits and the lack of usefulness of welfare-to-work programmes, but it is possible that greater understanding of the motivations could be helpful to the organisations which advocate for the poor.

We know the welfare rolls decreased in accordance with US welfare reform implementation but that the employment of former recipients did not increase commensurately. Many have remained poor and on various forms of public assistance, but they are off the rolls and welfare reform is an official success. Clearly, if this was the only objective and reducing social exclusion simply an appealing potential by-product of reform, then one cannot help but wonder if such a superficial approach to welfare is not representative of the values of US society at

large. Should Bahle (2003) be correct and 'Each intuitional arrangement needs to be based on social values' (p7), then what does this say about the social values of United States policy makers and the voting public? For the foreseeable future, will 'no new taxes' be the rallying cry for successful politicians catering to the millions of Americans who yearn to pay as few taxes as possible? Certainly it is understandable that many Americans are concerned about their own welfare and, given the cost of health care, insurance, prescription medication and nursing homes, question how they will manage in the years when they may need it most. Currently this is of particular concern in light of scares about the tenuousness of the state pension that has left many people anxious it will disappear as a retirement safety net.

Whilst Michael Harrington (1997) called on the public to witness the divide between those who have and those who have nothing, there endures an anti-giving philosophy from many of those who have the ability to give to those who are in need of receiving. In essence, these government incursions into affecting positive social change are disturbing to some, in this case two tax and economic policy analysts writing from the Cato Institute, because,

... this administration's budget policies ... always seem to cost taxpayers more money.... Bush wants to show that he is 'compassionate' with his conservatism. But big-time social spending sure isn't compassionate to federal taxpayers (Edwards and DeHaven 2003-online).

And yet,

[we are taught] to look for the causes of poverty in ethnic disadvantage, in inadequate education, in poor health care ... but that is not, however, the logical process of the modern world [because] remedies for poverty ... cost money, which is an unwelcome thought to those who must pay (Galbraith 1986: 35-36).

Clearly, welfare reform policies have grown progressively punitive over time, participation requirements have become more rigorous and welfare-related politics has grown increasingly polarised. Many Americans continue to mistrust centralised government and the welfare state is, '...a European invention, thoroughly at odds with Americans' preferences for small government, personal freedom, and individual responsibility' (Gilens 1999:1). And yet little is said about those with



few marketable skills, along with a host of other problems, and about whom little is known what to do (Holzer 2001; Walker and Wiseman 2003; Courtney and Dworsky 2006)

### **(1.5) A Call for New Thinking**

How can the challenges being posed by single parenthood be met? We saw in Chapters Four and Five how the United States has chosen to approach this by requiring case managers to be active advocates for marriage. Also we saw how for some women work is likely to be little or no more advantageous than welfare. The principle of the tax credit ensuring it pays to work is helpful to many, but for others, in light of the problems of trying to sustain work, it has limited attraction for they seldom remain employed long enough to benefit. Further, the costs of trying to make work pay in terms of spending on education and training and childcare subsidies, tax credits notwithstanding, have already exceeded the costs of welfare prior to reform and yet many remain unemployed and, seemingly, unemployable.

‘All this shows the difficulty in finding the means of meeting this particular claim of justice, but it does not shake its position as a claim of justice. A right is a right none the less though the means of securing it be imperfectly known’ (Hobhouse 1911: 160). Therefore, new thinking about neglected alternatives is needed from policy makers and it must be acknowledged that national governments can no longer cope in the same way they have previously with expanding need and the pressures of global markets. Increasingly, ‘We have to find ways of taking care of ourselves, because we can’t now rely on the big institutions to do so’ (Giddens 2000:3). Yet, in so doing, attempts to fix these social problems in any workable way are unlikely to materialise rapidly; therefore, a commitment must be made to embark upon effective and much longer-term solutions.

With workfare’s failures, policies and funding for the mandated short-term training currently available to the most at-risk populations should be held wide open to scrutiny and revision. Additionally, there should be broad recognition that the least employable need more help than either colleges or case managers can likely afford

in terms of cost, expertise and time. To be sure, despite an overwhelming amount of data and research into addressing the needs of this population, it is clear that little is understood about how to help these women (Phillips 1997; Jencks and Swingle 2000; Peck 2001). Still, there are several possibilities. We know that short-term training in women-only welfare programmes is of limited value. Why are these women who have so few skills required to be seated in classrooms for as many as forty hours per week when traditional classrooms failed them on their first attempt? A more reasonable approach may be to permit them to attend non-traditional (self-paced, one-on-one) classes with other members of the education-seeking public instead of segregating them to educational ghettos of classes filled with other welfare recipients very much like them. Further, instead of scaling back job creation programmes for 'hard-to-serve' TANF recipients, they should be expanded into longer-term training (12 months plus) for those least likely to work. The principal of these programmes is that participants train for a job, receive a wage for their work and keep some of their benefit. But these programmes, too, must establish the flexibility required to cater to the needs of these women. The argument will be that there are not the funds available to sustain these programmes, but the alternative is that employment of the least-skilled will not be secured without it and that, too, has economic and social costs not only for this generation but also for their children.

Another recommendation is that a better use of funding would be to place greater focus on their children by creating access to programmes such as intended by the early Ypsilanti, Michigan programme discussed on page 102 and the original incarnation of Sure Start, while at the same time providing practical solutions to the problems of their mothers. Esping-Anderson and Sarasa (2002), suggest that investing in children is part of a 'win-win policy model' that not only ensures child welfare, but makes a strong 'actuarial' case insofar that working women will likely reimburse the subsidy via tax payments made throughout their lives (p17). The authors advise that developing responsible social expenditures are a 'productive investment in the future' for they ensure the welfare of today's children by enhancing their life chances and productivity later (p17).

While interim evaluations of Sure Start have found limited effectiveness, this may be because the programme may be morphing, suggests Norman Glass, one of its

developers, 'What started off as a family support programme for parents in deprived areas has become a programme in which the important thing is to get people back into work, with a focus on childcare services and employability (quoted in Abrams 2005). This focus on employment need not be of concern, however, so long as emphasis also is placed on the creation of tangible skills, along with increased access to more and better childcare, and an array of other relevant support service to make employment possible, and lastly the creation of jobs able to flex to the needs of low-skilled, poor mothers. In lieu of these, and if Sure Start's long-term effectiveness is being compromised, then it may become remarkably similar to workfare and, then, there should be little surprise at emerging data on its limited effectiveness for the lowest skilled. Regardless, even if Sure Start's priorities have changed, there is some evidence that it may have helped limit teen pregnancies, increased middle school academic achievement and increased recognition of special educational needs in children (Barnes, Desousa Frost, Harper, Laban 2005:2,5). Yet the United Kingdom's single parents on benefit do not, as yet, have work requirements as is the case in the United States. A shift in this direction would pose an enormous challenge to US policy. Should the virtually unthinkable happen and forty percent of US single parents on TANF be exempted from work in favour of a cohesive Sure Start-like programme with multi-level professional services, who would decide which population could avoid work mandates? The majority of case managers have neither shown themselves consistently amenable to single parent benefit entitlements, education and training, nor do they always appear to have the skills to make appropriate judgements on who is and is not able to work full-time. If the philosophy emerged that the neediest population of welfare recipients should be released from work requirements in favour of long-term services helpful to them and their children, such a provision would require an enormous shift in thinking and, indeed, federal and state law. The Ypsilanti study may have had some impressive outcomes in the past forty years (see Schweinhart 2004 on page 102), but the success may hail from a time when far less was demanded of poor single parents in terms of workfare compliance and the labour market was markedly different than today's'.

It was here, at the meeting of the real and ideal that I hoped to advocate for change by creating policy models based on the best and worst of possible worlds. The best

of possible worlds would encourage support on many, long-term levels. But multiple layers of assistance would necessarily involve numerous qualified professionals and increased cost. Not only is this unlikely to materialise but also appears so far from within the current realm of possibility as to seem a little Pollyannish.

Instead, we are left with the discomfort of the real world. The principle of the New Deal, that government has an obligation to assist the less fortunate, has faded greatly, and it remains to be seen what the new focus will be after the 2008 US presidential elections. As of today, people are increasingly required to manage their own fate, and social justice is seldom a topic of discussion. For those seeking a second chance, this means the withdrawal of already meagre services designed to assist them meet their goals. Murray (2005) advocates for the abandonment of the 'feckless' underclass and suggests that it this population will soon cease to be a political issue in the UK as it has in the United States, for 'writing off of a portion of the population as unfit for civil society' is a necessary 'but not happy solution'(p6).

Since George Bush was elected for his second presidential term in November 2004, he has fulfilled his promise of limiting tax increases. This has resulted in decreasing spending by way of funding cuts to the departments of Employment Security, which provides job training to the unemployed, and education, in particular the education of the low skilled. The US federal budget for 2006 indicated an almost two-thirds curtailment of funding for adult education and a severance of funding for vocational education (Department of Education 2005), and colleges, workfare programmes and benefits agencies are not yet sure how they will cope in a world with increased demands on government funds. This administration has grasped what we learned in Chapters 3 and 4. Namely, that vocational education 'has produced little or no evidence of improved outcomes for students despite decades of federal investment' and basic skills and job training '... was found to have a modest impact on adult literacy, skill attainment and job placement, but data quality problems and the lack of a national evaluation made it difficult to assess the program's effectiveness' (Department of Education 2005).

Initially hoping to create a successful workfare programme template, disappointingly I am left in want. As many questions as there have been answers now remain. Where does this leave our single parents? And what of the void left? Will the mandated training ultimately evaporate along with funding, or will programme directors become more creative and better at meeting their goals? How helpful is their creativity likely to be when they have limited and sporadic funding and students are afflicted with much more than marginal education? If workfare is to continue in any form, should funding priorities be given to less expensive programs such as the short-term training or should the diminishing government investment focus on more expensive and extensive programs that provide for complex needs?

Since we know details of short-term training effectiveness, then perhaps the more costly programs are be a better investment. It is difficult to tell. Had Sure Start persevered with its initial goals, we may have had a model from which to draw for US policy. Lacking this, there is little to go on. Will the government revert to a work creation programme as it did in the 1930s when Roosevelt forestalled social unrest by vowing to take action against unemployment? This seems unlikely. The 1930s saw massive demonstrations but lone parents hardly have the numbers, solidarity or wherewithal to successfully lobby for change. Protests may bring results for the masses but not these mothers.

The recipe for first chance employment and opportunity is elementary: access to quality educational resources early on, absence from obvious want, an attentive family and a network of individuals with jobs, aspirations and perseverance all equate to a healthy aspirational package. A second chance system is a different matter entirely and calls for significant change to the model used for the last four decades. Unfortunately, we have either been poor students, or hoping beyond reason for something from very little. Workfare fails because there is little that can be done to alter the effect of neglecting primary and secondary school. New thinking is needed. Part of that new thinking is to re-evaluate welfare reform from the perspective that it has succeeded in doing what it can for the less compromised sixty percent who have found work, or simply left the welfare rolls. In time it is reasonable to think the better off probably would have found work anyway, but the

limited resources offered to them by training and education providers may have tipped the balance in their favour. The remaining forty percent who continue not to work require more than the current incarnation of reform. For them it did not work, and neither will it without access to the resources they need early on – as early on as during primary education.

### **(1.6) Lessons for Policy**

What sort of policy interventions might improve the situation? States should press the federal government for the development of services to coordinate comprehensive responses to the needs of this population. Quality, readily accessed pre and postnatal care needs to be considered of paramount importance for single parents and community workers should ensure that it is taken up. Quality, sustained, early childhood interventions must focus on the children of these women because those who experience disadvantage fall behind at every stage. Long-term, well-funded, coherent programmes to prevent teenage pregnancy should exist at all levels of family life, i.e., schools, benefits agencies, clinics and hospitals. All of these families should be assigned a qualified (MSW) social worker that has their interests at heart and who holds ultimate sway at benefits agencies. The real policy-makers are the local practitioners: case managers, social workers and teachers, and thus policy must be individualised and set at the local level.

States must support comprehensive programmes staffed with skilled professionals to prevent and address the problems of domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse and neglect. Providing greater oversight will ensure consistency in access to services. Lastly, states should ensure that no family is nutritionally deprived. All this amounts to the price tag for the government's disregard of the least able and the isolation of them into mostly unseen areas of lasting poverty and crime. Moreover, their isolationism could be viewed as a not unreasonable response to public disdain, disregard and the imposition of stigma. Without adequate levels of support, the worst-off will not work for they cannot work without multi-level assistance and their children are at risk of future labour market detachment and delinquency. That is, they must be drawn in to the social fold. Without this

attention, the cycle continues and costs are distributed amongst benefits agencies, the criminal justice system, struggling schools, homeless shelters, government sponsored food banks and welfare-to-work programmes of little or no use. As we saw in chapter 4, the direct costs of poverty are far-reaching and ignorance of them in pursuit of limited governmental intervention may prove to be false economy. Further calculations of the data presented in Chapter 4 remain unquantified in aggregate. It is unsure why this remains the case, but it would be helpful for any future research to tabulate the collective costs of neglect of this population of needy women. In essence, while welfare has a cost, the cost of neglect extends far beyond the boundaries of direct cash assistance in the form of TANF. With such information, it may be possible, then, to make a financial case for the attention that poor families need and with less political polemics. If this is indeed the case, comments such as ‘... big-time social spending sure isn’t compassionate to federal taxpayers’ (Edwards and DeHaven 2003) may have less resonance.

This may not appear to be a ‘third way’, but, in essence, it is. In the words of Giddens (2000), ‘In a world marked by rapid social and technological change, government must be empowering rather than heavy-handed’ (p5). Nowhere has a long-term, broad-spectrum, honest approach been taken to stabilise these poor families. In America, there are four-year presidential election cycles and two-year cycles in congress. These upheavals may bring expertise or they may invoke confusion or compromise. Certainly what is clear is that this system has so far ensured the accomplishment of little that is not at least partially palatable to party affiliates. The US may be the most powerful and affluent country in the developed world, but it is also amongst the most unequal. Little sense of solidarity remains between its rich and poor who now are required to take personal responsibility for their collective position at the lowest end of the social spectrum. While social justice as a reason for support of the least able seemingly is passé, it may be this that holds good societies together.

Regardless of what emerges from the most recent restructuring, competing interests will ensure continued the second chance education and policy tug-of-war and the ideas presented here will likely remain a fantasy. Should any effective measures materialise, they would necessarily be revolutionary, long term, perhaps more

expensive than currently and reveal the true conditions and causes thereof of more than a million women.

Here is a great mass of people, yet it takes an effort of the intellect and will even to see them.... I had proved to my satisfaction that there were around 50,000,000 poor in this country. Yet, I realized I did not believe my own figures. The poor existed in the Government reports; they were percentages and numbers in long, close columns, but they were not part of my experience.

...Poverty is off the beaten track. It always has been. The ordinary tourist never left the main highway...' (Harrington 1997: 2-3).



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**Appendix A**  
**Aide de Memoire for Community Service Officers**

Contact Name \_\_\_\_\_

Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***All of the following questions refer to the DSHS 'hard to serve' population of single mothers who are lacking basic academic skills and have little or no useful employment history.***

**All numbers are approximate.**

1. How many TANF recipients are there per year?
2. What percent of TANF recipients are 'hard to serve'?
3. What are the characteristics of the 'hard to serve'?
4. What is the average amount of time a 'hard to serve' recipient remains on public assistance?
5. What are the barriers to work identified for the 'hard to serve' population?
6. How likely is a person with one or more barriers to lose TANF support?
7. How are barriers identified and by whom?
8. Is learning disability assessment available?
9. Are there assessments for depression or other mental illnesses?
10. By whom are remedial education and job training provisions made?
11. Have any special problems arisen in the relationship between social service officers and education providers?
12. Who identifies clients in need of remedial education?
13. What assessment mechanism is used to select clients for remedial education?
14. How is the quality of education and training services evaluated?
15. Are there any ramifications for education providers for poor outcomes?
16. About how many clients return to welfare after not completing education and training?
17. What are the ramifications for clients for not completing their education and training?
18. What fraction of TANF clients receives education and training?
19. What is the average amount of time spent in education and job training?
20. How are unusual or difficult cases dealt with?
21. How are foreign language clients catered to?
22. How do caseworkers determine positive outcomes for TANF clients?
23. How is data for 'hard to serve' populations collected?
24. Can I get copies of any of this data?

**Appendix B**  
**Aide de Memoire for Welfare-to-Work Programme Professionals**

Contact Name \_\_\_\_\_

Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***This study is directed at DSHS 'hard to serve' female clients on TANF.***

1. What is your understanding of the term 'hard to serve'?
2. Approximately how many students are served each year?
3. What are the criteria to qualify for programme entry?
4. Approximately what percentages of students do not have a GED or high school diploma?
5. Of those who do not have a GED or high school diploma, how many enter with a grade equivalency of 7.0 or less?
6. Are GED classes available?
7. Do limited English speakers at all levels have access to English language classes?
8. Do students have assistance with job search and placement? If so, how?
9. What vocational training classes or programmes are available to students?
10. If academic and vocational training instructors operate separately, how much contact, if any, is there between them?
11. How much contact, if any, is there between programme staff and students case managers?
12. How long do students typically remain in your programme?
13. What is the maximum length of time students are permitted to remain?
14. How many hours of attendance per week are mandatory?
15. Is free childcare provided? If not, how do students pay for childcare?
16. What are the repercussions of a student's failure to show for class?
17. Do any students return to your program after leaving?
18. If any, why do they return?
19. Are you aware how social service agencies determine which clients should receive training and education?
20. Does your programme have guidelines or externally imposed requirements about the nature and duration of education and training?
21. How does your program define program completion?
22. In your opinion, what are the greatest barriers to successful programme completion and future long-term employment facing students?
23. In your opinion, has the implementation of TANF time limits made any difference to characteristics of the student body?
24. Does the department collect, or have access to, data on the rates at which former students gain employment and the duration of the employment?
25. If no, is there any evidence about whether employment rates are a problem?

26. Are teaching staff full or part time, permanent or temporary?
27. What are the qualifications required of teaching staff?

## Appendix C

### Via Facsimile, Royal Mail, Electronic-mail Public Disclosure Coordinator

College Address

Re: **Public Disclosure Request**

Dear XXX,

I am a PhD candidate from the University of Liverpool undertaking research of US welfare reform and efficacy in welfare-to-work programs. It is with regards to this that I request public disclosure.

Pursuant to the Washington State Public Disclosure Act, RCW 42.17.010 et seq., I am requesting documents relevant to student placement into and completion of the Pre-Employment (PET) classes of Customer Service and Wood Construction/ESL for the last twelve-month period available.

Specific information that I am requesting will include the following:

- The number of individuals enrolled into each PET.
- The number of individuals who completed each programme.
- The number of individuals who were enrolled but exited training prior to completion.
- The number of placements in work directly from PET.
- An explanation of the term 'complete'.
- The amount in dollars of block grant received to fund the programmes and the share provided per job title.

The Public Disclosure Act requires that the Department respond to this request promptly. Specifically, the Department must respond within five business days of receiving the request.<sup>38</sup> If the Department withholds any public record, then the Department bears the burden of proving that the record is exempt from the disclosure requirements of the Public Disclosure Act.<sup>39</sup> The Department must identify the record being withheld and provide a written statement of the specific reasons for the denial.<sup>40</sup> The Department may not withhold

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<sup>38</sup> RCW 42.17.320.

<sup>39</sup> See RCW 42.17.260(1).

<sup>40</sup> *Servais, supra*, 127 Wn.2d at 828.

a record if the information the Department claims is exempt from disclosure can be redacted from the record.<sup>41</sup>

Because academic and non-profit institutions generally receive these services without charge, should a fee be incurred for processing my request, please contact me with the details. Otherwise, please forward the documents to my attention at the following address: 1516 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119. Please call me at (206) 409 1927 should you have any questions concerning this request.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Julie Aldcroft  
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

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<sup>41</sup> RCW 42.17.310(2); 42.17.260