A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INDIVIDUALS IN TRANSITION FROM WELFARE TO WORK IN AN APPALACHIAN AREA

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Abstract

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INDIVIDUALS IN TRANSITION FROM WELFARE TO WORK IN AN APPALACHIAN AREA (160 pp.)

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This qualitative study explored the phenomenological or “lived experiences” of current and former welfare recipients who are in transition from welfare to work and who live in an Appalachian area of southern Ohio. By utilizing in-depth qualitative interviews the researcher identified emerging themes and patterns of adjustment employed by the participants to help facilitate their transition from welfare to work. Those services, resources, policies, and procedures that the participants perceived to be effective in assisting them to make the transition from welfare to work were identified. In addition, those services, resources, policies and procedures that were perceived by the participants to be ineffective were noted. Any remaining needs, challenges, or barriers that the participants believed to be thwarting their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency were examined as well as the participants’ recommendations as to how to address those issues.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Jerry A. Olsheski

Associate Professor of Counseling and Higher Education
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents, Floyd and Martha (Grushon) King. My father taught me the importance of perseverance and hard work. As a World War II veteran and throughout his life he has lived by the creed-- “I’m never down; I’m either up or getting up.” My mother taught me the joy of reading, learning, and ever growing. They both consistently demonstrated the joy of their faith in God through living for and giving to others. Thus, to them I am forever grateful.

Love and gratitude are also expressed to my beloved wife, Zandra, for her unrelenting, loving support and encouragement, as well her gracious, cheerful reminders that she has sacrificed as much as I during this lengthy endeavor. Indeed she has and perhaps much more so. Therefore, she was not about to let me abort this project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

Approximately four years after President Clinton signed and Congress enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996, welfare rolls had declined over 50 percent (Lichter & Jayakody, 2002; Rose, 2001; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2000). By 2001 the number of families receiving welfare had been reduced by 63.2% (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). As impressive as these figures are there has been a growing concern among some policy makers that while PRWORA has been effective in terms of reducing welfare caseloads, it has done little to actually reduce the plight of many families yet living in poverty (ACS & Loprest, 2001; Cancian, Haverman, Myer, & Wolf (2000).

Midgley (2001) noted that there is little evidence to support the claim that welfare reform based on the work-first model is magically solving problems of poverty and deprivation on American society, or that the termination of welfare benefits will promote economic development and solve entrenched social problems. Welfare reform can and will reduce the welfare caseload, but its potential to alleviate poverty and propel the poor into the comfortable world of the middle class is limited (p. 292).

Midgley (2000) added that the issues “of crime, family disintegration, violence, drug abuse, and illegitimacy have not been solved by welfare reform” (p. 35). Besharov and Germanis (2000) recognized that welfare reform had not “lifted large numbers of female headed households out of poverty” (p. 33). Similarly, even with the reduction of families...
on welfare Brauner and Loprest (1999) further noted that most individuals leaving welfare for employment still did not earn enough to place them above the national poverty level. Scheer (2006) pointed out “that at least a million welfare recipients have neither jobs nor benefits and have sunk deeper into poverty.” He added, “For those who found jobs, a great many became mired in minimum wage jobs—sometimes more than one” (p. 8).

Statement of the Problem

There have been few qualitative studies reflecting the “lived experience” of the individuals themselves who receive TANF (Crawford and Kimmel, 1999; Seccombe, James, & Walters, 1998). Meanwhile, qualitative inquiry continues to emerge as a valuable approach to research (Hammersly, 2001). Thus, qualitative studies could add to the analysis of the impact of welfare reform as well as provide data for post-welfare reform policy and support services.

Robb (1999) noted, “Poor people have a long overlooked capacity to contribute to the analysis of policy…. ” (p. xii). Robb (1999) suggested that the poor could provide valuable input in the development of welfare policy. Similarly, Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson (2000) concluded, “Making welfare reform successful requires that one’s status as client not be conceived as antithetical to one’s status as democratic citizen, that clients become participants and not merely spectators in the shaping of their futures” (p. 13). Scheer (2006) observed that “nobody seems to have thought it important to assess how the families on Aid to Families with Dependent Children fared after they left welfare” (p. 8).
This study attempted to provide qualitative data concerning individuals who are in transition from welfare to work. Both current and previous welfare recipients were interviewed. In doing so it was the researcher’s hope that these and other individuals who live in Appalachia or elsewhere indeed can be participants rather than spectators in the process of welfare reform.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation was three-fold. The first objective was to better understand the phenomenological or “lived experiences” of individuals who are attempting to transition from welfare to work. For some participants, their lived experience may be that of simply surviving with or without welfare (TANF). The focus will be to provide opportunities for individuals to tell their own stories about their personal attempts to make the transition from welfare to work (i.e., from cash assistance to sustained employment and self-sufficiency).

The second objective was to identify effective coping strategies, services, and resources utilized by the recipients that help facilitate the transition from welfare to work. This might also include identifying alternative means of adaptation, adjustment, or survival employed by the participants (i.e., community resources, Social Security--SSI or SSDI, bartering, etc.).

The third objective was to identify any remaining challenges, barriers, or needs confronting those who are attempting to transition from welfare to work and toward
self-sufficiency. The last objective was to determine what recommendations, if any, would participants make to policy makers and services providers to better assist recipients to make the transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency?

Research Questions

Within the above framework the following research questions were addressed:

1.) What is the “lived experience” of individuals residing in an Appalachian area who are in transition from welfare to work?

2.) What interventions, services, or patterns of adjustment were most effective or ineffective from the perspective of the recipients themselves in helping to facilitate their transition from welfare to work in an Appalachian area?

3.) From the perspective of the participants what, if any, major challenges, barriers, or conditions yet remain that hinder participants from making the transition from welfare to work and achieving self-sufficiency?

4.) What recommendations would participants make to policy makers and service providers to better assist recipients in making the transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency?

The Place

This study was conducted in three southern counties of Ohio. The counties are part of a Tri-State region consisting of Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia. The Tri-State is representative of a much broader geographical area known as Appalachia. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), authorized by Congress in 1965, defined Appalachia as follows:
A 200,000 square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (ARC, 2006).

It is important to note that Appalachia is not simply a geographical area, but an area that has experienced considerable levels of poverty and other challenges. Denham (2005) observed:

…according to the 2000 Census, 350 of the 410 counties in the Appalachian Region have experienced a reduction in poverty rates from 31% in 1960 to 13.6% and the percentage of adults with a high school diploma has increased by almost 70%. Nevertheless, problems still exist in much of the Appalachian region and factors such as isolation, dependence on extractive industries, lack of investment in human capital, and problems in educational settings are well documented and create barriers for Appalachians including those in southeast Ohio (p. 2).

Significance of the Study

As described above, the primary purpose of this study was to broaden the knowledge about individuals and their families living in an Appalachian area who have experienced or are experiencing the transition from welfare to work. Analysis of each participant’s “lived experiences” may better inform policy makers, professional counselors (career, community, and vocational rehabilitation), social workers, and other service providers about the needs and challenges of those individuals attempting to transition from welfare
to work and/or to simply survive. In addition, the study may assist in the development or enhancement of essential service delivery systems, resources, policies, and procedures to better facilitate the transition from welfare to work. Perhaps the resulting data may assist other families who live in Appalachian areas to transition from public assistance toward gainful employment and personal and family-sufficiency.

Limitations

The study included only those volunteers residing in three southern Ohio counties in Appalachia who currently receive or have previously received TANF and who were attempting to make the transition from welfare to work. These experiences may not be descriptive of other TANF recipients living in an Appalachian area.

Similarly, the study consisted of ten volunteer participants who were current or former TANF recipients. Although qualitative studies may consist of a single participant or several participants, the ten individuals and their respective lived experiences described in this study may not be representative of other TANF recipients.

In addition, the interviews were conducted over a 4 week period. Thus, the lived experiences of the participants at the “point in time” of their interviews may not be representative of the lived experiences of the same participants if interviewed sometime later during their five-years of eligibility for TANF. This could especially be so if the participants were granted hardship extensions beyond the 5-year time limits for TANF.

This study included volunteers who participated in the Job Search Program and/or other programs and assignments sponsored by each County Department of Job and Family Services. Participants were interviewed at least twice. Each interview lasted
approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours for a total of 3 to 4 hours per participant. I continued to interview TANF recipients until no additional major themes or patterns were identified.

From these in-depth interviews and observations I gathered a rich and “thick description” about the participants’ experiences (Geertz, 1973; Padgett, 1998). By employing a qualitative approach I made a conscious effort to hear the voice of the participants themselves including their perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and personal beliefs (Lucas & Jarrett, 2001).

Definitions

The following definitions are presented in order to provide a better understanding of this study:

Appalachia-- the region located in the eastern U.S. surrounding the Appalachian Mountains which has experienced economic and other challenges.

Comprehensive Education and Training Administration Program (CETA)--developed in the 1970’s as a training program that included more strict eligibility requirements and limits on the amount participants could earn.

Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIPS)--medical insurance for those children and youth in Ohio whose families meet income guidelines.

CORE Services-- those general services and resources available at the “One-Stops” including labor market information, job search strategies, and resume and interview services.

Human Capital-- generally regarded as an individual’s abilities, skills, education, expertise, and training and the impact these components have upon employment, earnings, and the economy itself.
Intensive Services-- Additional services provided to individuals who are not employed after utilizing CORE Services. It may include additional training, community and/or rehabilitation counseling, and other services to assist in procuring employment.

Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS)-- provided education, training, and job placement services to individuals including those receiving AFDC during the 1990’s.

Leavers-- individuals who are no longer receiving cash assistance (TANF).

Jobs Training and Partnership Act (JTPA)-- a provided training and job placement services. JTPA was the predecessor to WIA.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)-- legislation reformed the welfare laws by authorizing a new system of block grants to states and changed the structure and provision of public assistance.

Poverty Guidelines-- These are published and updated periodically by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The guidelines are a “simplified version of the poverty thresholds that the Census Bureau uses … to prepare its estimates of the number of persons and families living in poverty” (Retrieved 1/6/06 from http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/05fedreg.htm).

Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC)-- the agency in Ohio designated by the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for providing vocational rehabilitation and other services to individuals with disabilities.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)--cash assistance usually with accompanying medical coverage and Food Stamps/Card.
Transition from welfare to work-- the experiences of recipients as they attempt to move from TANF to sustained employment and self-sufficiency.

Transition Services-- services such as medical coverage and food stamps or card to assist individuals who were receiving public assistance, but who are now employed.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)--signed agreements among different partnering agencies within a given geographic or demographic area to provide employment and training services.

One-Stop Centers-- facilities or online programs designed to provide employment services, labor market information, and other job or career related services.

Ohio Works First (OWF)--a more recent term for cash assistance or TANF in Ohio.

Work Experience Program (WEP)--assignments authorized by Job and Family Services to provide recipients practical, hands-on work experience.

Work Incentive Program (WIN)--provided individuals receiving public assistance opportunities to participate in employment-related activities, job placement, and personal, career, and rehabilitation counseling.

Workforce Investment Act (WIA)--the restructuring of employment and training systems toward customer service and performance accountability by streamlining services and offering universal access for all job seekers including individuals with disabilities.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

A Brief Review of Welfare Reform and Job Training in the U.S.

In 1935 President Franklin Roosevelt initiated the New Deal which included federal authorization of Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). This concept emerged from the Social Security Act which provided support for children and their parent(s) if the parent(s) were unable to support the family financially (O’Niel, Bassi, & Wolf, 1987). ADC was later renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to reflect the expansion of services to the entire family unit. Eventually the public assistance programs became known simply as welfare.

In 1965 President Johnson implemented his “War on Poverty.” Albeda and Tilly (1996) noted that in the 1960’s the primary approach by policy makers to reduce the number of families on public assistance was an improved economy. By creating more jobs it was thought more people would obtain employment and become financially independent. Emphasis was placed upon education, training, and case management (Daniel-Echols, & Colley, 2001). A key component of this approach, however, was mandated assignments for participants (i.e., a percentage of recipients were required to take part in education, training, or other designated assignments).

In 1967 the Work Incentive Program (WIN) was initiated to implement these changes in welfare reform. Participants were placed in various assignments that focused primarily on job placement. However, some WIN programs provided literacy and adult basic education classes, General Education Development (GED) preparation, and other basic training activities.
Policy makers viewed the WIN Program primarily as a vehicle for mandating work assignments or job placements rather than focusing on educational and training opportunities (Bernstein & Greenberg, 2001). Regardless of this different approach, however, welfare caseloads continued to escalate and it appeared that President Johnson’s War on Poverty had not yet been won.

Human Capital

During the late 1950’s and into the 1960’s the concept of ‘human capital’ began to emerge. In 1958 Mincer’s article, “Investment in Human Capital and Personal Income,” appeared in the *Journal of Political Economy* and proved to be a seminal source for the concept of human capital. Mincer perceived the difference in one’s earnings as linked to one’s skills and abilities or human capital. Later, Becker (1964), a colleague of Mincer’s at the University of Chicago, posited in his book, *Human Capital*, that investing in human capital through training and education was similar to investing in factories and machinery. Thus, human capital (i.e., skills and abilities) was identified as assets which one owned.

In time human capital was regarded as an individual’s abilities, skills, education, training, as well as medical care and how these components impacted employment, earnings, and the economy itself. This concept also influenced welfare reform policies and programs by assisting individuals to enhance their human capital and thereby help recipients move from welfare to work.

However, during the 1970’s the economy was not conducive to absorbing the growing number of families receiving ADC. As a result another major shift occurred in
addressing welfare reform. President Nixon’s administration defined and implemented “workfare” which emphasized that recipients should become employed or, if not, they should at least do work assignments for their public assistance (Dinerman, 1977). Thus, policy makers changed from an “improved economy” approach for reducing welfare to an “implementing initiatives” approach. They believed that new targeted initiatives such as increased training, utilization of previous work experience, and enhanced motivation might better reduce the need for participants’ dependency upon public assistance.

The Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration (CETA) Program enacted in 1973 reflected this change in approach (Rose, 1995). Many perceived CETA as an effort to further initiate a “make-work” approach or workfare. This meant that recipients would work off their welfare payments (Rose, 1995). Katz (1996) noted that during this period of welfare reform, the focus moved from the reduction of the causes of poverty to simply the reduction of caseloads.

Throughout the 1980’s policies became more restrictive to dissuade individuals from applying for public assistance (Withorn, 1996). Job training was prioritized as a viable approach to stem the tide of increased welfare rolls. In addition, parents of children over the age of six years old were no longer exempt from the work assignments (Trattner, 1994).

*The Job Training Partnership Act*

In 1982 the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) succeeded the CETA Program. The JTPA was officially implemented October 1, 1983. The JTPA attempted to correct some
of the perceived limitations of CETA. For example, Rose (2000) noted that CETA guidelines “meant that the work was often insufficient by industry standards” (p. 284). Rose also perceived that CETA’s “directives to refrain from normal government operations…meant that projects were easily construed as unnecessary” (p. 284).

Additionally, policy makers did not want the training programs offered through CETA to compete with the private sector. According to Rose (2000) these restrictions often “mitigated against the production of useful goods” (p. 284). Lastly, there were concerns that CETA funding might have been used in place of other state and local funding. However, one study showed this substitution of funds to be from 11% to 18% (Cook, Adams, Rawlins, & Associates, 1985).

JTPA attempted to rectify some of these limitations of CETA by providing a more progressive approach to move men and women from unemployment and welfare to the workplace. These initiatives included emphasis upon helping disadvantaged youth, dislocated workers, and others confronting various barriers to employment. Services included assistance with job search, on-the-job training, basic education, and GED preparation. In addition to JTPA other programs were emerging to help facilitate this welfare to work process. The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS) was one such program.

*The JOBS Program*

In 1988 the centerpiece for welfare reform was the Family Support Act (FSA). The FSA initiated the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS). The JOBS Program showed much promise by emphasizing preparation for employment
through on-the-job training (OJT), Community Work Experience Programs (CWEP), as well as services for TANF recipients dealing with stress resulting from the transition from welfare to work (Price, et al., 1992). Specifically, the JOBS Program attempted to take a more holistic approach to job training and job placement. Various support services were added to better assist families to prepare for and enter the workforce including personal and career counseling in addition to increased monitoring of child support payments (Price, Van Ryn, & Ryan, 2002).

Under JOBS some states permitted greater latitude and creativity in developing pilot programs to assist men and women in transition from welfare to work. One such program initiated in Ohio in 1990 was the JOBS Student Retention Program (JSRP). It was implemented through the Ohio Department of Human Services in conjunction with the two-year Community Colleges and Regional University Campuses.

Although policy makers recognized that post-secondary technical or college training was not necessarily appropriate for all individuals receiving public assistance, programs such as JSRP (later renamed Job Prep Program) did provide opportunities for men and women to transition from public assistance to gainful employment. In Ohio and other states it was the difference between recipients starting an entry-level job or starting a career leading to personal and financial self-sufficiency.

For example, in one county in Southern Ohio where this research study was conducted, 913 recipients were served by the Job Prep Program and attended a local regional university campus (Job Prep Historical Report to Ohio Board of Regents, 1998). At least 102 of the participants completed two years of college and 50 students were
enrolled in four-year programs. Another 300 participants were off welfare permanently. Another 125 participants were employed full time with benefits and 100 participants were working part time. Those recipients attending college maintained a cumulative Grade Point Average or GPA of 2.622 (Job Prep Historical Report to Ohio Board of Regents, 1998).

Still other JSRP/Job Prep participants went on to graduate from Technical Colleges or Career Centers as Licensed Practical Nurses, surgical and pharmacy technicians, welders, auto and diesel mechanics, electricians, etc. As a result, many of these participants became financially independent as well. Similar results were realized at the other 32 Community Colleges and Regional University Campuses in Ohio (Job Prep Historical Report, 1998). However, the JOBS Program with its emphasis upon “on-job-training” and educational programs was soon to be curtailed. The political climate began to change with growing movement among some policy makers and citizens to reduce welfare rolls and dependency upon public assistance (Midgley, 2001; Mead, 2002).

* A Growing Consensus for Welfare Reform

It was not until 1996 that another major shift occurred in welfare reform. President Clinton’s signature on the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) indeed changed the definition of welfare or public assistance “as we know it.” Significant changes were implemented which bore little resemblance to those initiatives set forth by President Johnson in his Declaration of War on Poverty in 1965.

There had been a growing concern among a number of conservative policymakers that the welfare system was becoming counter-productive and that some families participated
in certain entitlements for a generation or more (Gingrich, 1995). Rather than decreasing the number of participants and families receiving public assistance, welfare rolls still continued to climb. In fact, by 1996 approximately 4.6 million families or 12 million individuals--particularly women and children--were receiving public assistance (Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

Women especially were becoming increasingly entrenched in the welfare system. This “feminization of welfare” became more apparent, particularly in inner city and urban areas. Minority women were especially impacted by this situation. Malveaux (2000) recognized that when women who were receiving TANF did obtain employment, they generally earned 75 cents for each dollar earned by men. Additionally, African American women earned approximately 64 cents and Hispanic women earned 55 cents for every dollar earned by men. Kim (2000) reported that approximately one third of women who had low paying jobs were on the average at 150% of the poverty level.

Albeda and Tilly (1996) observed that the emphasis to reduce welfare roles was again focused on an improved economy. It was believed that a growing economy would stimulate job growth and thereby reduce the number of families receiving public assistance. Indeed, it appeared that the welfare caseloads were reduced partly by the availability of more entry-level positions to absorb individuals in transition from welfare to the workforce. Under PRWORA an expanding economy coupled with a greater emphasis on job search programs and diversionary interventions (i.e., policies designed to put the unemployed back to work before applying for welfare) seemed to be working.
Caseloads were falling rapidly. Many states had reduced their caseloads as much as 50% to 70% or more (Lichter & Jayakody, 2002).

By the late 1990’s, however, there was growing concern by analysts and policy makers as to what would happen if the economy were to enter a recession and the number of entry level positions might no longer be available, particularly since the economy appeared to be slowing down. Would those who had previously left the welfare rolls and who did not have adequate training for better paying jobs be able to achieve and maintain personal and financial self-sufficiency? Or might they have to return to public assistance? Would the welfare cycle repeat itself?

If so, how might the cycle of welfare dependency be broken? Were there any strategies, interventions, policies, or procedures that specifically helped reduce or alleviate the long-term causes of poverty? And what were the experiences and observations of the current or former TANF recipients themselves? What did they believe needed to be done in order to enable and empower them to move toward employment and self-sufficiency? It was questions such as these that prompted this current study.

Indeed, a plethora of workforce development programs emerged during the 1970’s to the mid 1990’s (i.e., WIN, CETA, JTPA, JOBS). Still by 1996 the number of welfare cases continued to rise to 12 million individuals, mostly women and children (Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). It appeared to many policy makers and citizens that welfare as we knew it was not working and the underlying causes of poverty were not yet being fully addressed. Perhaps the “voice of the people” who were
most affected by policy and program changes in welfare could be instructive in conducting this seemingly endless war on poverty.

*Continued Change in the Political Climate & Welfare Reform*

There continued to be ever-growing movement, particularly among political conservatives, that welfare should no longer be a long term or life time entitlement, but rather a provision for “temporary assistance” to needy families (i.e., TANF) who were in transition from welfare to work. This movement came to fruition during the 1994 national elections in which more conservative–minded representatives were elected to the U.S. Congress under the banner of the “Contract for America.”

After rejecting the welfare reform package presented by conservative lawmakers on two previous occasions, President Clinton eventually did sign into law legislation that would change “welfare as we know it.” Once implemented this legislation would eventually reduce the number of families who received cash assistance by half or more. However, some areas of the country did not have enough entry-level positions for employment to absorb the sudden influx additional workers including of welfare recipients. This was particularly so in rural communities and economies (Howell, 1997; Coleman & Rebach, 2001, p. 294).

*“One-Stop” Employment Centers*

As described above by the 1990’s there existed a myriad of different training and employment services supported by state and federal funds. President Clinton and the Department of Labor chose to streamline those services to eliminate duplication and
thereby reduce expenses. This process ushered in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 and was implemented in July 2000.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 embodied key components reflecting the Department of Labor’s priorities: (1) streamline the delivery of services through the “One-Stop” Employment Centers; (2) provide career, employment, and financial aid information; (3) maintain performance measures for accountability; (4) establish local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB’s); (5) provide flexibility to develop programs that will reflect the needs of the labor market in the area; and (6) create innovative youth programs linked with academic, career, and employment opportunities in the area (DOL, 2001).

Concurrent with this movement was the passage of the PRWORA by the U.S. Congress in 1996 to change the welfare system. Some legislators believed that rather than having individuals and families live on a subsistence level for one or more generations, a strong effort should be made to transition them from public assistance to the workplace (i.e., “welfare to work”). With the arrival of WIA and Welfare Reform, the primary focus became “Work-First” through which job search preparation and increased job placement would be emphasized. The “One-Stop” Employment Centers became the centerpiece to help facilitate this process.

WIA mandated that “One-Stop’s” provide centralized, universal, customer-focused services and that certain “performance outcomes” must be met in order to receive federal and state funding and incentives (DOL, 2001). Each state was to have an Advisory
Board or Council made up of representatives from government, education, and training, business and industry as well as consumers to help provide implementation and direction for the WIA program and partnerships. These partnerships would develop Memorandums of Understanding or MOU’s to help facilitate the process. Included in the partnerships would be Community Action Organizations, Community Colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies, and Departments of Human Services among others.

Counties or regions could use considerable creativity in how they chose to implement and operate their respective programs. Certain performance outcomes must be met or funding could be reduced over a period of time. Conversely, incentives would be provided to those counties and “One-Stops” which exceeded the expected outcomes. The challenge was to encourage collaboration of different agencies, institutions, businesses, and consumers, to provide information and optimal employment and training opportunities.

In addition to job placement, emphasis was also placed on job retention and advancement in the workplace. This process was designed to prepare a trained, qualified workforce to compete in the local, regional, national, and global economy. To facilitate this process WIA was mandated to provide seamless services to a universal population. The Core Services at the “One-Stop’s” included intake and orientation procedures, vocational assessments, as well as the development of resumes and enhancement of interviewing skills. Core Services also provided technologically advanced, online job search services.
In one of the southern Ohio counties where this current research project was conducted, approximately 1,200 to 1,600 or more job seekers utilized the “One-Stop” Employment Center each month. Included in that number were individuals receiving TANF who were endeavoring to transition from welfare to work. By utilizing these “One-Stop” services and resources an increasing number of individuals were becoming gainfully employed. However, many still remain unemployed or under-employed including those receiving public assistance.

The Challenges of Welfare Reform in Rural Areas

Taylor (2001) has pointed out that “there is a dearth of information available on welfare use and the impact of welfare reform in rural areas, largely because of the challenges associated with conducting research with families in rural settings” (p. 444). Taylor (2001) summarized some of these challenges that have been examined including “geographic isolation, variability across different types of rural settings, the insular nature of many small communities, and the stigma associated with formal service use” (p. 444). Taylor (2001) also noted about individuals living in rural areas is that there is “a greater reluctance among the rural poor to seek welfare as well as a reluctance to share personal information with researchers” (p. 444).

Moreover, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), 13% of the women in the United States were living in poverty and most of these live in rural areas. Myers and Gill (2004) noted that “approximately one in five women is poor (and) the proportion of low Social Economic Status women in rural areas is even higher” (p. 225). Cook and Gibbs (2000) observed that unemployment, underemployment, and poverty are higher in rural
areas as compared to urban areas. Thus, the challenges are many for families, particularly for single mothers attempting to transition from welfare to work.

Lichter and Jayokody (2002) also perceived the need for additional research on the impact of welfare reform in rural areas. They noted that most “work first” approaches were constructed on “an urban-based political and cultural agenda,” and that “rural America…is too often forgotten in the welfare policy debates” (p.132). Similarly, Weber, Duncan, and Whitener (2002) observed that single mothers in rural settings often confront intense challenges including limited work opportunities, lower wages, need of dependable transportation, availability of child care, and higher unemployment. Indeed, lower employment rates and lack of availability of jobs is characteristic of a number of rural areas, including the three counties described below that were a part of this current study.

*Three Appalachian Counties in Southern Ohio*

The study focused on three counties situated in southern Ohio. This area is part of the Appalachian region. The Ohio Department of Development (ODD) has identified two of the counties as *rural* based on their lower population figures. The ODD identified the third county in the study as *metro* because it is located in a larger metropolitan area with greater population. The metro county in Ohio is part of a Tri-state area that includes Huntington, West Virginia, and Ashland, Kentucky. Although the Ohio *metro* county included in the study has a lower rate of unemployment than the two rural counties, considerable pockets of poverty still exist there. For example, the 1999 poverty rate in the “metro” county was 19.9% compared to 11% statewide.
**County “A”—Poverty Level and Employment Data**

According to the U.S. Census (2000), the first rural county included in the study had a population 79,195. Of that number 43,464 or 57.4% of the county population were determined to be 200% below the poverty level. In addition, 25.9% of persons 25 years and over, had no high school diploma. According to the same census 6.1% held an Associate degree, 6.4% Bachelor’s, and 3.7% Master’s degree or higher.

With a total of 30,834 households in the county during the census, 16.9% received less than $10,000 per year. Another 19.4% had household incomes of $10,000 to $19,999. In addition, 16.7% had household incomes between $20,000 and $29,999. At the time this study was conducted the unemployment rate in the county was at 7.4% compared to unemployment rates of 5.6% in Ohio and 4.3% in the U.S.

**County “B”—Poverty Level and Employment Data**

The second rural county had a population of 32,641 in 2000. Of that number 19,571 or 61% of the residents were below 200% of poverty level. Comparable to County A, 26.5% of persons over 25 years of age had no high school diploma. Only 4.8% had an Associate degree, 7.1% completed a Bachelor’s degree, and 3.9% completed a Master’s degree.

In terms of household income, 16.9% had less than $10,000 in 1999 and 19.4% had between $10,000 and $19,999. Another 16.7% had household income ranging from $20,000 to $29,000. At the time this study was being conducted, the unemployment was 8.8%. Thus both of the counties were experiencing relatively high unemployment rates compared to that of Ohio (5.6%) the U.S. (4.3%).
County “C”--Poverty Level and Employment Data

According to Ohio State University Extension (2002) the county had a population of 62,319 in the year 2000. The personal income per capita was $18,909 compared to the state average of $27,977. As described above the 1999 poverty rate in metro county was 19.9% or almost 20% when compared to the statewide poverty level of 11%.

Similarly, the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) also reflected that only 10% of individuals within this county had completed Bachelor Degrees compared to the State of Ohio’s overall average of 21.1%. Similarly, 10.6% of the citizens in the same county were living in poverty compared to Ohio’s poverty rate of 8.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

In April of 2004 the U. S. Department of Labor (DOL) released figures that indicated that County C’s unemployment rate had dropped to 5.7% as compared to Ohio’s statewide average at that time of 5.9% and the national rate at 5.6%. This change in rate of unemployment meant that the specific county would be ineligible to apply for Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant funding for 2005. This would result in significant cuts in grant funding since the county would be defined by ARC as a county in “Transition” rather than “Distress” in terms of employment figures.

As a result of the DOL’s data, the concern of many in the county focused on the definition of “unemployed.” Indeed, the Director of the Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) in County C questioned the Department of Labor’s survey results that were based on a complicated formula including a randomized phone survey (Herald-Dispatch April, 29, 2004). To check the unemployment numbers presented by the
Department of Labor, the Director of JFS requested the county “One-Stop” Employment Center conduct another countywide phone survey.

The “One-Stop” utilized a statistical “random sampling” of phone listings derived from the local phone directory. A total of 1,383, households were randomly selected to participate in the countywide phone survey (Table 2.1). Of those 1,383 households selected, actual phone contact was made with 635 households. Within the 635 households contacted, individuals from 329 households agreed to participate in the survey. Some of the households had more than one person employed or unemployed so the total number of individuals 16 years and older participated in the survey was 859.

Table 2.1
Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Results</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households Randomly Selected in Survey Plan</td>
<td>1,383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households Actually Contacted</td>
<td>635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households Responding to Survey Questions</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Individuals in Households Responding to Survey</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 859 individuals responding to the survey, 309 reported that they were employed and 66 stated that they were unemployed (Table 2.2). The unemployment figures obtained from the “One-Stop” survey for County C differed significantly from the Department of Labor’s (DOL) figures within a + or – 4 margin of error. The major difference was DOL’s Labor Market Information (LMI) of 5.7% rate of unemployment compared to the “One-Stop’s” 17.9% rate of unemployment (2.3).
Table 2.2

**Numerical Breakdown of Participants in Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Retirees or those who are Disabled</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Youth under 16 years of age</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number in Military Service, Incarcerated, etc.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number Employed</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number Unemployed</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Participants</strong></td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3

**Comparison of Surveys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>LMI for County</th>
<th>Survey Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2004 Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>17.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number in Household</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Population (Retired, Disabled, Youth)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Population Under 17</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of both surveys were then published in area newspapers. As a result of these publications, county offices received phone calls from various U.S. legislators. Specific inquiries about the survey data were made by the county’s U.S. Representative and one of Ohio’s U.S. Senators. They requested additional information concerning the structure and procedures utilized in conducting the two surveys. They also requested possible reasons as to why the unemployment figures differed so greatly.
After careful analysis the major difference appears to be that the DOL formula did not factor in the 10% of individuals who were no longer seeking employment or receiving unemployment benefits. A number of the respondents indicated that they had simply “given up” trying to find employment after a period of time. That would constitute the nearly 10% differential in the two sets of employment figures. As a result of these discrepancies in data, some U.S. lawmakers began a review of the existing formula used by the Department of Labor to extrapolate employment/unemployment figures around the country. The “One-Stop” Employment Center Survey for this Southern Ohio county attempted to reflect a clearer picture of the availability (or lack thereof) of employment opportunities for job seekers including individuals in transition from welfare to work.

The Relevance of the Survey Data to TANF Recipients

With fewer job openings available it becomes more difficult to obtain employment and more competitive as well, particularly in rural areas (Cook & Gibbs, 2000). Furthermore, a number of those individuals receiving public assistance may not have the necessary training, skills, or previous work experience to effectively compete in the job market. Many recipients often experience additional personal challenges or conditions that make it even more difficult to compete for fewer positions.

Howell (1997) observed that in one rural region in the U.S. only one job was available for every two individuals receiving cash assistance. Jensen and Chitose (1997) also noted that employment opportunities in rural areas were possibly insufficient to absorb a large influx of unmarried mothers receiving public assistance.
In addition to the above challenges a Rural Policy Institute study (1999) concluded that those receiving TANF who did enter the workforce in rural areas did not on the average receive an increase in pay until two years later as compared to those in more urban areas. Since many of the employment opportunities in rural areas are at or near minimum wage, no increase in pay for two years can have significant implications for those who are striving for financial independence and self-sufficiency.

*Other Challenges to Employment and Self-sufficiency*

Considerable research has been conducted which recognizes the impact of poverty upon families (Wolf & Hill, 1993; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994). Children born into poor families generally weigh less at birth and may experience increased challenges in cognitive development such as verbal, math, and reading skills (McLoyd, Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; McCloyd, 1998). The World Health Organization (WHO) observes that poverty often perpetuates an ongoing cycle of poverty (2001). For example, Haynie and Gorman (1999) note that behaviors developed in an environment of poverty frequently foster lower educational expectations that in turn often lead to lower income levels. The WHO (2001) also recognizes that poverty and increased unemployment emerges from lower educational and economic levels.

*Efforts to Break the Poverty Cycle via Community Colleges*

This researcher previously described opportunities for individuals receiving welfare in the early to mid-1990’s to complete college degrees while participating in the JOBS Program. Departments of Human Services in many states in conjunction with
community colleges developed programs that enabled welfare recipients to attend college or other post-secondary programs. This collaborative effort between Human Services and community colleges provided a vehicle for many individuals receiving welfare to successfully make the journey from welfare to self-sufficiency. Key components of the program included professional counseling (i.e., personal, career, and rehabilitation). Academic advising, vocational assessment, tutoring, and support groups were provided with financial aid for tuition, books, child care, and transportation.

The 33 programs conducted on college campuses throughout Ohio, including the southern metro county in which this investigation occurred reflected the positive results and increased potential of reducing welfare caseloads by enhancing the educational levels, skills, and employment opportunities for those, particularly single mothers, who were living in poverty. McCabe (1999) concluded, “Community Colleges are the key to avoiding a national crisis by moving under-prepared and dependent individuals into productive self-sufficiency” (p. 23).

Kostic (2001) also recognized the important role community colleges can play in assisting men and women in transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency. She pointed out the following:

With traditional welfare and other social service programs being dismantled, community colleges are being skewed increasingly to provide direct short-term workplace education. On the one hand, these directives may exacerbate social stratification, with community colleges serving to route people off welfare and into whatever kinds of jobs can be acquired with 12 weeks of training. On the other
hand, whatever their strictures, community colleges will continue to be the *only* education option for an increasing number of adult students, particularly poor women with children (p. 23).

During congressional debate concerning the re-authorization of PRWORA in 2003, a number of lawmakers wanted to insert language that would allow individuals receiving welfare to complete at least two years of college training in order to earn the Associates Degree and thereby be better prepared to succeed in the workforce. However, other legislators believed a continued emphasis on “work first” (be it jobs paying minimum wage or slightly higher) would reduce welfare rolls even more substantially. Indeed, the reduction in the number of caseloads had occurred as discussed earlier (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). However, in terms of reducing poverty itself, it would appear that many individuals receiving welfare have moved from “work-fare” to the “working poor” without ample training or skills to achieve viable self-sufficiency.

Moreover, families headed by single mothers receiving welfare and residing in rural areas often confront difficulties such as increased shortages of finances and child care providers; lack of availability of dependable transportation, and fewer employment opportunities as described earlier. As a result, Lichter and Jensen (2001) observed that more than one third of the women who head families are living in poverty. In the state of Washington it was reported that women headed as much as 90% of the households receiving public assistance (Washington State Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee, 2000).
After interviewing a dozen welfare recipients who were also attending college, Kates (1991) noted:

Access to higher education is a critical policy issue for AFDC recipients and other low-income women with dependent children; further, this issue has significance for a much larger proportion of women living in poverty than is currently recognized.

In order to be effective, policies to improve access to higher education must be informed by the experiences of low-income women in higher education (p. 182).

Thus, a primary thrust and focus of this investigation, again, is to hear the “voice of the participants” themselves and their individual experiences and perspectives as they endeavor to transition from welfare to employment and eventual self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. Perhaps by better listening to and being better informed by the experiences of low-income women, more effective and empathic programs, policies, and procedures can be developed to better facilitate the transition from welfare to work.

*Mental Health Challenges of the Poor*

Those receiving public assistance often experience significant mental health challenges. For example, from 1994 to 1995 the National Household Survey of Drug Abuse (NHDA) reported that at least 19% of individuals receiving welfare met the criteria of DSM-III-R psychiatric diagnosis (Danziger & Pollack, 2000). In 1994 the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse indicated that women receiving welfare were twice as likely to abuse illegal drugs and/or alcohol than those women not receiving public assistance. Sisco and Pearson (1994) concluded that out of 206 women
receiving public assistance, approximately 11.4% were abusing alcohol while nearly
14.7% were possibly already addicted to alcohol. Weisner and Schmidt (1993) noted that
problem drinking among those individuals receiving welfare was nearly twice the level of
problem drinking in the general population.

Hagen (1999) found that more than 60% of mothers receiving public assistance have
also experienced domestic violence (i.e., battery by their partners) along with the
prevalence of clinical depression and other diagnosed disorders among welfare recipients.
Danziger (2000) observed that nearly 35% of recipients met the criteria for diagnosed
disorders and even more so for recipients who experience depression. Sweeney (2000)
noted that “roughly one-fourth to one-third of current TANF population nationwide has
a serious mental health problem. Salomon et al. (1996) reported that perhaps as much as
85% of welfare recipients have experienced physical or sexual abuse or violence as
children and later experienced domestic violence as adults.

Loprest and Zedlewski (2006) compared the percentage of recipients who experienced
multiple barriers including less than high school education, health conditions that limit
work, and mental health concerns. In 2002, they noted that 27.4% of new TANF entrants
experienced health conditions while 22.4% experienced mental health issues. Of those
who cycled on and off TANF (cyclers), 24.8% had health issues and 29.5 percent
experienced mental health concerns while those who remained on TANF (stayers) in
2002 show 24.9% with health issues and 25.5% with mental health concerns.
The Role of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in the “One-Stop”

Many of the individuals, including those receiving welfare, who utilize the “One-Stop” Employment Centers often experience various physical as well as mental health challenges (Hall & Parker, 2005). To assist individuals with disabilities the “One-Stop” Employment Centers are mandated to include vocational rehabilitation services as well. The Vocational Rehabilitation Services in each state are a mandatory partner of the “One-Stop” Employment Centers (DOL, 2000). In the three counties of Ohio where this research study took place the provider for vocational rehabilitation is the Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC) which is affiliated with the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

The vocational rehabilitation counselor can fulfill a significant and integral role in the “One-Stops” in a variety of ways (Hall & Parker, 2005). The vocational rehabilitation counselor’s involvement, input, and services are essential in helping to provide truly seamless, universal services to the “One-Stop” customers and consumers including those with physical and/or psychological conditions or disabilities. Similarly, the vocational rehabilitation counselor is an advocate for consumers with disabilities as well as a coordinator of services and resources for training and job placement.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors also have opportunity to inform and educate fellow “One-Stop” partners and staff about the specific services provided through the U.S. Rehabilitation Services. This educational emphasis can further expand and enhance the collaborative effort of the “One-Stop” partners and service providers as they strive to offer needed services and resources to a universal population.
The CORE services are provided to all job seekers entering the “One-Stops” including those with disabilities. Some individuals with disabilities may not need nor want services from a vocational rehabilitation counselor. They may wish to utilize the CORE services only for their job search activities. However, vocational rehabilitation services and counselors are available should someone request or inquire about those services. In terms of the individual customer or consumer at the “One-Stop” the information can be shared via individual or group orientation sessions. Individual follow-up appointments can then be scheduled. A very effective “Team Approach” to the restoration and rehabilitation process is initiated when necessary for the consumer (Ficocelli, 1993, Morton, et al., 1997).

The primary goal of the rehabilitation counselor within the “One-Stop” model and elsewhere is to help facilitate the restoration, rehabilitation, and re-entry (or initial entry) of individuals with disabilities into the workforce. Rehabilitation counselors understand that employment itself is one of the most effective therapeutic approaches to enhancing self-esteem and providing a better quality of life for the consumer. The vocational rehabilitation counselor can be a “change agent” within the “One-Stop” Model by increasing awareness of the needs and services available to individuals with disabilities (ADA Handbook, 1990; Rubin & Roessler, 1995). In addition, the rehabilitation counselor can be instrumental in defining and clarifying concepts such as advocacy, informed consent, functional abilities, wellness, job accommodations, strategies, and technologies to better assist individuals with disabilities (ADA Handbook, 1990;
Goodwin, 1992). This includes those individuals with disabilities who are endeavoring to transition from welfare to work.

**Summary**

This chapter provided an historical overview of the emergence of welfare reform and workforce development efforts in the United States. These efforts included a variety of government authorized programs (e.g., WIN, CETA, and JTPA) which were developed to help combat the war on poverty while enhancing employability and workforce development. The unique challenges of individuals living in Appalachian areas and who are in transition from welfare to work were examined. The collaborative efforts of various “One-Stop” partners were also explored.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This study is designed to better understand the phenomenological experience of individuals moving from welfare (TANF) to the world of work and self-sufficiency and the meaning which that experience holds for each of those individuals. Such an approach focuses on the feelings, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of the participants (Handel, 1982).

Patton (2002) described a phenomenological approach to research as a means of “capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p. 104). He further expressed that to obtain “such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have ‘lived experience’ as opposed to secondhand experience” (p.104).

Berrios and Lucca (2006) expressed that, in a qualitative study, the participants become more like “co-researchers” as they share their life experiences (p. 181). By telling me their stories about trying to transition from public assistance to the world of work, the participants will be co-researchers in a very real and significant way.

Morgen (2002) stated that “one of the more egregious problems in many public policy discussions of poverty has been the relative absence of the perspective of the poor themselves” (p. 754). Indeed, she observed that qualitative research “at least offers the potential for embodying the voices, perspectives, and concerns of the people and the
communities we study” (p. 754). By utilizing a qualitative approach in this investigation, I gathered thick, rich, descriptive data by actively listening to and capturing the “voices, perspectives, and concerns of the people” who were attempting to make that transition.

Depending on the nature of the research question, it would appear that qualitative methodologies have much to offer in providing additional data and diversity in research (Goldman, 1989; Reinharz, 1992; Crawford & Kimmel, 1999). As described earlier, this study explored several key research questions. First, what is the ‘lived experience’ of individuals who receive or have previously received welfare? Second, what services, resources, or experiences were most effective or helpful and which were least effective or helpful to the participant in making or attempting to make the transition from welfare to work? Third, what challenges, barriers, or conditions might yet hinder participants from making that transition from welfare to work and toward self-sufficiency? And lastly, what recommendations would participants make to policy makers and service providers to better assist recipients in making the transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency?

Another question relative to the above four research questions is simply: “How are former recipients faring as a result of welfare reform?” Loprest (1999) observed that “leavers” might be employed, but they still live in poverty. Often their jobs provide time-limited or no health care, little or no retirement, or lack of advancement opportunities, (Tickamyer, et al., 2004).
Several studies have documented the tremendous drop in welfare caseloads across the United States (Lichter & Jayakody, 2002; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2000). However, fewer qualitative studies have focused on the impact of welfare reform on families living in Appalachia where availability of jobs and level of earnings needed to achieve self-sufficiency are not as plentiful. Thus, the focus and rationale of this investigation was to better understand the lived experiences of those families who are experiencing tremendous and traumatic change, and then, to better assist them in their adjustment and adaptation to that change before 5-year time limit and “hardship extensions” for TANF expires.

The Researcher

For nearly two decades this researcher has been involved in assisting men and women to move from public assistance to the world of work. In the 1970’s I instructed recipients in the Work Incentive Program or WIN (Albelda & Tilly, 1996). That program focused on changing the economic environment of recipients by mandating participation in training (e.g., literacy or GED classes, job preparation, etc.) or various work assignments.

Later, I became an administrator and professional counselor for a regional university campus involved in a One-Stop Employment Center. I coordinated a program which served participants of the JOBS Program assisting men and women to prepare to enter the workforce (Hagen, 1999, Price et al., 1993).

Currently, I am the Program Coordinator and Professional Counselor (Community, Career, and Rehabilitation) at a One-Stop Career and Employment Center (One-Stop).
I assist individuals in an Appalachian county in Southern Ohio to transition from public assistance to the workplace. I also provide career and personal counseling for other One-Stop customers and collaborate closely with rehabilitation and community agencies and counselors. Additional services offered at the One-Stop include vocational assessment, resume preparation, job search and interviewing skills, as well as strategies for job placement, enhancement, and advancement in the workplace. Information for a plethora of training, educational programs, and community resources is also provided.

As a Professional Counselor who focuses on career and vocational rehabilitation counseling, I collaborate with vocational counselors in coordinating services to implement an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for those entering the One-Stop who may be experiencing various conditions and disabilities. A number of individuals to whom I provide services may experience severe physical and/or psychological conditions including clinically diagnosed disorders. Often these conditions cause certain consumers to pursue disability benefits (e.g., SSI or SSDI).

Over the years I have had opportunity to observe and interact with hundreds of individuals with varying degrees of functional abilities and functional limitations. Thus, as I conducted this study of individuals and their families in transition from welfare to work, I did so as a participant observer. I endeavored to actively listen to and understand the “voice of the people” (i.e., the participants themselves). Also, I attempted to focus on the subjective perceptions, attitudes, and feelings of those being observed (Handel, 1982; Maxwell, 1996; Moustakas, 1994).
More specifically, at the time of this investigation part of my caseload as a professional counselor included working with 80 to 90 or more individuals each month who were experiencing various physical and/or psychological challenges or disabilities. This number represented approximately half of the county’s adults whose families were receiving TANF. In light of the many challenges these recipients experience, it became apparent to me and my colleagues that additional professional services were needed, particularly for those who experienced various disabilities and other challenges.

*Symbolic Interaction*

Throughout the study I employed a *symbolic interaction* approach to better understand not simply the perceived experience of each of the participant’s transition from welfare to work, but to recognize the process the participants used to formulate meaning from those experiences (Blumer, 1969; Ball, 1985; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Blumer (1969) pointed out that symbolic interaction does not regard meaning as emanating from the intrinsic makeup of the thing, nor does it see meaning as arising through psychological elements between people. The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which others persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person, thus, symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products through activities of people interacting (p. 5).
Similarly, Berg (1998) noted, “Human behavior does not occur on the basis of predetermined lockstep responses to preset events or situations. Rather, human behavior is an ongoing and negotiated interpretation of objects, events and situations” (p.10). In approaching the study from such a perspective, I was better able to get “inside the experience of the actor” (Blumer, 1969, p. 57). The symbolic interaction approach provided me a process to facilitate the identification of common themes from which certain groupings or patterns of descriptive data (language, experience, perceptions) could be distilled.

**The Theoretical Perspective: Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Individuals seeking employment and pursuing careers bring with them unique environmental and intra-psychic characteristics as noted in Social Cognitive Career Theory or SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). These characteristics can impact the person’s career-related behavior (Edwards, Rachal, & Dixon, 1999). SCCT provides a more holistic approach to understanding employment and career-related behavior. In addition, SCCT helps to identify how career choices emerge, how those choices are implemented, and how outcomes are achieved (Lent et al., 1994, p. 80).

SCCT also recognizes the relevance of *human agency* in pursuing employment and career interests. Chen (2006) described the importance of career human agency, “With intentionality, human agency is about making things happen in ways that will allow one to maximize the personal attitude and aptitude for positive attainment. In other words, human agency serves to translate intentionality into action” (p. 135). Chen also pointed out that the “counselor helps the client form and implement an action plan that is built
from the client’s own awareness, intention, and initiatives, leading to the reinforcement of the action variable in this career exploration and planning process” (p.135).

Because the One-Stop Employment Center was authorized to provide seamless services to a universal population, the SCCT provides a theoretical context that is relevant to all individuals seeking employment or pursuing a career, including individuals with disabilities and/or those who are attempting to transition from welfare to work.

*The Procedures for Recruiting and Conducting the Study*

Within the theoretical context described above, I endeavored to identify and understand the challenges and conditions that the One-Stop consumers experience, particularly individuals with disabilities and those attempting to move from welfare to work before their five-year time limit and hardship extensions expired. Once the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board or IRB (Appendix A), I contacted the Directors of the three County Departments of Job and Family Services where the study would be conducted. Each Director provided a signed letter on official JFS letterhead permitting me to conduct in-depth interviews with those individuals who should choose to volunteer to participate in the study (Appendix B).

I proceeded to distribute copies of the *Recruitment Letter* to current and former TANF participants of Job Search, the CORE Services or Alternative Assignment Programs, and other designated assignments approved by and/or funded through Job and Family Services (Appendix C). After presenting the *Recruitment Letter* and a brief description of the study to various groups or individual recipients, including women and other
minorities and ethnic groups, a number of participants wished to volunteer. I then
carefully and thoroughly explained various terms of the study including informed
consent, confidentiality, anonymity, pseudonyms, etc. When it was clear that each
volunteer participant understood these terms, I addressed any remaining questions they
had about the study, procedures, or meaning of terms.

The volunteers were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time
without penalty. Similarly, I explained that should a participant feel uncomfortable about
a particular question or issues brought up during the interview, they could choose not to
respond to the question or topic or discontinue the interview or study. Appointments
were then scheduled for those who wished to participate in the study.

Later, before each scheduled interview was conducted, terms such as confidentiality
and informed consent were again reviewed and the participant’s correct understanding of
the terms was confirmed. The participant then read the *Informed Consent Form and
Statement* and I addressed any additional questions the participant might have presented
(Appendix D). After reading the documents and giving me verbal confirmation of their
willingness to participate in the study, I initialed the participant’s respective *Informed
Consent Form*.

Each participant was interviewed at least on two separate occasions. Each interview
lasted approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours or about 3 to 4 hours per participant. From these in-
depth interviews and observations I gathered a rich and “thick description” about each of
the participant’s lived experience. This included their perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and
personal beliefs. Additional volunteers were interviewed until no significantly different themes or patterns were identified.

A total of 10 individuals were interviewed on two separate occasions for this study. Of the 10 participants, two (20%) were African American (one male and one female) and six (60%) were female. All were born and raised in the U.S., but one, Anita, was born and raised in Germany and moved to Ohio after marrying a U.S. serviceman.

The Process of Data Collection—Triangulation

The process of methodological triangulation as described by Kane (1995) and Patton (2002) enhances the qualitative approach to inquiry. By utilizing triangulation the researcher was able to derive data from several sources (Ely et al., 1991; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Glesne, 1999). Much like a three-legged stool, the data gathered from at least three distinct sources was more apt to withstand critical inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 1999); Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I employed three different approaches to obtain qualitative data for the study— in-depth interviews, personal observations, and documents.

The Interview Process

After completing the Informed Consent Form, the researcher asked some basic demographic questions such as age, number of children, level of education, length of time on assistance, and any previous or current employment (Fink & Koseoff, 1985). This information provided demographic data that helped the researcher to identify various comparisons and/or contrasts among the participants. The questions also served as a starting point to facilitate the interaction and between the researcher and the respondent.
Although trained as a professional counselor, I did not engage in counseling the participant. However, I was keenly aware of each participant’s affect, emotion, intensity, and nuances of meaning as to what their life experiences meant to them personally. I was thankful for my experience and training in employing active listening and tracking skills. I endeavored to “listen” with my eyes as well as my ears as each individual shared his or her own phenomenological experience.

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions concerning the personal experiences and perceived meanings of those experiences to the participants (Appendix E). The questions were general enough to allow flexibility of identifying unique experiences and expressions of those experiences by each of the participants (Reinharz, 1992). Additional probing questions often emerged during the interview process. The in-depth interviews produced a voluminous amount of qualitative data describing shared experiences and meanings (Van Manen, 1990; Rubin, Rubin, & Piele, 1996). From this data emerging themes and patterns were noted (Aronson, 1994). A sufficient number of interviews were conducted until no additional or significantly different themes or patterns could be identified.

Following each interview I reflected on the content as well as the emotional energy and intensity (or lack there of) of each respondent’s experience and story. I discovered that the 30 to 45 minute drive back to my workplace or residence provided additional moments for me to reflect, review, and further process what I had heard and what I had observed during the qualitative interview. More notes and reflections consequently emerged (Patton, 2002). Later, while reviewing the audio-recordings and transcriptions,
I identified additional nuances of expression, emotion, and meaning from their recorded life experiences. I then made notes of some of those fresh observations and insights.

As described above, the interviews were recorded (audio) in their entirety to better capture the intonations, emphasis, inflections, and emotion of the participants. The audio recordings were then transcribed yielding nearly 400 pages. Meanwhile, I continued to record additional field notes to supplement the audio-tapes and transcriptions of the interviews. Field notes were also recorded during the participant observation described in the next section.

**Personal Observation**

In the qualitative model for research the investigator acts as the research instrument (Patton, 2002). Thus, as a participant observer I attempted to immerse myself into the experiences and the perceptions of the recipient themselves. I observed participants when they were occupied individually and as they interacted with others at ABLE and GED classes, computer classes, the Resource Center, the Job Search Programs, scheduled breaks, and times of casual conversation with others.

In order to better hear the “voices” of the participants, I worked toward building a level of trust with each participant. This in turn helped to facilitate a more relaxed, safe, and accepting relationship and environment that further encouraged the participants to communicate their unique experiences, perceptions, and thoughts (Reinharz, 1992). Patton (2002) described the value of observation and reflection:

The impressions and feelings of the observer become part of the data to be used in attempting to understand a setting and the people who inhabit it. The observer takes
in information and forms impressions that go beyond what can be fully recorded in even the most detailed field notes (p. 264).

By combining qualitative data derived from the interviews along with my personal observations and reflections of each participant in a number of different situations, I was able to acquire a more holistic picture of those individuals who were endeavoring to make the transition from welfare to sustained employment.

*Documents*

The third approach I utilized to gather qualitative data was that of reviewing documents. Marshall and Rossman (1999) recognized a broad range of sources for such documents:

The review of documents is an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying values and beliefs of participants in the setting. Minutes of meeting, logs, announcements, formal policy statements, letters, and so on are all useful in developing an understanding of the setting or group studied. Similarly, research journals and samples of free writing about the topic can be quite informative (p. 116).

In this study I utilized peer-reviewed journals, texts, unpublished papers, online sources, and more. I also encouraged the participants to bring in their own documents such as letters, photo albums, newspaper articles, greeting cards, diplomas or certificates, etc. that had relevance or significance to them and their families (Appendix F). Such documents provided an excellent source of information and insight about the participants as well as their families, and also served as an excellent ice breaker to initiate the interview process.
Marshall and Rossman (1999) observed, “As with other methodological decisions, the decision to gather and analyze documents or archival records should be linked with the research questions developed in the conceptual framework of the study” (p. 117). By keeping the research questions as the focus and framework of this study, the use of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and a variety of documents added a greater dimension to the qualitative data that was acquired.

*Identifying and Processing the Data.*

After each interview the audio-tapes were transcribed and field notes and observations notes were recorded and reviewed by the investigator. I also recorded my own reflections about the interview and observation process. These reflections proved to be helpful as I identified some of my own biases and recognized certain preconceived ideas or perceptions. For example, although I had worked with men and women receiving public assistance in some capacity for nearly twenty years, I realized that I still had not fully comprehended the breadth and depth of their “lived experiences.”

The transcriptions of the recorded interviews, field notes, and my own observations of participants provided a rich and “thick description. I began the extensive process of qualitative analysis to identify various emerging themes and areas of commonality from the “lived experiences” of the participants (Creswell, 1998).

Patton (2002) described the process of collecting and analyzing data as an ongoing process:

A qualitative analyst returns to the data over and over again to see if the constructs, categories, explanations, and interpretations make sense, if theory
really reflect the nature of the phenomena. Creativity, intellectual rigor, perseverance, insight—these are the intangibles that go beyond the routine application of scientific procedure (p. 570).

Rather than utilize computerized electronic analysis of the qualitative data, I employed a color coding system in order to identify emerging themes and resulting patterns. Various topics, issues, and needs were identified and highlighted. For example, the need of reliable transportation might be highlighted in yellow. The participants’ perceived lack of or desire for additional training and education might be highlighted in red and the need for affordable housing in blue.

At times, the researcher would also cut and paste via computer or actual hard copy the responses of participants reflecting a particular need, issue, or experience. This approach proved helpful by enabling me to note the similarities as well as the unique distinctions of the participants’ responses. I reviewed key words and phrases such as “there ain’t no jobs,” “it does get discouraging at times,” “don’t lump us all together”, and “I need to feed my children.” Similar phrases and descriptive words describing comparable experiences were identified and coded.

Some qualitative researchers might perceive the above method of identifying various themes and coding to be archaic and cumbersome when compared to the use of certain technologically advanced, computerized programs that are available. However, I discovered the “hands-on” approach of reading and personally interacting with the transcribed material to be quite revealing and rewarding. I was reassured of the relevance of such an approach when I completed a doctoral level course on qualitative research and
discovered that the professor had utilized a similar “hands-on” method of qualitative analysis for her own dissertation and continues to do so.

From ongoing analysis of the coded terms and phrases certain themes began to emerge. For example, the expressed need for additional training and education were presented repeatedly by several participants early in the study. They may have worded it differently, but the repeated theme was becoming evident. Continued review and analysis of the data was crucial in further verifying and clarifying the data and determining whether the themes were truly reflecting the lived experiences and voices of the participants.

While continuing the review and analysis process I observed that a number of the themes appeared to be related. I identified those themes and combined them into key categories which made the material more meaningful as well as manageable. As I compared the resulting categories to the original research questions, it was interesting to note how relevant the material proved to be in terms of what experiences and policies appeared to be effective or helpful to the participants and what did not.

Even so, I continued to interview several more volunteer participants until it appeared that no substantially new or significantly different themes could be identified. However, the latter interviews did provide additional qualitative data that further substantiated several of the major themes and categories previously identified in the study. For example, the need for reliable transportation and additional education and training were presented by the TANF participants.
Summary

In this chapter I provided the rationale for the use of the phenomenological approach to investigate and capture the “voice of the people” that are in transition from welfare to work. I presented four key questions to help structure this investigation. I also described the tools of triangulation utilized in the investigation (in-depth interviews, personal observation, and documents) to more effectively gather, clarify, and verify the resulting qualitative data (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 1998).
Chapter Four: Thematic Analysis and Results

Introduction

In accordance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, the actual names of the participants do not appear in the study. Rather, the participants were identified as Participant I, II, III, with respective pseudonyms (e.g., John, Angela, Beverly, etc.). In this way complete confidentiality and anonymity of each participant was maintained. All of the participants were born in the U.S. but one, Anita. She was born and raised in Germany and later married a U.S. serviceman who was stationed there. She returned to the U.S. with him, but they divorced 12 years later.

Three participants (Debbie, Beverly, and Roger) resided in County A. Three other participants (Katie, David, and Tim) lived in County B. Since County C had the largest population of the three counties, four individuals (John, Angela, Anita, and Janet) were interviewed there. I had planned to continue conducting interviews with volunteers from each county until no additional themes emerged.

About the Participants

Below is a brief descriptive summary of those current and/or former TANF recipients who agreed to volunteer to participate in the study:

Participant I (“John”)

John is a single 33-year-old Caucasian male and a father of two sons 11 and 13 years of age. John has been involved with public assistance off and on since his children were first born. Under PRWORA time limits for TANF, he has utilized about 14 months of the 36 months available. He has been employed intermittently from several weeks up to
16 months at any one time. He is currently employed part time while receiving some cash assistance, medical card, and food stamps card for himself and his two sons. Last summer John attended Adult Education classes in order to enhance his academic skills. He had been given a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder, as have both his sons. In the fall of 2006 he enrolled in a local Community College to pursue an Associate Degree in Computer Aided Design (CAD) while he continues part-time employment and receives food card and medical benefits for himself and his sons.

*Participant II (“Angela”)*

Angela is a single 26-year-old African-American female with two daughters, 5 and 6 years of age. At this time she has no high school diploma or GED, but plans to pursue the GED in the next few weeks. She is currently enrolled in the Job Search Program at the Lawrence County “One-Stop” Employment Center. She wants to go to work since both her children are now old enough to attend pre-school. She reports that she worked full time as a cook in a nursing home facility in New Orleans. After completing her GED, Angela plans to take additional training in Medical Billing and Coding at a local regional State University Campus.

*Participant III (“Beverly”)*

Beverly is a single 36-year-old Caucasian female a 14-year-old son. She has worked several jobs primarily in the fast-food service industry. Her longest period of employment was two years. After those two years she stated that she could not handle it (employment) any more. She was later diagnosed as having Bipolar Disorder.
She later married and had her son. After two years of marriage she and her husband divorced. For the past five years she has been a single parent. She continues to receive counseling and medication for the Bipolar Disorder. She filed for disability about four months prior to being interviewed for this study.

*Participant IV ("Roger")*

Roger is a married 37-year-old Caucasian male. He has been unemployed a year after being laid off from a factory where he had worked nearly 15 years. He and his wife have three children ages 8, 13, and 16 years. He received unemployment for six months and TANF the past three months after exhausting personal savings. Although he continues to seek employment, he has not been able to locate a position that would support a family of five. He conducts his job search efforts while participating in the Work Experience Program (WEP) through Job and Family Services. He is being trained for a janitorial position. He hopes to be employed as a janitor at a local State University where he would earn a livable income and have medical benefits for the entire family.

*Participant V ("Debbie")*

Debbie is a single 35-year-old Caucasian female with a 15-year-old daughter. After high school Debbie enlisted in the Army. After seven months active duty she transferred to the National Guard where she continued for three and one-half years. She became inactive due to “hardship cause” to take care of her young daughter. She later went on to complete three years toward a Bachelor Degree in Business Administration at a State University in the Tri-State Region where she currently resides.
In order to support her daughter and herself, she worked for Kelly Temporary Services for three or four years where she did medical billing and scheduled appointments. She did a number of other jobs through Kelly Temporary Services as a “temp” until she suffered a back injury following an auto accident. Over the past 15 years she has received public assistance intermittently with her “temp” positions through Kelly’s Services.

In addition to her back injury, Debbie has been diagnosed with allergic asthma that often sends her to the emergency room for breathing treatments. She has also been diagnosed with fibromyalgia. Meanwhile, Debbie’s 15-year-old daughter has been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder (rapid cycling).

Debbie currently has about three months of cash assistance remaining of the sixty-month limit. However, she hopes to receive some hardship extensions through Job and Family Services to continue the TANF. Meanwhile, Debbie has been pursuing Disability benefits.

Participant VI ("Anita")

Anita is a single 37-year-old Caucasian female and mother of an 18-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son. She was born and raised in Germany, but has lived in Southern Ohio for the past 17 years. She married a U.S. serviceman when he was stationed in Germany. They then returned to his hometown in southern Ohio. After twelve years of marriage she and her husband divorced. She received TANF off and on for approximately two years. While participating in the Job Search Program through Job and Family Services, she received training as a Home Health Aide. She later went on to complete training as a
State Tested Nursing Assistant (STNA) and has been employed at a local Nursing Care facility for the past year and a half. She and her 18-year-old daughter plan to take prerequisites at a regional State University campus and then apply for admission to the Registered Nurse Program (RN). If they are not accepted into the RN program, they plan to apply for the Licensed Practical Nurse Program at a regional Technical Career Center. She and her two children currently receive medical benefits and food card, but no cash assistance due to her full-time employment as STNA at the Nursing Care facility.

Participant VII ("Janet")

Janet is a single Caucasian female in her mid-thirties who has three children. Her oldest daughter is 14, her second daughter is 10, and her son is 6 years old. As a single parent Janet is extremely busy working two or three part-time jobs while attending classes at a regional State University campus. She is majoring in Criminal Justice and Communications with a minor in Psychology. In a little over a year she plans to complete her degree. Following graduation she would like to work in Corrections or the Court system. If she cannot find employment in her chosen field, she may relocate to the Central or Southwestern United States.

After a separation from her significant other about three years ago, she came to southern Ohio for a new start. However, she had difficulty finding employment and had to apply for public assistance for the first time. She had been a travel agent in Florida. After two years working two or three part-time jobs, she was able to make enough income to meet some of the basic needs of her family. Currently she receives medical
coverage and food stamp card through JFS. Upon completion of her degree she hopes to obtain a position that will enable her to be totally self-sufficient.

**Participant VIII ("Katie")**

Katie is a married Caucasian female in her mid-thirties. She and her husband have two children, a daughter 16 and a son 19 years old. They previously lived near Cleveland, Ohio. They owned and operated a business in home building. Her husband assembled pre-manufactured houses for home buyers. Katie and her husband did well financially until her husband was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer.

Since he was the crew leader of the building and assembly process, it brought home construction business to a near stop. Katie did the bookkeeping for the enterprise, but her attention was understandably focused on caring for her husband while he went through cancer treatment. They hired someone else to carry on the business. Unfortunately, the new employee embezzled thousands of dollars from the business leaving Katie and her family impoverished. The family then relocated from the Cleveland area to southern Ohio to be near family members. They found it necessary to apply for TANF to help pay for his and the family’s medical expenses. They also received cash assistance and a food stamp card. Katie participated in the Job Club through JFS. She later obtained some part-time employment. She currently is employed transporting seniors and TANF participants. She hopes her part time job will soon become full time.

**Participant IX ("David")**

David, a 19-year-old Caucasian male and his wife have a one-year old daughter. Although not medically confirmed as yet, he and his wife believe they may be expecting
a second child. They had lived in Lima, Ohio. Since David was having difficulty obtaining employment in the Lima area, they chose to relocate to southern Ohio to seek additional employment opportunities and to be near her parents.

Finally he was able to obtain employment at a local manufacturing firm. However, as David describes it, “Stuff happened.” As a result he was terminated from the job. He also had his operator’s licensed suspended due to speeding and operating a vehicle with no insurance. He hopes to get his licensed re-instated in about six months. Meanwhile, his case manager at JFS has assigned him to the Job Club Program to seek employment. His wife receives disability benefits so with the TANF, medical coverage, and food stamp benefits, David states that they are getting by for now. He would like to get additional employment to enable them to become self-sufficient.

Participant X (“Tim”)

Tim is a married African-American male in his mid forties. He and his wife have a four-year old son. Tim had gainful employment at a manufacturing plant in southern Ohio, but he was released due to some medical problems. Later he obtained employment at another plant. However, that plant experienced a “lock-out” in which management would not allow union employees to return to work. As a result, Tim was again unemployed.

After several months it was necessary for Tim to apply for public assistance (TANF). In addition to cash assistance, JFS provided ongoing medical coverage and a food stamp card. While participating in the One-Stop Job Club activity, Tim learned to do a resume and cover letter, enhance his interviewing skills, and do online job
searches. He was quite active in seeking employment and had two or three interviews that appeared quite promising at the time this study was conducted.

The Participants’ Perspectives and Shared Experiences

While conducting this qualitative study I began to observe the emergence of several themes that reflected comparable lived experiences, challenges, and issues. Whether the concepts and emerging themes were articulated by current or former recipients, male or female, or individuals representing various ethnicities, the data presented a number of commonly shared experiences. These experiences helped to convey what the “lived experiences” were like for ten current and former welfare recipients who reside in an Appalachian area of southern Ohio.

My analysis of the qualitative data began early and continued throughout the research process. Rubin and Rubin (2005) recognized such an ongoing approach to analysis of qualitative data:

Analysis begins early on when you examine the first few interviews to make sure your project makes sense and concerns matters important to your conversational partners. As you complete each interview, you examine its content to see what you have now learned and what you still need to find out. Based on this ongoing analysis, you then modify the main questions and prepare your follow-up questions to pursue emerging ideas (p. 202).

This process caused me to examine, revise, and refine my analysis of the themes and categories as the qualitative data emerged. Experiences continued to be described by the participants that they found to be supportive and effective while making the
transition from welfare to work. According to the participants, certain services helped them to adjust to and cope with life’s challenges as they attempted to move from welfare toward self-sufficiency. Conversely, other services and experiences shared by the participants appeared to be ineffective or, in some instances, counterproductive for themselves and their families as they attempted to transition from welfare to work and toward self-sufficiency. Some participants described their post-TANF experience as “survival” rather than self-sufficiency.

After careful analysis of the qualitative data in this study I observed some common themes and patterns which had been corroborated in previous studies (e.g., Tickamyer, et. al., 2000, noted lack of transportation). However, certain other concepts and issues presented by the participants in this study were somewhat different in nature. The following section will describe the common themes and categories identified in the study in the context of the four Research Questions presented in Chapter One of this study.

Research Question One

The first research question examined the following: “What is the ‘lived experience’ of individuals residing in an Appalachian area who are in transition from welfare to work?” By using the process of triangulation to collect qualitative data, I employed in-depth qualitative interviews, participant-observation, and documents. I then identified and organized the data according to various emerging themes relevant to each of the four research questions.
Accurately describing the “lived experiences” of TANF recipients who are in transition from welfare to work is a significant challenge. Lichter and Jensen (2001) described the transition from welfare to work as moving from the “welfare poor” to the “working poor”. Qualitative methodologies in research allow those impacted the most, the recipients themselves, to tell their stories and to give voice to their own lived experiences.

Each of the ten participants in the current study had unique and varied lived experiences from childhood to the point in time when they were interviewed by the researcher. Indeed, many factors and choices entered in to bring them to where they were when they shared their own phenomenological experiences as a welfare recipient. From the twenty in-depth, qualitative interviews conducted during this study, there emerged a number of responses to the question-- “How are you faring during (or after) the transition from welfare to work?” Their responses gave a glimpse of the lived experiences of families attempting to transition from welfare to work.

For example, Angela, a mother of two young daughters 3 and 4 years of age, described her attempts at transition quite succinctly,

It’s not easy. You know some times the bills are higher. In the summer time
I don’t have to pay that much on gas bills, so I have a little extra. But I’m living on
what I need-- not on what I want.

John is a single parent of two sons, an 11-year-old and a 13-year-old. Both have been diagnosed with and take medication for ADD. John, who also experiences ADD, is working 25 to 30 hours a week for a little above minimum wage. He is attending
classes full time at a local community technical college. Making the transition from welfare to work has been a difficult experience for John and his sons. He describes the challenges of just feeding two growing boys:

A $108 (food stamps per month) would feed just my two boys, maybe, because my two boys can eat. I mean, what am I suppose to do…say, ‘No, you’re not allowed to eat, only eat this and this at this time?’ They’re growing kids! They need nourishment, but when they start doing this welfare reform stuff, nobody thinks about that.

John continued,

None of my kids are obese. My one boy is getting really tall and… they eat. And that makes me feel bad because, you know, nine or ten o’clock (evening), ‘Dad, can I fix me a sandwich?’ Because dinner just did not… it was enough at that time, but their metabolism went through it so fast that they’ve got the munches again, you know. My kids go through a loaf of bread in one day, a gallon of milk in a day and a half!

Similarly, Janet is also looking forward to completing a degree in Criminal Justice and getting a better job. In terms of how she and her three children are faring, she explains,

It is tough. It does get hard. It is very discouraging at times. But, you know, at the end you know when your kids say, ‘Mom, I need a new pair of shoes,’ you’re able to go buy them and not have to wait. Um… that’s where it makes me do it (work and go to college) because I don’t like having to tell my children, “You
know, I’m sorry, you’re going to have to wait a couple more weeks before I can buy you a $10 pair of shoes. Um, and in the meantime, you’d better pray that the electric doesn’t get cut off.’

Janet then commented further on her goal to graduate and to be better able to support her family,

It is tough, but I’m… not one of those people who can sit back and just be happy with saying, ‘Okay, do you want fries with your combo meal?’ That’s not me. I need something more out of life and it might be being a bit materialistic, but then again, you know, I want the best thing for my family that I can provide them.

Janet echoed other participants in wanting to provide the best they can for their children. The participants also realized that they could not do their best while trying to raise a family on $300 or so per month on welfare.

Unfortunately, in rural nonmetropolitan areas often the jobs and resulting income are not sufficient to enable parents, particularly households headed by single women, to provide for their children as they would like. Brown and Lichter (2004) noted that many of the jobs available in nonmetro areas are “often unstable, offer few benefits, (e.g., health insurance, childcare), and pay low wages” (p. 284).

This above is descriptive of the job market in the two rural counties included in this current study where the unemployment rates are typically above 7%. Although the unemployment rate for the metro county included in this study is generally lower, the training and skills level of a number of recipients are not sufficient to obtain the higher
paying jobs with benefits. Brown and Lichter (2004) further noted, “Employment opportunities or, more precisely, unemployment opportunities, may play an unusually large role in securing (or not) the long-term economic well-being of nonmetro single mothers and their children” (p. 300).

Research Question Two

The second research question addressed the following: “What interventions, services, or experiences were most effective or ineffective from the perspective of the recipients in helping them to make the transition from welfare to work?”

The ten participants taking part in the study observed that the basic services provided by welfare or (TANF) were essential and helped them to meet their family’s very basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, medical coverage, and in a few cases, transportation. Angela’s experience reflected the above observation: “My (two) children have needs and, you know, wants. I can’t give them what they want. I can give them what they need.”

Indeed, the participants in this study were generally appreciative of the essential services provided through Job and Family Services. Themes identifying services and experiences the participants described as most effective or helpful to them in their efforts to transition from welfare to work are presented. Those themes describing the least effective services or experiences are then examined.

Continued Access to Medical Care

The medical coverage provided by Job and Family Services in Ohio and its counterparts in other states was the only means by which the participants could access
medical care for themselves and their families. In the study, several of the participants or a family member experienced major medical issues and challenges. For example, Debbie needed ongoing medical attention for a severe back injury, asthma, and fibromyalgia. Katie’s husband had a rare form of cancer. Tim experienced diabetes and loss of vision in one eye. Eight of the ten adults taking part in the study were in need of ongoing medical care.

The medical card was particularly important to some families for the prenatal care and delivery of their children in a safe technologically advanced facility. The Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIPS), Healthy Start, and Women and Infant Children (WIC) provided needed assistance as well. Indeed, the medical card has continued to address the primary health care needs of families receiving TANF.

Interestingly, as this study was nearing completion, the State of Ohio approved the expansion of Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIPS) to include those families whose household income is 300% above the poverty level. Heretofore, CHIPS had been available only to those families whose household income was 200% above poverty level. This new policy should greatly increase the number of children covered under CHIPS in Ohio.

However, once adults on TANF obtain employment they may have only one year of transitional medical coverage through JFS. If their employer does not provide health care, many adults may then be without health care coverage due to the high cost of medical insurance.
Access to Mental Health Care

Mental health care was also identified as an effective and necessary service provided through JFS and the medical care program. Four out of ten participants taking part in this study have been clinically diagnosed with a psychological disorder. These diagnoses included Bipolar Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, (ADHD), Major Depression, and/or Anxiety Disorder. Another participant experienced panic attacks and paranoia.

As presented in Chapter Three of this study, the prevalence of mental health issues among welfare recipients has been well documented in research literature (Danziger, 2000; Danziger & Pollack, 2000; Loprest & Ledlewski, 2006). This current study would appear to reflect that data.

Beverly described the necessity of medical and mental health coverage:

I couldn’t afford to pay my medicine cause I take Effexor and Atarax for anxiety, and Topomax to help me sleep plus a mood stabilizer. The Effexor is a $100 and some and the Topomax is a $100 and some. The Atarax is about $80. And those (prescriptions) alone, you know, insurance isn’t going to cover much of that.

Compounding this situation, a number of the participants’ children were also experiencing mental health issues. One participant’s 15-year-old daughter was diagnosed with and receiving treatment for ADHD, Anxiety Disorder, Passive/Aggressive Disorder, and possibly Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). One father who was diagnosed with ADHD has two sons who also have been diagnosed
with ADHD. Understandably, the medication for two children would be quite expensive.

Another participant in the study has a son who is in counseling for Anger Management. Still another participant’s daughter has symptoms of Bipolar Disorder and her son is dealing with anger management issues. Understandably, continued access to mental health services is crucial for parents as well as their children, including those families attempting to transition from welfare to work.

Although appreciative of the medical coverage provided by JFS for themselves and their families, several of the participants shared some common concerns about recent changes in the administrative policies and procedures pertaining to the medical coverage. Beverly again stated her concerns rather succinctly,

Well, their (JFS) medical card…they’re still having problems with their medical, they just didn’t have the services they needed. Uh, I’m not happy with the medical card here right now, with the changes they’re making right now. Uh, they’ve made us switch to the private which I don’t mind so much except that they don’t have the doctors on board.

Beverly was concerned because many of the doctors were no longer accepting the medical card. It was becoming increasingly difficult to find a physician who would provide the necessary care for the participant and/or their children. And some of the doctors who did accept the medical card were not in the area where the recipient lived. Beverly concluded, “I don’t see why we should have to change (medical plan) if they’re
not, if they don’t have the doctors. We’re not getting what we need!” She went on to point out that many dentists no longer accept the new medical plan either.

_A Very Effective and Positive Experience—Job Search_

A key component of welfare reform was for states to provide programs at the county level to assist TANF recipients in seeking, obtaining, and retaining employment. In Ohio these programs are often identified as Job Search or Job Club. The County Department of JFS often utilize the local One-Stop Employment Center to help facilitate these activities and assignments. The three counties where this study was conducted provided such programs to assist men and women in developing and enhancing job seeking and interviewing skills, creating resumes, conducting online job searches, and developing awareness of appropriate attire and attitude for job interviews. Basic life skills and budgeting were also addressed.

It was in this setting that the interviews for the current study took place. It became evident during the in-depth qualitative interviews that the participants enjoyed and appreciated their Job Search or Job Club experiences. Although some recipients were initially hesitant, the positive, supportive environment in the Job Search and Job Club Programs proved beneficial in terms of presenting job search strategies and life skills as well as enhancing self-esteem.

John observed that all the services here I went to helped me in one way or another. As far as job search, instead of going out—you know gas is pretty expensive right now -- and running three quarters of a tank of gas looking for a job, you can get online and
see who is actually looking for somebody. Some of the applications you can acquire right here and fill them out. You know, it’s like having a mediator, somebody to help you out.

Katie explained that in the county where she resides, TANF clients attend Job Club three days a week for a month. She went on to describe the Job Club activities,

You have to write a resume which I already did. I let them go over it. I had to add some to my old resume… other jobs. And how to do interviews, and how to dress, how to budget ‘cause there are people who don’t know how to do that.

Katie went on to describe how she soon obtained employment, “And that’s how I got that ‘Inventory’ job was on my own, because I would stop in …on the internet because that SCOTI System that is set up… you get those matches!”

Roger had previously worked at a production plant, but was laid off permanently. The Job Search program provided a means of continuing his job search while participating in the Work Experience Program (WEP) assignment in “Maintenance and Housekeeping” at an apartment complex. He recently submitted an application through Job Search for a maintenance position at a local university.

Roger observed, “I went through a two-week training course (Job Search) and that was probably some of the biggest help…. They help you look up jobs…they have applications for local companies.”

Roger added:

During that two weeks you have the chance to send out resumes, do applications, do job search online. And in the evening time, that’s how I do my search is
online. Like I say, I use SCOTI online at home. I do that careerbuilder.com, monster.com, and Job Bank. I’ve got all my resumes (online). I get some things back, but it’s usually in areas I have no training.

Roger then described another program he was enjoying, “What we’ve been doing in this activity is it opens up everybody’s mind…what everybody’s thinking. Plus, it deals with stress, how to conduct an interview, and how to dress for an interview.”

Like other participants, Tim commented on how much he had changed having participated in the Job Club,

Yes, there is a lot (of ways)…like when I do a resume and stuff, I can do a cover letter page, I am more positive about getting a job. There is this one place which was going to hire me Wednesday. Everything I wrote on that, I learned from these guys (Job Club staff).

Angela recognized not simply the job search skills she learned through the Job Search Program, but the enhancement of her self-esteem as well:

When the case manager tells them that they have these programs (Job Search), tell them to take the programs because they are a real big help and it’s a big stress reliever. Also, it lets you know that someone is behind you!

When I asked the participants to explain why they regarded the Job Search program so positively in comparison to other aspects of the JFS services, one of the respondents put it this way: “Well, there’s upstairs and there’s downstairs and there’s a world of difference how they treat you.” The respondent went on to explain that “the Job Search staff saw each of us as an individual and respected us.”
It is important to note that the Job Search & Job Club staff is there to serve the general public (i.e., a universal population) including those who are receiving public assistance. As a result their responsibilities are inherently different from that of JFS case managers who must make the assignments specifically for TANF recipients, monitor compliance on the part of the participants, and issue a sanction (stoppage of TANF income) for noncompliance. Thus, the recipient’s perceptions of JFS case managers and staff may be somewhat different when compared to their perceptions of the Job Search or Job Club staff.

Ineffective Policies, Procedures, and Experiences

The themes identified in this study that the participants believed to be ineffective in terms of services, policies, or experiences were relatively few in number. However, in describing their individual lived experiences as a welfare recipient, the participants displayed greater emotion, intensity, anger, and frustration surrounding one lived experience in particular than any other issue appearing in this study. And that was the issue of being treated with disrespect by JFS staff.

The Concern for Respect and Consideration

The thematic issue of disrespect was voiced by 50% of those interviewed. Participants from all three counties where the study was conducted verbalized this issue. Moreover, not simply was the theme one of the most prevalent, it proved to be one of the most painful for the participants themselves. While sharing their stories, the researcher heard and observed more emotional behavior and intensity concerning this experience than any other issue presented. The shared experience as told by the
participants themselves was that of being treated disrespectfully when applying for and while receiving welfare. These experiences appeared to support other studies reflecting recipients feeling stigmatized (Moffitt, 1983; Rogers-Dillon, 1995).

Interestingly, some of the seemingly most confident, self-assured participants in this study were also the most descriptive and emotional in sharing their experiences of being treated with disrespect. Katie was most emphatic. Her interview was proceeding well. She was fluent and quite interested in sharing her experiences while making the transition from welfare to the workplace. However, when I asked her to share her experiences when she first applied for welfare, her affect changed and her eyes welled up with tears.

Katie responded, “It was a nightmare! I was looked at like, um, I did something wrong. The worker actually said I chose this way and I didn’t.”

Katie went on to explain that she and her husband had a thriving business and nice home until he was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. She commented that “he’s doing a little bit better.”

Katie explained, “We had a good life’s savings until my husband got sick. It’s all gone!”

When asked why she felt like she had done something wrong she replied,

“It was the attitude.”

I then asked, “Was it a particular person, do you think, or what—a bad day, stressed out, burn-out?”
Katie replied,

“No, because everyone I came in contact with… that was just one. And then they acted like you knew what you were doing and I had never done that before. I didn’t know that here there were certain times and days that you had to come in and apply. I didn’t know any of that. They assumed that everybody that walked through that door knows the system.”

Katie went on to describe feelings and experiences that were shared by several others participating in the study. During the taped interviews I observed that the participants’ emotional intensity ranged from hurt and humiliation to outbursts of anger. Indeed, the issue of being treated disrespectfully by staff emerged as the most emotionally charged issue or “lived experience” shared by the participants.

Katie later recommended that

the people the clients first come in contact…need to be watched closer on how they treat people coming through that door. Not everybody’s the same, not everybody’s bad, not everybody’s trying to beat the system…cause to me, that’s how you feel as soon as you walk in.

The researcher pointed out that perhaps the staff had observed a number of times when some recipients had abused or misused public assistance.

Katie again responded,

Right, and I agree ‘cause I know there are people out there (that do that). I’m not stupid, but they’re just putting us all in that big lump. If you walk in that door and you need help, then you’re in that big lump.
Debbie also did not wish to be “lumped together.” She expressed that,

to tell you the truth, if they (caseworkers) see you doing what you’re suppose

to be doing and you know you’re not shirking, you’re not trying to slide by or

anything, as we call it, jumping through the hoops for them, they should take

that into consideration. They shouldn’t just lump us all together.

Debbie continued, “I know there are slackers…who get by with as little as they can.
I mean I try, I try my best and I always have, you know, and it takes only a few to make
it harder on the majority.”

Having been a Medical Assistant in a busy clinic for some time, Debbie took her
assignments and responsibilities through JFS quite seriously. Unfortunately due to
multiple medical challenges, she has had to pursue disability benefits.

Janet also shared her experiences of being disrespected,

Being on assistance is a humiliating thing. It’s not someone’s goal or ambition
‘Yes, I’m going to get on welfare, yeh!’ Um, treat people with a little bit more
decency. People aren’t there because they want to be. They’re there because
they have no choice. Don’t treat them like they’re the dirt under your feet. And
that’s the feeling you get!

Indeed, five of the six women interviewed in this study described in somewhat
different words that fact that they had experienced “that feeling” as they interacted with
staff at various Job and Family Services. The participants often felt that the staff did not
respect them (the recipient), nor did the staff appear to be concerned about the needs of
their family.
When the participants revealed similar experiences such as these, the researcher would ask them if they felt that just certain individuals treated them disrespectfully. The participants pointed out that there were a few case managers or staff who treated them respectfully, but most did not.

When Janet first applied for TANF the caseworker asked, “Well, what makes you think you need assistance?”

Janet replied to the caseworker, “Because I need to feed my (three) children.”

Janet then disclosed that “the look she (caseworker) gave me…it was like… I was a complete bother to her being there, even though she’s being paid for me to be there!”

Anita described a similar experience while applying for TANF:

They ask you how come and why you need help? I mean, it’s obvious when you need help. Otherwise you would never ask for help. But they like to put you down at first, like how come and why are you in that situation?

Later Anita added,

I guess they’re trying to put you down just to figure out how come you’re in that situation. And the reason was I got divorced. You know, I had no place to go.

Nothing! So I needed help—especially with two kids!

Debbie concluded the following:

I’ve had caseworkers that were really understanding and really willing to work with me. And then I’ve had other ones that it was like—“Do it or else.”

I think the caseworkers need to have psychology classes sometimes, because it’s like they’re not willing to deal with our problems. They don’t want to
understand our problems.

While addressing this theme of disrespect, I noted that the participants did not say *all* employees working at County Departments of Job and Family Services treated them disrespectfully. Having worked nearly sixteen years with recipients in collaboration with one of the County Departments for Job and Family Services involved in the study, I have heard numerous recipients speak very highly and appreciatively of their respective caseworkers.

Moreover, I am also aware that some individuals—client or staff-- may experience or perceive situations differently. Some individuals-- client or staff -- may be dealing with personal, medical, emotional, or psychological issues, challenges and concerns. In addition, JFS employees may be dealing with difficult circumstances, personalities, exhaustive caseloads and responsibilities, or the ongoing changes in policies and procedures. Indeed, another research project could be conducted on the lived experience of caseworkers, administrative assistants, receptionists, and other employees of various State Departments of Human Services. However, this current qualitative study focused on listening to the voice of the people (i.e., the recipients) while they shared their respective lived experience.

In this study, Janet said that she was made to feel “like dirt under their feet.” Katie tearfully recalled her experience—“It was a nightmare.” When the researcher asked the participants to clarify whether it was a particular moment (a bad day), happening, or individual (no names were sought, mentioned, or discussed), the recipients explained that they felt they were treated disrespectfully by most of the caseworkers and staff.
Several of the female participants expressed that many JFS caseworkers should have to take sensitivity training, counseling, or psychology classes so as to treat them (the recipients) with more respect and to better listen and to understand what they were experiencing and needing. Undoubtedly there could be a number of causal factors or combination of factors or dynamics impacting the recipients’ lived experiences producing the emotional intensity observed by this researcher during the interviews.

The Theory of Self-efficacy presented by Bandura (1977) might be relevant in this type of human interaction. Bandura (1977) pointed out that a woman’s personal experiences coupled with positive or negative interactions with others could have a positive or negative impact upon a woman’s perception of herself and her ability to cope or manage life’s experiences, especially for women with lower household income.

Rogers-Dillon (1995) noted that the issue of dealing with stigmatism while receiving welfare is a complex one. Rogers-Dillon (1995) recognized that women who had previously had a middle class income experienced more anxiety as a recipient than those who had been dependent on welfare earlier in their lives.

The researcher noted during this study that Katie and Janet, both of whom had once enjoyed a relatively comfortable middle class income, were more sensitive to and intense about the way they had been treated by staff while receiving assistance. Katie and her family lived reasonably well until her husband was diagnosed with cancer and was no longer able to work.

Similarly, Janet and her three children also enjoyed a comfortable living until she found it necessary to leave her companion due to his drug addiction. Both women may
have experienced some self-efficacy issues with the rather traumatic experiences and changes in their lives. Furthermore, for both women and their families the household incomes were significantly less than what it had been previously.

The five women in this study who described being treated disrespectfully may have reflected the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) presented by Lent et al. (1994). According to Lent et al., SCCT identifies three key factors that impact the career behaviors and choices of individuals—one’s self-efficacy, goals, and expectations. They theorized that these three components impact an individual’s career choices and behaviors. In addition, Brown and Lent (1996) proposed that self-efficacy is not a “singular, passive or global trait, but rather involves dynamic self-beliefs that are linked to particular performance domains, activities and work tasks” (p. 312). With women experiencing very challenging and depressing situations in trying to provide for their families, their sense of self-efficacy may be diminished somewhat which further threatens their sense of well-being and confidence.

The feminization of welfare described in Chapter Two in which women and children constitute the largest percentage of recipients may reflect still another aspect of women describing experiences of being treated disrespectfully by JFS staff. Although the actual causes as to why five of the six females in the current study expressed intense feelings about the “disrespect” issue, it nevertheless emerged as a prevalent theme in the study, particularly among women.

The relatively small sample in this study also limited the potential for different responses and outcomes as compared to a much larger sample. This issue of being
treated disrespectfully by Human Services personnel might present a future topic for research as well. Exploring the lived experiences of the caseworkers or other JFS staff who interact with and provide services to those receiving welfare could potentially shed additional light.

For example, I have observed instances in which individuals receiving welfare were non-compliant in completing required assignments as authorized by U.S. Congress in PRWORA and its subsequent re-authorization policies and procedures. In some instances, the behavior went beyond non-compliance to that of defiance and disregard for the current State and/or Federal guidelines and policies. When in non-compliance, the recipient can be sanctioned and lose the assistance for a period of time. However, there is an appeal process to the State that recipients can pursue if they so choose.

I was not aware of any such behavior on the part of the participants in the current study. Once or twice their services were delayed because they were not able to make a given appointment at their respective JFS, but there were not any major causes for sanctions presented in the interviews for the study.

In comparison to the five women’s lived experiences when they applied for welfare, none of the four men who participated in the study expressed any feelings of being treated disrespectfully. Rather, the men cited particular issues with the system (e.g., “Why do they change caseworkers so often?”), but not with JFS staff. Neither did the four men express any frustration or anger toward JFS staff or any of their case managers.
For example, Roger commented, “I heard people say they went in there and their caseworker had been rude to them. The times I’ve been down there they treated me with respect. They’ve answered my questions. I haven’t had a problem with them.”

Later Roger observed,

Another thing, I think, a lot of people have a chip on their shoulder when they go in these places and that just rubs a caseworker the wrong way and we’ve got two clashes, two-edged clashes going on there.

Whether the varying experiences and perspectives of the men and women were due to gender differences, gender discrimination, self-efficacy or other issues is not clear. However, one prevalent theme emerging from the study was that fifty per cent of the participants, all of whom were women, described various experiences of having been treated disrespectfully while at JFS.

*The Concern for the Frequent Changing of Case Managers*

Another procedure or experience described in the interviews by several participants as being ineffective and frustrating was that of the frequent changing of their case workers. For example, I asked Debbie to describe her experience as a TANF recipient and she simply replied, “Chaotic.”

I then asked her to explain what she meant by “chaotic” and she shared the following:

Because… you get shuffled around quite a bit, caseworkers, and sometimes they shuffle you off to people who are new and they don’t really know what they’re doing. Sometimes it can cause a problem with what you’re doing. Different case
managers want different things or expect different things or, you know, will let things slide.

Roger expressed some similar frustrations about JFS changing case workers so often:

One bad thing I found was wrong with them is they change case workers constantly. That’s the only bad thing. I’ve seen only one case worker, but the new one, I’ve never seen her. But, uh, I heard others talking in the class…and some of them have had eight case workers in six months and they’ve only seen two of them. Before they ever see the new one, they change them to a different one.

When I interviewed Beverly I asked what advice she would give to someone who was applying for assistance for the first time. I was anticipating her saying something about being sure to have birth certificates and social security numbers for family members. Instead she shared the following:

First off, take something to read or do because you are going to be sitting there for awhile in the waiting area. They are very backlogged. They are short on people. Uh, be prepared to be bounced from case worker to case worker. I’ve had seven or eight case workers in the past three months. Every time I turn around they are sending me a letter— ‘You have a new case manager.’

I then asked Beverly why she thought there were so many turnovers. She replied:

Some have retired. They’ve hired maybe one or two and they are adjusting to the cases accordingly. But that’s being bounced around too…way too much. People …haven’t even gotten a chance. Half the time they don’t even see me
before I get transferred to another case manager.

As an administrator I understand the necessity of change in the workplace and doing more with less, including personnel. However, as a researcher I was interested in hearing the voice of the recipient. Thus, in reviewing the transcripts and colored-coded statements concerning the issue of “changing caseworkers so frequently,” I observed another statement that Beverly had made. It shed some light as to why she would prefer much less changing of her assigned caseworkers.

I asked, “Has this frequent changing of caseworkers been, you think, in recent years with welfare reform and its reauthorization?”

Beverly replied,

Oh, yea, because I had the same case worker for years before that. And I knew them when I saw them. I knew them by name. We knew each other well enough when I came in she could tell I was in a bad mood, or I had a bad day, or what’s wrong…you know, how your week’s been, and she could tell what I needed and didn’t need.

Beverly then suggested the following:

And that’s what they need to do, to know their people, to know what’s going on so they can accurately assess what they (the recipients) need. If they need an extension or if they’re lying or not. You can’t tell they’re lying if you don’t know them. And half these case managers don’t know who they’re dealing with and somebody comes in there and lies and they’re giving them all this stuff they don’t need. And then it hurts the ones like me who do need the services.
Welfare reform has indeed changed many things. TANF case loads have been reduced by 60% or more (U.S. department of Health and Human Services, 2002). Case managers may not be working for years with the same clients as occurred before welfare reform was authorized with its time limits for TANF eligibility. Even so, the experience of recipients dealing with the frequent turnover of assigned case managers was shown to be an area of concern and frustration for several participants in the study. Other than the theme of being treated disrespectfully, the rapid change of assigned case managers proved to be the second most prevalent theme for ineffective practices from the perspective and lived experience of the participants.

Research Question Three

The third research question examined the following: “From the perspective of the participant, what, if any, major challenges, barriers, or conditions yet remain that hinder participants from making a successful transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency?”

In examining the qualitative data and the emerging themes identified within that data, several key needs or barriers became evident. One of the primary needs standing between the participant and the pursuit of sustained employment was that of reliable transportation.

The Need of Reliable Transportation

Lack of the availability of reliable transportation continues to present a major challenge to many TANF recipients seeking employment or participating in required JFS assignments such Job Club, WEP sites, etc. Only one of the three southern Ohio
counties represented in this study provided free access to transportation. That one county utilized vehicles (usually vans) to transport Senior Citizens and TANF recipients and their pre-school children. The other two counties did not provide specific transportation to TANF recipients. Tickamyer et al. (2000) noted this difficulty in other rural counties of Ohio:

Clients we interviewed repeatedly pointed to lack of reliable transportation as a primary obstacle to consistent employment and also a common source of sanctions that appeared totally unfair and irrational to recipients with last minute transportation failures. Case managers dealing with individual clients often see transportation problems as excuses, however, rather than real material obstacles to employment (p.13).

Similarly, in this current study Angela experienced the challenge of not having reliable transportation:

But you know, it’s kinda’ hard for me because the transportation thing is like, real crazy because we don’t have transportation out here. I’m use to a car. By me losing everything, I lost my car. The Welfare Department gives you $25 to go where we have to go, but it doesn’t last long. By me seeking jobs, coming to Job Search, the cab for me to come down here is $4 and $4 back, that’s $8 (in one day).

Angela described her plan to get transportation and to get off welfare:

If I can get transportation, I can fill in the other links...try to save up enough money to get a car and so when I get a car I could branch out even farther (for a
better job), because you can pay only so much. And if I branch out for a
down payment on a car… get from point A to point B, finish my schooling (GED
and Medical Billing and Coding), I’ll be content.

Angela has her goals and reliable transportation may determine whether she can realize those goals. The same is true for several other participants in the study and countless other current or former recipients.

For example, Tim indicated that if his relatives had not assisted him with gas money, he could not have attended the required Job Search assignments nor participated in some promising job interviews. He expressed to me that he may soon be employed as a result of those interviews. His previous work experience indicated that he was well qualified for the positions for which he interviewed. However, the $25 travel allowance provided through Job and Family Services would not have been sufficient for his travel expenses.

Janet has not had a vehicle for the past year and has walked most every where she needs to go. She related the following dilemma,

I was up near Columbus when it happened and I couldn’t afford the $300 towing fee to get it (the car) home. Well, it was going to cost like $900 to a $1000 to fix it, because when it broke, it messed up a whole lot of other things. I just couldn’t afford it. I had to sell it to a salvage yard.

Later I asked Janet what steps she might take to deal with having no transportation. Her response revealed the financial challenges she was confronting,

I can’t make a car payment on the money I’m making now. I’m so far behind in
debt it’s incredible. Um, you know I had to take this quarter off from school (university) ’cause my financial aid got messed up and then I had some family issues that I had to deal with. So it’s tighter this 10 weeks than it has been since I started school. Having a reliable source of transportation at this point in time is not feasible, it’s not attainable, not ’til I finish school, because once I finish school I can get a better job. Uh, this not having transportation limits you.

The grocery is two blocks away from her home. With herself and three children, she walks to the grocery at least four or five times a week and uses the food stamp card. Occasionally, she may take the cab if she has a few extra dollars, but she and the children continue to walk most of the time.

Indeed, over half of the ten individuals participating in the study discussed challenges with transportation and/or the costs of transportation. Whether it was lack of public transportation, an unreliable vehicle, or simply not having enough money for needed car repairs or gasoline ($3 or more per gallon at the time these interviews were conducted), transportation presented a major barrier to those attempting to move from welfare to work and toward self-sufficiency (Lens, 2002; GAO, 1998c).

Tickamyer et al. (2000) also recognized the challenge of transportation in rural, Appalachian areas of Ohio. They interviewed 29 Human Service Directors and noted …the large and pervasive problem of transportation which affects virtually every county and most program participants can only be dealt with by band aid interventions of small loans for vehicle purchase or repair, provision for temporary or emergency taxi or shuttle services, or worst case, threats and sanctions with little
backup assistance. Directors are all too aware that they are dealing with a larger structural issue, endemic to the region, but is beyond their power to do anything at this level (pp. 14-15).

According to the data, the issue of reliable transportation was not the only challenge or barrier that current and former TANF recipients were confronting. They recognized the need to make them themselves more employable by enhancing their education and job skills.

*The Need for Additional Education and Training*

As the participants described their lived experiences in transition from welfare to work another prevalent theme emerged —the need for more training and education. In fact, three of the ten or 30% of the participants in the study had been high school dropouts. John and David later completed the GED. After attending the Job Search Program, Angela also realized the importance of completing her GED. She is currently attending Adult Education classes at the county One-Stop Employment Center. According to her Adult Education instructors, Angela will be ready to sit for the GED exam in a few days.

The participants became keenly aware that most positions available to those without a high school diploma are generally low paying or entry level and would not provide a self-sufficient income. In addition, many of the job listings require at least a high school or GED diploma in order to apply. Throughout the Job Search Program or Job Club assignments, the participants realize even more the necessity of obtaining the high school or GED diploma.
Angela also recognized that she needed to obtain her GED in order to pursue her goals. She commented, “After I finish Job Search, I want to start GED classes and then go to the university to get the certificate for data entry and medical records.” Angela expressed excitement about her goals and her timetable, “I have between March and May to get my GED. I take the online GED practice tests all the time. I score pretty high. It’s just on my math score where I’m kind of weak.” She is already registered to take her GED Exam.

John, a former welfare recipient, also has a plan to further his education. He completed his GED in 2004. He is now employed full time at a local car dealership. John has just completed his first semester of class at a local community college majoring in Computer-aided Design. He is very pleased that he earned a 3.6 GPA, particularly since he has ADD and experienced challenges in high school. As a single parent with two sons, ages 11 and 13, he will return to college in the fall when his children return to school.

Similarly, David, a 19-year old and father of one child, also completed his GED. His wife was approved for disability income. At the time of this study David was participating in Job Club. He hoped to be employed soon, but said he would like to pursue an Associate Degree in Law Enforcement Technology and later a Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice.

The participants who already earned a high school diploma realized the importance of furthering their training as well. Roger, a husband and father of three children (ages 8, 13, and 16) is currently assigned to a WEP site while he continues to seek
employment. He had worked at a manufacturing plant, but received a permanent layoff. While employed, his income was sufficient to provide for his family, but he has had difficulty obtaining employment in the rural county where he resides.

Roger commented, “I went to the WEP Program and that has been really helpful. I experienced stuff I haven’t experienced before… stripping floors and waxing floors. That will be helpful … where I’ve taken the exam at the college should I happen to get on there."

Roger had already completed the custodial exam for possible employment at a local university. He scored 97% on the exam and mentioned he would like to work for the university. However, he also expressed an interest in additional training, “As of right now, I’d like to go back and get some more education, more training…with computer programs.” If hired at the university, he would have access to Computer Science classes as well as possible tuition waivers or financial assistance.

As a single mother of three children (ages 14, 10, and 6), Janet realized the value of furthering her education. She had trained and worked as a travel agent in a southern state, but relocated to southern Ohio “after a relationship broke down.” She discovered that jobs in southern Ohio were not as plentiful so she had to apply for public assistance. Since then she has worked two or three jobs at any one time including catering meals and house cleaning. Meanwhile, she has continued her education at a university two blocks from her home. Her vehicle recently broke down so she walks to her classes at the university, the grocery, etc. She has less than a year before she completes a Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Psychology. She is
very interested in obtaining a position with a state or federal corrections program. At
this point, she appears to be well on her way toward achieving her goal.

*When Education is not Enough: the Need for Vocational Rehabilitation*

Two other participants in the study have experienced major physical and mental
health issues. As presented earlier, many TANF recipients experience multiple medical
and/or mental health issues. For example, Debbie has multiple challenges including a
severe back injury, fibromyalgia, narcolepsy, depression, and severe allergic asthma
that frequently require immediate treatment at the emergency room. Due to her
medical condition, Debbie has cycled on and off public assistance for the past 15 years.

During the interview, Debbie stated that she really wanted to work. She described
her efforts in the following statement,

I tried to get back on at Kelly’s (*Temp Service*). And then I tried to get on at
Manpower, but my doctor decided that it would be better if I didn’t work because I
was starting to have all kinds of, um, I was having some really bad problems with
my back. And I was going to Columbus once or sometimes twice a month on my
back.

Debbie had completed a Medical Office Tech program in 2001 at a local
Vocational-Technical School. She maintained intermittent employment from several
months to a year or two at a time. However, with her back injury and other medical
challenges, she could not continue working. Previously when she was feeling better
she had completed 3 years toward a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration.
Unfortunately, some of the classes she needed to complete her degree were either canceled or were offered when she had to work.

At the time of Debbie’s interviews she only had three months remaining for TANF eligibility. She was hopeful that JFS might give her a “hardship extension” for several months until her disability is possibly approved. She said that even if she does receive disability, she wants to continue her physical therapy and counseling so that she might eventually return to the workforce.

I asked Debbie what she would most like to do if she were able to return to work and she replied,

I want to be a Child Advocate. Actually, I looked into one of the colleges, uh, University of Colorado and they have a good program. I talked to him (advisor) and he said most of my credits would transfer over from my Bachelor’s Degree.

So he said it would probably take about 18 months to actually get my degree.

With medical confirmation of her multiple disabilities, Debbie could be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Working with Ohio’s Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR), she and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor could develop an Individual Employment Plan (IEP). BVR could also assist Debbie if additional training or education should be needed including, perhaps, the coursework to become a Child Advocate. In addition, BVR could assist Debbie in procuring employment as well, if and when she is able.

Another participant who took part in this study also experienced mental health issues and was in the process of applying for disability. Beverly had experienced severe
symptoms of Bipolar Disorder in her teens, but it was not diagnosed until later. She said the longest she ever kept a job was two years and that was fast food. Most of her jobs lasted only a couple of months or less.

Beverly described the ongoing challenges in her life:

I had a nervous breakdown during my divorce. While I was in (hospital) they had decided that I had Bipolar. And it was. They adjusted my medication… until they apparently got it half way decent where it keeps me steady as long as I’m not under a lot of stress.

Beverly also commented that “even though the stress is gone, I can still feel the residual, it takes me a week to recover from one breakdown.” She has tried to return to the workforce, but the jobs create “too much stress too quickly… I don’t have time to recoup.”

At present her three years of eligibility for TANF have expired and she is now receiving “hardship extensions” for TANF. She is trusting that her disability will be approved before she exhausts the hardship extensions. Beverly shared in the interview that she is not certain what she will do if the disability is not approved. Again, upon medical confirmation of her disabilities, BVR could possibly assist with appropriate training and job placement.

The realities of the lived experiences described by Debbie and Beverly cannot be solely addressed through more training and education. Other resources are needed including appropriate medical attention, mental health services, and vocational rehabilitation (Morton, et al., 1997; Hall & Parker, 2005).
The Need for More Jobs in Rural Areas

The participants described the lack of jobs in rural settings as a challenge. Roger attended ten different schools while growing up as his father sought employment. As a result Roger wanted to provide a stable home environment for his wife and three children in a rural county in southern Ohio. He shared his concerns:

Then I got married and I told my wife I’m not going to move all over the place to find a job and I wanted my kids to have friends and go to one school and so far I’ve succeeded. But the job market is kind of rough right now.

While working at a manufacturing plant Roger had made a decent income and was able to support his family. That was a year ago. After using all his savings it was necessary to apply for public assistance. Even with his ongoing job search efforts, it has been difficult for Roger to find employment that would still enable his family to be self-sufficient.

When asked how he and the family were making it he replied, “Well as of right now, I’m receiving assistance from the state and I’m struggling because my house payment is more than what I’m getting there (TANF). He continued, “As I said, I can’t make my house payment. I’d really like to have a job. I think assistance is great, but it’s for people that really need it, who can’t work. I can work. I want a job.”

Roger is not alone. Three of the ten individuals interviewed in the current study had been totally self-sufficient a few months to a year earlier. However, due to plant layoffs, lock-out’s, shut downs, or major medical challenges, these families find themselves having to apply for public assistance. These three individuals reside in rural
counties in southern Ohio within Appalachia. The two rural counties where the study was conducted have unemployment rates at 7% or higher. The metro county included in this study has an unemployment rate usually in the mid 5% range. However, in the metro county there exists considerable pockets of poverty in which a significant number of recipients and other residents are not prepared to compete for the better paying jobs with benefits.

Another participant, David, moved from Lima, Ohio. He said the job market had at one time been pretty good up there. Due to various economic challenges and lack of jobs, David relocated to southern Ohio where he was told that there were several production plants hiring. At this time, he continues to seek employment that would enable him to provide for his wife and young child.

Tim had been employed at a local plant, but the plant implemented a lock-out of current employees and hired replacements. All three are seeking employment within the rural counties or at least within a reasonable driving distance. With fuel costs over $3 a gallon in the area, it would be difficult for these families to commute a long distance to and from work. Four of the ten participants (John, Anita, Katie, and Janet) are now employed at wages less than $9 per hour. All four are still using the medical card and food stamp benefits through JFS.

Two individuals (Debbie and Beverly) are experiencing multiple medical and/or mental health issues and are currently pursuing disability. The four remaining individuals (Angela, Roger, David, and Tim) are continuing their job search efforts while participating in the WEP or other designated JFS assignments. At the time this
study was being conducted, Roger was hopeful that his previous work history and 97% test score might enable him to soon be employed at a local university. Tim had experienced three very positive job interviews and hopes to be employed soon. Regardless, all four individuals are planning to continue their job search efforts.

Research Question Four

The fourth question addressed in the following: “What recommendations would participants make to policy makers and service providers to better assist recipients in making the transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency?”

Themes Reflecting the Recipients’ Recommendations

The participants addressed the services and resources most helpful to them in their transition from welfare to work (or possibly disability for two of the participants). They also described those experiences that they believed were ineffective or counterproductive. In addition, they made some specific recommendations as to how to better assist other recipients to make that transition successfully. These are presented in the following section.

“One Size Does Not Fit All” or Individualization of Services

Another theme that emerged from the voices of the recipients was the need for more individualized services. Each participant and their family at times had specific needs that were not addressed in current JFS policies and procedures. For example, Katie, Tim and others found it difficult to attend interviews, look for work, or get applications due to the need of basic car repairs on their vehicle, if they had a vehicle. Others had no vehicle or public transportation available. Others may not have access to standard
day care, “off hours” or nonstandard child care, or specialized child care for special needs children (Johnson & Meckstoth, 1998).

Thus, at times, specific interventions can make the difference between obtaining employment or no employment, training or no training. The participants in this study believed that individualization of services based upon the unique and essential needs of the individual and the family could better assist individuals and their families to become financially self-sufficient.

*Gradually Decrease the Monthly Cash Assistance*

John, a single parent with two sons, recommended that when the individual does obtain employment, don’t immediately withdraw all the financial aid at once, but give the family a period of time to make the adjustment from welfare to work. He pointed out that

the biggest thing is, when you’re a single parent…they need some kind of assistance… they need help until they can get on their feet. Sometimes, when they get on their feet, it’s easy for the feet to be knocked out from underneath.

I’m getting 25 to 30 hours a week. They just cut my *(TANF)* check down to $68 and they’ve cut my food stamps down to $108 *(per month)*. And I mean my kids *(two boys, ages 11 and 13)* have a good appetite.

John went on to explain that it would help families if JFS would gradually withdraw the assistance while the family made the personal and financial transition from welfare to work, especially if the job does not pay that much.

Debbie also recognized the financial adjustment of moving from welfare to work,
When you’re sitting there and you’re looking at your bills and one bill has to go behind and you’re scrambling to get it and it’s so piled up… when you’re living on limited budget anyway and they take it completely and they just strip it from you, that makes it tough. So maybe if they did it gradually, not pulling the rug out all at once.

Debbie mentioned another point to help families make the transition from welfare to work,

Even if they had people or financial advisors working with you to help you with your budget each month. You know, ‘You bring your bills in and we will work with you, you’ll know how much you’ll have or what.’ That would be great.

Developing a budget is usually presented in the Job Search or Job Club assignments, but learning to apply those skills and adjust to the changes in income is often difficult to do. Loprest and Zedlewski (2006) recognized the limited incomes of those making that transition, “More than 6 in 10 recent welfare leavers are poor, and 1 in 3 has incomes below half the poverty level. In contrast, about 4 of 10 nonwelfare families have income below the poverty level” (p.46). Although the budgeting process appeared to be a challenge to most of the families in this current study, it was of interest to this researcher how they manage as well as they did with just over $300 per month. Even including food stamps and the medical coverage, it was quite a task to accomplish.

There may have been some other unreported income (e.g., family, friends, significant others, or ‘under the table’ funds). However, the participants did not allude to additional income other than two who said that family members had at times helped
them with gas money in order to get to appointments with their doctor, counselor, and especially, JFS caseworkers. If they failed to make their JFS assignments they could be sanctioned for non-compliance and thereby lose their TANF check for a period of time.

“An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure”

Like Katie and Janet, Roger had experienced a sufficient income to support his family. Unfortunately he was laid off from the plant where he had worked for several years. He received six months of unemployment while continuing to seek for another position. After six months he still had not found a job that paid comparable to what he had earned at the production plant. After his unemployment benefits were exhausted, the family had to utilize their savings. Before long the savings account was empty as well.

Roger explained that he did not realize how difficult it was to find gainful employment in the rural county where he resided. At the time of the interview he had extended his online job search to Columbus, Ohio--a two hour drive from his home. He also disclosed that the cash assistance (TANF) his family received did not even make the monthly house payment.

When asked what changes needed be made to help men and women in his situation, Roger explained,

As far as the state level goes, we might look at how the system is set up.

Like I say, there are good programs out there to help you, but you have to be completely broke to get started. I think that’s what we want to get away from. When you see that your money is going to be dropping off significantly,
go get your stuff then (assistance). Don’t wait until you’re completely broke and you’ve lost your house.

Roger continued,

On the other hand, it seems like the assistance program wants you that way before they’ll help you. So they need to get together and work it out— ‘We don’t want you broke; let us help you before you’re completely down and out.’ On the participant’s part, don’t wait ‘til you’re down and out before you go to get help.

If the help is just a little bit, just enough to help you get by ‘til you can find a job or whatever… that’s better than being homeless and hungry!”

Thus, Katie, Janet, Roger and others described the need for preventative, short term services that would assist them until they were back on their feet financially. According to the participants, these services may not necessarily constitute long-term assistance, but would be a means to help them until they go back to work.

This theme coincided somewhat with John’s, Debbie’s and other participants’ perspective of not cutting the assistance all at once, but do so gradually to give them time to adjust to the transition of welfare to work. From the standpoint of policy makers, the availability of state and federal funds for such services (i.e., help them before they are “completely broke” as Roger stated) may not be feasible.

The challenge of welfare reform is to facilitate opportunities for current and former recipients to be able to provide for the needs of their families through employment. By doing so, perhaps it will be possible to empower them to provide some of their wants as
well. Of course, much depends on the physical and mental health of the individual participant as well as his or her perspective.

Angela, a single mother with two young children, resides in the metro county included in this current study. She expressed the desire and determination to better prepare herself for a good job and a career. She explained,

I have to want it! Actually, you have to want it… to seek out employment. You have to get up and put your foot forward! You can’t depend on somebody else to do it for you! So I have to take responsibility of wanting employment and not just be stuck in one position for the rest of my life!

At the time this study was being conducted Angela was preparing to sit for her GED exam. From there she was planning to enroll in a university in the area to complete a Medical Billing and Coding Program leading to certification. With five or six major hospitals and numerous clinics and other health care agencies in the area, Angela should have no difficulty obtaining employment and achieving her goal.

Indeed, Angela and the other recipients are not the only ones who have a responsibility. Policy makers, services providers, business and industry, as well as education and training institutions also have a major part to play in assisting individuals to transition from welfare to work and onward to total self-sufficiency.

Saturation Point of Prevalent Themes

After interviewing three or four participants on two different occasions, I began to identify a number of repetitive and prevalent themes. These themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews, participant observation, and some of the personal documents
provided by the participants. After interviewing the seventh and eighth participant, however, it appeared that no additional concepts or patterns were emerging. Rather, the participants were experiencing some very similar and shared experiences as identified in previous interviews, but in their own respective way. It appeared to me that the “saturation point” was approaching. The saturation point occurs when no new or significantly different concepts emerge from the qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Rubin and Rubin (2005) explain the meaning of “saturation point”:

You are not looking for any differences at all but looking for those related to the concepts and themes you are working out. As you continue to interview people from each of the relevant categories, each new conversation should add less and less to what you already know, until all you start hearing are the same matters over and over again. At that point you have reached what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term “saturation point” and you stop (p. 67).

However, to explore the possibility of additional concepts or thematic issues and to test whether the “saturation point” had been realized, I proceeded to interview two more participants twice each. Both participants provided additional thick, rich description and qualitative data that further reaffirmed the concepts and themes that I had previously identified. However, no noticeably different or new concepts or patterns emerged.

Obviously, the saturation point does not imply that all concepts, knowledge, and understanding about individuals in transition from welfare to work have been identified
in this qualitative study. Rather, within the framework of the four particular research questions developed for this study, at this point in time, with ten particular individuals participating in two interviews each, a number of significantly different concepts, themes, and patterns had been identified repeatedly until I was “hearing the same matters over and over again” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 67).

Summary

In this chapter a brief descriptive summary of each of the ten participants was presented. The primary themes of the study were identified and analyzed in the context of the four research questions. Remaining challenges and needs of current and former recipients were explored and recommendations of participants examined. The definition for and determination of “saturation point” was discussed. In Chapter Five the conclusions and implications derived from the prevalent themes and patterns are examined.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions and implications derived from the study. I briefly summarize the purpose of the study and the qualitative methodology utilized to gather and analyze the data. I present recommendations for future research topics relevant to individuals in transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to hear the voice of the people in order to better understand the lived experiences of men and women who are attempting to transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency. In addition, I wanted to determine from the perspective of the participants themselves, what services, policies, procedures, or experiences they believed were particularly effective or ineffective while attempting to make their transition to employment and toward self-sufficiency. Also, I wanted to identify any remaining challenges, barriers, or conditions that yet remain which hinder participants’ efforts to maintain employment and achieve self-sufficiency? Lastly, I wanted to document any recommendations participants wanted to make to policymakers and service providers to better assist individuals and their families to transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency?

Ten current or former TANF recipients were interviewed on two separate occasions. Each interview lasted approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours. The semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded (audio), transcribed,
and the resulting qualitative data analyzed. Participant observation and relevant
documents (e.g., photos, certificates, letters, and journals) were also utilized to gather
additional information. Several different themes were coded, identified, and verified
throughout the study.

*What is the Lived Experience of Individuals in Transition from Welfare to Work?*

Lichter and Jayakody (2000), Rose (2001), and Loprest (1999) among others
examined the significant drop in welfare roles, partly if not largely, as a result of
welfare reform. After a decade of welfare reform researchers continue to study the
shares of families on welfare and those that recently left welfare live in poverty, and
many live in deep poverty” (p. x). The outcomes identified in this current study tend to
support previous studies.

Moreover, the same outcomes (e.g., the need of transportation, affordable housing,
training and education, and medical and mental health care) help to describe the plight
of the poor. By listening to their voices perhaps policy maker and services providers
can help relieve or reduce their plight.

*Outcomes: Effective Services and Experiences*

Several themes identified in the study reflected the recipients’ general satisfaction
with certain services and benefits provided through JFS. The participants perceived
these services as essential and effective in helping them to attempt the transition from
welfare to work. However, two participants in the study were not currently seeking
employment due to multiple health issues. Although they were focused on obtaining
disability benefits, they also spoke of the necessity of and appreciation for the medical benefits.

_Medical and Mental Health Care Benefits_

As pointed out in Chapter Four, eight of the ten participants (80%) experienced significant medical challenges and/or mental health issues. Of the two families who did not experience medical or mental health challenges, the children in one of those families did need medical care. Thus, 90% of the families were in need of ongoing medical and or mental health care. Also, the children of families receiving TANF were typically eligible for health care coverage. In Ohio the Children’s Health Insurance Program or “CHIPS” meets the medical needs for children.

The primary concern about the medical benefits expressed by at least two of the participants in the current study was that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find physicians who would accept the medical card through JFS. Again, Beverly’s statement quoted in Chapter Four reflects this need: “They need to get the doctors on board!” Overall, however, participants were appreciative of the basic medical and/or mental health coverage for their children and themselves.

As this research study was being completed, the State of Ohio Legislature and Governor voted to extend the eligibility of the CHIPS Program to Ohio families who are 300% above the Poverty Guidelines rather than the 200% level. This will enable many more children in Ohio to be eligible for free medical coverage.
Job Search and Related Assignments

All ten participants responded positively to their experience while taking part in the Job Search or Job Club Assignments. Several enjoyed the positive, supportive atmosphere while learning basic life skills, enhancing job search and interviewing skills, creating an effective resume, or making a budget.

Outcomes: Ineffective Experiences or Negative Experiences

Overall, the respondents were appreciative of the medical and mental health care benefits as well as the Job Search Program. However, 50% or more identified two key areas or experiences that they perceived to be ineffective if not counterproductive. Those areas involved issues of disrespect and the turnover of caseworkers.

“Don’t put us in One Big Lump!”

Five of the ten participants (50%) shared numerous experiences that caused considerable emotional pain, frustration, or outright anger. Those experiences surrounded episodes in which they perceived and believed they were treated disrespectfully by caseworkers and other staff at JFS. Again, this issue proved to be the most volatile and emotionally charged “lived experience” presented by 50% of the participants all of whom were women. However, none of the four men mentioned any experiences wherein they believed they were treated disrespectfully. In Chapter Four possible causal factors of this difference in terms of the men’s and women’s lived experience and perception were explored, but none were definitive.

Having had responsibilities for nearly two decades as a program coordinator and professional counselor providing services to individuals receiving public assistance,
I was aware of some of the challenges and issues confronting both recipients and as well as their case managers and other service providers. I have observed that cynicism and burnout can occur on both sides of the desk or glass window.

Nevertheless, one of the primary objectives of this study was to hear the voice of the recipients as they shared their own phenomenological experience while on welfare and as they attempted to transition to the world of work and, hopefully, self-sufficiency. For me to explore the lived experiences of case managers, administrators, or other service providers would require several different studies and at another time.

However, when recipients choose not to cooperate or fulfill various requirements as designated by PRWORA and County Departments of Job and Family Services (e.g., not submitting medical documentation, participating in various assignments, submitting timesheets, or attending scheduled appointments), the case manager or other front-line service provider could potentially become insensitive, or eventually experience burnout over a period of time. Under those circumstances, case managers and other service providers may find it difficult to be empathic to the needs presented by noncompliant recipients.

The Case of “Changing Case Managers”

Second only to the issue of disrespect, was that of the rapid turnover or reassignment of the recipient to a different JFS case manager. For example, Beverly shared that she had been assigned to seven or eight different case managers within the past three months. Debbie, Roger, and others also described the relatively rapid turnover of assigned case managers. The respondents concerns ranged from not knowing with
whom they would be working to whether the case managers really knew or cared about their particular needs or that of their family. Several respondents stated that they had never met a number of their assigned case managers before they received a letter informing them that they had been assigned to still another case manager.

Remaining Needs or Barriers

The Need for Reliable Transportation

Transportation continues to present a challenge to many welfare recipients. Three of the participants in this study do not own a vehicle. Two stated they could not afford to purchase a vehicle. The other participant utilized public transportation provided to seniors and TANF recipients who live in that county.

Once a TANF recipient obtains employment, s/he can present confirmation of employment (e.g., a pay stub) and Prevention, Retention, and Contingency Funds (PRC) may provide for needed car repairs or other expenses such as tires, battery, brakes, etc. However, there is no funding available to repair vehicles to get to the JFS assigned sites or to do job search. Of those participants in this study who do own vehicles, several commented that they could not make it to the required JFS assignments if family or friends did not assist them with money for gasoline.

Also, living in rural areas at times means greater distances to travel for required JFS assignments or even employment. Many TANF participants do not have the training or skills to earn much beyond the minimum wage (currently $6.85 in Ohio). Again, with fuel costs currently ranging from about $3.00 or more per gallon at the time of this
study, minimum wage would hardly purchase the fuel needed to drive to and from work, the grocery, medical appointments, etc., while trying to support a family.

**The Need for Affordable Housing**

Caseworkers at times suggest that the participants need to simply move or relocate. However, the cost of moving, paying a deposit and first month’s rent, getting the utilities turned on, etc. is beyond what $300+ cash assistance per month will allow. In one county where this study was conducted, the local Community Action Organization (CAO) which assists with rental deposits and housing had nearly exhausted their annual allocation to be used for rental assistance. The Prevention Retention and Contingency funds provided through JFS may help with the down payment and first month’s rent, but how does the recipient pay the rent thereafter? Many apply for subsidized housing that costs less, but many subsidized apartments have a lengthy waiting list. Thus, the challenges for those receiving TANF assistance or earning low wages are significant. Additional strategies and resources must be available and accessible for TANF recipients and other low-income families to assist them as they attempt to transition from poverty and toward self-sufficiency.

**The Need for Additional Training and Education**

While being treated with disrespect emerged as perhaps the most ineffective and counter-productive issue in the study, nearly all the participants identified acquiring more training or education as the most effective means to help them make the transition from welfare to work and to achieve self-sufficiency. Indeed, the recipients did not simply believe in additional training, several were already enrolled in college classes or
were seriously planning to pursue additional training in the near future. By necessity two individuals were focusing on obtaining disability benefits and one of them has nearly completed a Bachelor’s Degree.

A Holistic and Collaborative Approach

In 1996 President Clinton signed PRWORA into law to “change welfare as we know it.” Years later President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of PRWORA into law to continue that change. Much research has been conducted to determine the effectiveness and outcomes of welfare reform legislation and programs. In terms of reducing the welfare rolls in the US by 50% or more, it would appear that much has been accomplished. However, using Lichter and Jensen’s (2001) terms, if the results of welfare reform are simply moving recipients and their families from the “welfare poor” to the “working poor” then perhaps little has been accomplished materially and substantively in terms of improving the lives of thousands of low income families. Indeed, much more remains to be done.

Several states and programs are showing promising results, particularly those which are utilizing a more holistic approach including assessment and treatment programs (Wilkins, 2002). The Job Search and Job Club Programs described earlier in this study have been instrumental in helping recipients to obtain employment. Many of these men and women were fairly job ready and experienced fewer challenges or barriers. However, while welfare reform has reduced the number of recipients many of those who are yet unemployed may be experiencing multiple barriers which makes it difficult to obtain or retain gainful employment. Of course with the five-year time limits for
receiving TANF and some additional hardship extensions, many have simply been phased out of the system due to ineligibility. Thus, these individuals may not even be part of the “working poor” or are perhaps receiving disability (SSI or SSDI).

Wilkins (2002) identified some of the common barriers that the “hard-to-serve” recipients experience including “substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health problems, learning disabilities, language or cultural barriers and lack of work skills, experience, or education” (p. 1). Danziger et al. (2000) noted that the hard-to-serve TANF recipients in Michigan experienced a greater number of barriers than the general population. Understandably, those who had multiple barriers also had lower levels of employment (Danziger et al., 2000).

Wilkins (2002) reviewed several approaches utilized in different states to address the needs of recipients who were experiencing various challenges and barriers. She noted that those programs provided “improved screening and assessments, diversion of individuals to more appropriate programs, intensive case management, specialized treatment, supported work programs, and continued support services” (p.3).

In addition, Public/Private Ventures (2002), a non-profit organization, created a list of the “best practices” that various states implemented to assist TANF recipients and others to obtain and retain employment. According to P/PV, these best practices or “mixed strategies” included setting job goals, providing job search activities and work experiences as well as providing education and training opportunities. These strategies were “more likely to produce placement in better jobs and long term success” (P/PV Newsletter, 2002, p. 6).
A number of these approaches have been incorporated into the Job Search or Job Club programs and other JFS assignments for TANF recipients. The assignments may extend from one to two weeks or up to a month or longer. The Job Search and Job Club programs have been effective in facilitating job placement, particularly for those individuals with fewer challenges. Individuals experiencing greater needs or challenges can access additional services including vocational rehabilitation, community and career counseling, etc. In some counties in Ohio, the Job Search and Job Club programs are open to any job seeker who wishes to participate.

Still another key component identified by \textit{P/PV} for facilitating job retention and advancement was “close coordination of employment efforts by welfare and workforce development programs….” (2002, p. 6). Such coordination between welfare and workforce development programs is crucial and helps to foster a greater variety of services and improved case management.

While conducting this current study in three different counties in southern Ohio, I observed a viable working relationship between JFS and other community and One-Stop Employment Center partners. As authorized by PRWORA, these partners generally include, Community Action Organizations, Career Centers, colleges and universities, Adult Basic Education Programs, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, mental health agencies, and more. Indeed, it is such collaborative efforts and services as those identified above that can provide a more holistic approach to workforce development and greater job placement and retention for job seekers, including those in transition from welfare to work.
Each of the ten recipients taking part in this current study was actively engaged in various assignments to help move them toward employment and/or wellness if at all possible. Two of the ten participants, Debbie and Beverly, were experiencing multiple medical and/or mental health issues and had to pursue disability benefits. If and when possible, however, Debbie would like to eventually complete the last year of a Bachelors’ Degree in Criminal Justice to become a Child Advocate.

Much more yet remains to be done. As described elsewhere in this study many recipients experience medical challenges, mental health issues, and lack of reliable transportation. Loprest and Zedlewski (2006) recognized these and other potential barriers to employment including situations in which a parent has a child who is ill or receives SSI, or an individual who does not live in a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and has no vehicle, or simply has limited work experience. The barriers indeed can be many, but a holistic, collaborative approach can do much to assist individuals in their transition from welfare to work and toward eventual self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.

*Areas for Future Research*

This research study focused on the lived experiences of men and women who are currently in transition from welfare to work. Various themes were identified from the qualitative data revealing what current and former recipients perceived to be helpful and effective or ineffective in terms of assisting them in their efforts to transition from welfare to the workplace. The following topics or issues for investigation might provide additional insights into the lived experiences of individuals and families who
are attempting to move from welfare to employment and, hopefully in time, self and family sufficiency.

First, while conducting the in-depth interviews with the current or former recipients, I became keenly aware as to how the recipients’ lived experiences and perspectives differed from that of some caseworkers and supervisors. In a recent meeting with a JFS administrator in one county, I asked what changes should be made to current welfare reform policy to make it more effective in helping recipients. The administrator indicated that it would have been better if welfare reform had maintained the original five-year time limit.

The administrator was somewhat dismayed that the “hardship extensions” were added for those families experiencing major medical or mental health concerns. Because the state extensions could be renewed for several months, a recipient could go well beyond the original 5-year time limit or TANF eligibility. In addition, once the state extensions were exhausted, the recipient could then apply for federal extensions. Thus, the administrator believed that in some respects, welfare reform had returned to its original “entitlement” status, but with a few more hoops to jump on the part of the recipient.

It occurred to me that it would be interesting and informative to compare lived experiences of the recipients with that of caseworkers, managers, and other personnel in Departments of Human Services. Perhaps, by the recipients and the JFS staff hearing the voices or lived experiences of one another, a better understanding of each other’s lived experiences might emerge. This would potentially shed light as to why 50% of the
participants in the current study expressed that they had experienced considerable
disrespect while working with some Human Services staff.

Second, another aspect of this current study was that it was conducted in two rural
counties and one metro county in an Appalachian area of southern Ohio. A more
specific study comparing recipients’ responses and lived experiences of those
individuals who live in a metropolitan area to the responses of those who live in a rural
area could be revealing. Would there be major differences or areas of agreement in
terms of what policies, procedures, and programs were perceived to be effective or
ineffective? What services, resources, and employment opportunities are available or
not available to those who reside there? Are a number of the best practices described
above or additional, innovative practices being implemented in different states and
counties? If so, which strategies, services, or interventions are proving most effective
in assisting individuals to transition from welfare to work or to other needed services or
programs (e.g., SSI, SSDI)?

Third, another aspect of the current study was that it involved ten participants
including six women, one of whom was African American and four men, one of whom
was African American. Although the “saturation point” for identifying any distinctly
new or different themes began to emerge after seven or eight participants were
interviewed on two separate occasions, additional studies might include more
participants with greater diversity relevant to ethnicity and different geographical or
cultural areas. This could include other rural or Appalachian areas.
For example, how do the lived experiences of TANF recipients residing in the geographical areas or cultures in this study compare with those lived experiences of recipients living in other areas? By studying diverse populations and ethnicities in different geographical or cultural areas, perhaps additional themes could be identified from the lived experiences of former or current recipients. From these new and different themes interventions that can better accommodate and assist those parents and their families to move more readily toward self-sufficiency could be identified. These studies might also point out more effective ways of enhancing human and social capital.

To illustrate, this current study took place in southern Ohio, across the Ohio River from Kentucky and West Virginia. Would the phenomenological experiences of those individuals living in a neighboring state be somewhat different in terms of programs and services offered when compared to southern Ohio?

I recall a conversation in a classroom of college students in southern Ohio where I was scheduled to be a guest speaker. Before the class began two women were openly discussing the pros and cons of each state’s welfare system. One student was explaining to a fellow student the advantages of receiving assistance in her state because she had the convenience of direct deposit of her TANF check each month. She said something to the effect, “You don’t have to wait around to get your check.”

In a humorous but interesting way the conversation revealed how something as subtle or fundamental as direct deposit of a TANF check might influence where one chooses to live. Hopefully, upon completion of their respective degree programs, the
amount of money deposited in their accounts will increase significantly beyond their current TANF check. Indeed, it was good to see them attempting to increase their human capital in order to ensure greater future earnings and enhance the quality of life for themselves and their children.

Perhaps different counties and states may provide different programs and services. One rural county in this current study provides public transportation to senior citizens and TANF recipients. Undoubtedly, public transportation is a tremendous benefit to seniors and TANF recipients who may not have any other means of transportation. Perhaps there are other experiences that individuals who are endeavoring to transition from welfare to work might find helpful or frustrating. Additional studies might shed more light on those lived experiences.

A fourth area for research could be to see how previous recipients are doing at different periods of their lives following their final exit from TANF. For example, where are they and how are they faring one year, three years, five years, or ten years after their TANF experience ended? What issues are they confronting? Are they financially stable? If so, how so—through education or training, marriage or other relationships, disability benefits, hard work, self-employment? Have they achieved self-sufficiency? How are their children faring? Have the children completed a high school or GED diploma, post high school training or education? Are the children self-sufficient or receiving public assistance?
In short, how are the former recipients and their children faring in their post-TANF years? Such longitudinal studies could potentially provide greater insight in terms of the impact of welfare reform on the lived experiences of former welfare recipients. In addition, such studies might help identify those services, interventions, polices, and procedures which proved most effective in assisting recipients to transition from welfare to work and eventually achieving self-sufficiency.

Finally, what are (or will be) the lived experiences of current or future welfare recipients? Are they being served in a professional, efficient, and understanding manner? Are the service providers believed and perceived by the recipients (both male and female) to be professional, knowledgeable, efficient, and understanding? Are the service providers knowledgeable, efficient, and understanding?

As indicated above the topics for research can appear to be endless, but so can the challenges confronting those who are in need of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. It is hoped that the Temporary Assistance and collaborative, holistic services will provide long term results by equipping and empowering the recipients to no longer need cash assistance, but to actively participate in the workforce and the career of their choice. Perhaps that is the mission of JFS and other human service and workforce development agencies and organizations-- to provide services to assist those in need to obtain life skills and training that can lead to “a job, a better job, and a career” that will enable them to become truly self-sufficient.
Chapter 6: Reflections, Changes, and Challenges

Background

For nearly three decades I have worked with families receiving public assistance in rural Appalachian communities of the Ohio Valley. As a teacher and later as school principal, I interacted with parents and their children who were receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC or ADC). The first four or five years of my teaching career I instructed elementary students during the day and adult education students in the evening. A number of the families of the elementary and adult education students with whom I worked received AFDC. Many of the adults were assigned to the Work Incentive Program (WIN) described in Chapter Three of this study. Later, as a teacher and administrator of schools in Ohio and West Virginia, I became increasingly aware of the plight of families living in poverty including those receiving public assistance.

For the past 15 years I have administered grant-funded programs at a state university on behalf of TANF recipients seeking employment. Many of the individuals in these programs were in need of community, career, and vocational rehabilitation counseling. This included the Job Student Retention Program (JSRP) and the Job Prep Program, both of which were authorized under the JOBS Program described in Chapter Two of this study. During that time I have had the privilege and professional responsibility of working with hundreds of individuals, including both current and former recipients, to assist them in facilitating positive change in their lives and that of their families.
Moreover, while providing services to recipients both before and after welfare reform, I made observations as to what might better assist recipients and their families to move toward self-sufficiency and a better quality of life. With the TANF time limits and subsequent “hardship extensions” expiring, time was and is of the essence in helping individuals to prepare for a post-TANF reality and lifestyle.

I recognize and acknowledge my bias as perceiving the recipients’ realities from the perspective of a service provider (i.e., administrator and professional counselor). Thus, a primary goal of mine as a researcher was to accurately, effectively, and empathically hear the “voices” of both current and former recipients as they shared their own very personal and unique experiences.

In addition, I observed that much can be learned from a qualitative approach to research that provides a thick, rich description of the actual lived experiences of those most affected by welfare reform, the participants themselves. From the recipients’ lived experiences it is hoped that policy makers, JFS Administrators, as well as caseworkers and others can be better informed as to what is proving helpful and what policies and support services might yet be needed to assist recipients in making the transition toward employment and self-sufficiency.

The Impact of the Interviews and Observations on the Researcher

While listening to the participants’ lived experiences I developed a greater awareness of and appreciation for the human spirit within each of the participants. It was enlightening and at times moving to hear the participants describe their efforts to cope and adjust to whatever life had dealt them. As a result, I have been both informed
and inspired as they shared their lived experiences including personal agonies, goals, and aspirations.

I also acquired a greater appreciation for the particular crises and perplexities that confronted these individuals and their families. Whether it was described as physical, mental, or emotional pain; death; lay-off; loss of self-esteem or self-efficacy; or the inability to meet the family’s basic needs and the children’s wants and expectations, the realities of poverty were clearly articulated by the participants.

In addition, I have been both sobered and challenged when I heard how a case manager, administrator, counselor, social worker, teacher/instructor, service provider, parent, or other person or professional helped to respectfully make-- or regrettably, break-- that person’s sense of worth, hope, or purpose in this life. What a responsibility we have as professionals, service providers, and policy makers. What a responsibility the individual participants have. To recognize the worth, value, and dignity of every human being is imperative. As one adage puts it: “Be kind to everyone you meet because everyone has big problems.” After listening to the lived experiences of the respondents in this study, I recognized anew the reality of that statement.

Thus, I trust that all-- policy makers, professionals, services providers, and particularly those who are affected and impacted the most by welfare policy, the participants themselves-- will work collaboratively and creatively to help facilitate positive, productive, and meaningful change in the life experiences of the participants, their children, and their children’s children. In doing so, perhaps the “war on poverty” might yet be a winnable war.
References


Lawrence County job condition improved. (April, 29, 2004). The Herald Dispatch, pp.1A, 2A.


Malveaux, J. (2000). Commentary-- some succeed, but pay inequities linger. *USA Today, p. 15 A.*


Sweeney, E. (2000). Recent studies indicate that many parents who are current or former welfare recipients have disabilities. Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.


APPENDIX A

(Letter of Approval from Institutional Review Board)
The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies): 7

Project Title: A Qualitative Study of Individuals in Transition from Welfare to Work in an Appalachian Area

Researccher(s): William King

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Jerry Osheski

Department: Counseling and Higher Education

Jeff Vancouver, Ph.D., Chair
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date 3/4/08
Expiration Date 3/5/07

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
APPENDIX B

Letters from County Directors of Job and Family Services
December 11, 2006

Ms. Rebecca Cale
Institutional Review Board
Ohio University
117 Research & Technology Center
Athens, Ohio 45701

Dear Board Members:

William King has facilitated grant-funded programs for Job and Family Services (JFS) through contracts with Ohio University Southern Campus (OU-S) for the past fifteen years. He currently facilitates the Alternative Services Program for Lawrence County Department of Job and Family Services (LCDJFS) on behalf of OU-S at the Workforce Development Resource Center in Lawrence County, OH. The Alternative Services Program assists those individuals receiving cash assistance (i.e., Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or TANF) who are experiencing various needs and challenges in their lives.

Mr. King plans to conduct in-depth interviews with a number of volunteer participants for his doctoral dissertation. It is hoped that the study will provide increased understanding of what these men and women experience as they attempt to transition from welfare to work or as they seek other viable means of support. The study will not include psychological assessments or counseling. Confidentiality of all records will be maintained. Individual names or results will not be reported (pseudonyms will be used), but descriptive data or themes will be identified.

As Director of the Jackson County Department of Job and Family Services (JCDJFS), I approve the study that Mr. King plans to conduct with those participants receiving TANF who choose to volunteer. These volunteers will include those individuals who participate in Alternative Services, Job Search Program, or other designated assignments funded by the JCDJFS.

If you should need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me (740-286-4181). Thank you.

Respectfully,

Cindy Davis
Director
Jackson County Department of Job & Family Services
Ms. Rebecca Cale  
Institutional Review Board  
Ohio University  
117 Research & Technology Center  
Athens, Ohio 45701

Dear Board Members:

William King has facilitated grant-funded programs for Job and Family Services (JFS) through contracts with Ohio University Southern Campus (OU-S) for the past fifteen years. He currently facilitates the CORE/Alternative Services Program for JFS on behalf of OU-S at the Workforce Development Resource Center in Lawrence County. The CORE/Alternative Services Program assists those individuals receiving cash assistance or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) who are experiencing various needs and challenges in their lives.

Mr. King plans to conduct in-depth interviews with a number of volunteer participants for his doctoral dissertation. It is hoped that the study will provide increased understanding of what these men and women experience as they attempt to transition from welfare to work or as they seek other viable means of support. The study will not include psychological assessments or counseling.

As Director of Job and Family Services for Lawrence County, Ohio, I approve the study that Mr. King plans to conduct with those participants receiving TANF who choose to volunteer. These volunteers will include those individuals who are involved in CORE/Alternative Services or Job Search Programs offered at the Workforce Development Resource Center. Both of these programs are funded through JFS.

If you should need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me (740-532-3324). Thank you.

Respectfully,

Donald E. Myers, Director  
Lawrence County Department of Job and Family Services
SCIOTO COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES
710 Court Street • P.O. Box 1347
Portsmouth, Ohio 45662
(740) 354-6661

County Commissioners
Tom Reiser, Chairman
Mike Crabtree
Vernal G. Rifle III

Director
Sharon Mundenek

Assistant Director
James Tannen

December 11, 2006

Ms. Rebecca Cale
Ohio University/Institutional Review Board
117 Research & Technology Center
Athens, Ohio 45701

Dear Board Members:

William King has facilitated grant-funded programs for Job and Family Services (JFS) through contracts with Ohio University Southern Campus (OU-S) for the past fifteen years. He currently facilitates the Alternative Services Program for Lawrence County Department of Job and Family Services (LCDJFS) on behalf of OU-S at the Workforce Development Resource Center in Lawrence County, OH. The Alternative Services Program assists those individuals receiving cash assistance (i.e., Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or TANF) who are experiencing various needs and challenges in their lives.

Mr. King plans to conduct in-depth interviews with a number of volunteer participants for his doctoral dissertation. It is hoped that the study will provide increased understanding of what these men and women experience as they attempt to transition from welfare to work or as they seek other viable means of support. The study will not include psychological assessments or counseling. Confidentiality of all records will be maintained. Individual names or results will not be reported (pseudonyms will be used), but descriptive data or themes will be identified.

As Director of the Scioto County Department of Job & Family Services (SCDJFS), I approve the study that Mr. King plans to conduct with those participants receiving TANF who choose to volunteer. These volunteers will include those individuals who participate in Alternative Services, Job Search Program, or other designated assignments funded by the SCDJFS.

If you should need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me (740-354-6661). Thank you.

Respectfully,

Sharon Mundenek, Director
Scioto County Department of Job & Family Services
“Scioto County – Somewhere Special”
APPENDIX C

(Recruitment Letter)
SEEKING VOLUNTEERS TO TELL THEIR STORIES

Hello,

My name is Bill King and I’m conducting a study about current (or former) welfare recipients who are in transition from welfare to work. I’m interested in hearing about their experiences as they attempt to make that transition and participate in programs sponsored by Job and Family Services (JFS). These programs might include Job Search, Alternative Services, Work Experience Program (WEP), Adult Education, or other assignments or activities designated by SFS.

I’m seeking volunteers to participate in the study. If you are a current or former recipient of cash assistance though JFS, I welcome your participation in this project. Your life experiences and input may help policy makers, counselors, case managers, and other service providers to better understand the experiences and needs of individuals such as you who are attempting to move from public assistance to employment and self-sufficiency.

For the study I plan to interview each volunteer participant for approximately 1 to 2 hours on two different occasions. Each interview will be tape-recorded (audio). The names of the volunteer participants will remain completely anonymous and there will be no identifying information appearing in the study. You may discontinue the study at any time or not answer a question presented in the interview should you so choose. I look forward to arranging an interview with you through your local County Department of Job and Family Services or One-Stop Employment Center should you choose to participate. Thank you as you consider participating in this project.

Respectfully,

Bill King
Employment Advisor & Professional Counselor
Workforce Development Resource Center
120 N. 3rd St., Ironton, OH 45638
(Ph: 1-740-532-3140 Email: kingw@ohio.edu)
APPENDIX D

Consent Form
Ohio University
Consent Form

“A Qualitative Study of Individuals in Transition from Welfare to Work in an Appalachian Area”

William E. King, Investigator
Department of Counseling and Higher Education

Federal and university regulations require the researcher to obtain verbal or signed consent for participation in research. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent to participate in the study by informing the investigator verbally.

Explanation of Study
The current research study proposes to provide in-depth descriptive data and qualitative analysis to better determine the personal experiences and perceptions of individuals in transition from public assistance to the world of work. The study will attempt to identify those policies and services which were most helpful while attempting to make the transition. In addition, any remaining needs, challenges, or barriers to self-sufficiency will be identified. Lastly, from the perspective of the participants themselves, what do they perceive needs to be done to better assist individuals in achieving self-sufficiency for themselves and their families?

Procedures to be Followed
- Please read this entire form carefully.
- If you agree to participate in the study, confirm with Mr. King. He will explain certain terms and concepts (informed consent, confidentiality, etc.) with you. He will also answer any questions you might have before he begins the first of two interviews which will be recorded on audio-tape. The second interview will be scheduled approximately 1 to 2 weeks after the first one.
- Please allow approximately 60 to 90 minutes for each of the two interviews.
Risks and Discomforts
The interviewer will ask you to share your thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and challenges about your experience of attempting to move from public assistance to employment. Any additional understandings, insights, or recommendations you wish to share with the interviewer about this phase in your life (from receiving public assistance to pursuing employment and self-sufficiency) would also be helpful. To assist in telling your stories and sharing your “lived experiences,” you are encouraged to bring in documents such as letters, photos and photo albums, newspaper articles, greeting cards, diplomas, etc. that have relevance or significance to you and your family.

Please note, however, that as a Professional Counselor, I am required to report any information disclosed during an interview that indicates a clear and imminent danger or harm to oneself or others (e.g., suicidal thoughts or behaviors, child or elder abuse, etc.) to the proper authorities, agencies, or individuals. Thus, you may wish not to disclose legally sensitive or compromising information that I would be required to report to the proper authorities. In addition, if any topic or question presented in the interview is uncomfortable for you, please understand that you do not have to respond to the question or continue the interview. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty should you so choose.

Benefits
Although there may be no personal benefits to you for your participation, the information you share will help the researcher provide recommendations to better inform or prepare community, career, and rehabilitation counselors, human service workers, case managers, policy makers, and other service providers to better help individuals such as yourself move toward greater financial independence.

Confidentiality and Records
The researcher will maintain confidentiality of all records. Individual names or results will not be reported, but descriptive data or themes will be identified. As described above, if information is disclosed during the interview that indicates a clear and imminent danger or harm to oneself or others (e.g., suicidal thoughts or behaviors, child or elder abuse, etc.), as a Professional Counselor I am legally required to report this information to the proper authorities. Again, the participant may wish not to disclose legally sensitive or compromising information.
The audio tape(s) of the interview will be transcribed within three weeks following the scheduled interview. The audio tape(s) will then be destroyed. The transcriptions of the interviews will be coded and printed as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. Thus, your real name will not appear anywhere in the transcriptions or within the research study. The transcriptions and other data will be secured in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office for a minimum of three years and will then be destroyed. The Master List will be stored and locked in separate cabinet from the data. The Master List will be destroyed at the earliest convenience once study is finalized and approved.

**Contact Person**

Please contact Bill King at 740-532-3140 ext. 244 or kingw@ohio.edu if you have any questions or concerns about the results of the study.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740) 593-0664.

**Informed Consent Statement**

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled.

After reading the above consent form, the Participant must provide verbal confirmation of consent to the investigator in order to participate in the study. When the Participant verbally confirms volunteer participation in the study, the investigator will check here:
APPENDIX E

Interview Guide
Interview Guide
for
Semi-Structured Interview
(Questions for individuals describing their personal experiences and perceptions as they attempt to transition from welfare to work.)

1) Can you tell me how you came to be involved in receiving public assistance?

2) Overall, what has been your personal experience as a recipient of public assistance?

3) Explain how the Job Search, CORE/Alternative Services, or other JFS programs have/have not helped you in your efforts to transition from public assistance to employment.

4) Would you describe for me your feelings as you participated in the Job Search, CORE/Alternative Services, or other JFS programs?

5) Do you think you have changed in any way having participated in these programs? If so, how?

6) What do you believe should be changed or modified in the Job Search, CORE/Alternative Services, or other JFS Programs to better assist you in making the transition from public assistance to employment?

7) Overall, from your perspective, which programs, services, or procedures were least effective in helping you to attempt to make the transition from welfare to work?

8) From your perspective, what programs, services, or procedures were most helpful to you while attempted to make the transition from welfare to work?

9) Would you tell me what role (if any) you think Job and Family Services can/should play to help you move from public assistance to employment and toward financial self-sufficiency?

10) What role do you think you can/should play in attempting to move from public assistance to employment and toward financial self-sufficiency?

11) From your perspective what, if any, additional services, resources, or tools are needed to help you to make the transition from welfare to work?

12) What recommendations would you make to case managers, administrators, policy makers, and others to better assist you and others individuals to move from welfare to work and financial independence?
13) What advice would you personally give to individuals who are currently attempting to move from welfare to work?

14) From your perspective what remaining challenges or barriers do you face which make it difficult to transition from welfare to work?

15) Are there any other observations, insights, or comments you would like to share concerning your overall experience of attempting to move from welfare to work?

16) Overall, how are you faring at this time (personally, financially, etc.) as you attempt to make the transition from welfare to work?

The following interview questions could be addressed to those individuals who are now employed and are no longer receiving cash assistance or as a second interview:

1) If you have obtained employment, what has been your experience in the work place?

2) Describe how your life has changed since you moved from public assistance to employment?

3) What advantages or benefits (if any) have you experienced in moving from public assistance to employment? What disadvantages, if any, have you experienced?

4) Overall, how are you and your family faring since you made the transition from welfare to work?

5) What suggestions would you give to others who are attempting to make the transition from welfare to work and toward self-sufficiency?

6) If you had it to do over again what, if anything, would you do differently in your efforts to move from public assistance to employment?

7) Are there any other experiences, observations, or comments you would like to share concerning your overall experience of attempting to move from public assistance to employment and toward self-sufficiency?

8) (Optional) If you had the opportunity what comments or recommendations would you like make to the President of the United States, congressional representatives, policy makers, and Human Services personnel (including your case manager) about how to better help individuals and their families move from public assistance to employment and toward self-sufficiency?
APPENDIX F

Participant Documents
Document I

(Angela's assignment for Alternative Services Program authorized by JFS)

MY GOALS:

1) Get God

2) Get Job

3) Learn to drive

4) Move back to Louisiana

5) Get off welfare

6) Lose weight

7) Get stability in my life

8) Get a house to live in

MY PLAN:

A. Getting my license

B. Learning to drive

C. Getting a car

D. Then I will be able to go anywhere I want to and be independent
Certificate of Successful Completion

This is to verify that

Anita
(pseudonym)

successfully completed an approved
Nurse Aide Training and Competency Evaluation Program

on this 18th day of
November
200-

presented by

CAREER CENTER

In accordance with Rule 3701-18-24 Ohio Administrative Code, presentation of this Certificate is required in order for the individual to participate in the written examination and performance demonstration components of the Competency Evaluation Program (CEP) conducted by the Director of Health. Both components of the CEP must be successfully completed within twenty-four months from the date on this Certificate.

Signature of Program Coordinator
Document III

(Below is Anita's Certification for Home Health Aide. She is registered
to begin prerequisites for R.N. Program at regional university)

Home Health Inc.

This Certifies that

Anita

(has successfully completed sixty hours
of Classroom Training and fifteen
hours of Proficiency and Clinical Testing
and is awarded the title of

HOME HEALTH AIDE

Witnessed this 13th day of March, 2000

R.N.                        L.P.N.