

An Analysis of Barriers to Employment and Job Search Programs for Welfare Recipients:

A Case Study

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Overview of Presentation

1. Barriers and job search programs
 2. Study purpose
 3. Data collection
 4. Results
 1. Clients and barriers
 2. Job search programs
 3. Suggested program changes
 5. Future research
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Barriers and Job Search Programs

What are barriers to employment?

- **Personal/Family Challenges**
 - Mental or physical health issues
 - Health or behavior problems of children
 - Domestic violence
 - Substance abuse
 - Learning disabilities
 - Involvement with child welfare system
 - Housing instability
- **Human Capital Deficits**
 - Limited work experience
 - Low educational attainment
- **Logistical Obstacles**
 - Transportation
 - Childcare

Why are barriers important?

- Greater work expectations for cash assistance recipients
 - Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996)
 - Changes welfare into a work-oriented program
- Strong economy
 - Rising employment-to-population ratios
 - Dramatic declines in welfare caseload

Why are barriers important?

- Resources and momentum to try new approaches
 - Interest in hard-to-employ surges in 1990s
 - TANF offices begin to provide services for barriers
 - Especially mental health, substance abuse, and learning disabilities
- Focus on remaining caseload and concern about “Floundering Families”
 - Caseload with barriers remained constant BUT
 - Welfare leavers reporting barriers increased
 - (Loprest & Zedlewski, 2006)

Why are barriers important?

- 2005 Deficit Reduction Act
 - Increased pressure to engage all recipients in work activities
 - Search for new work-oriented approaches for all recipients

What does the barriers literature tell us?

- Many welfare recipients face *multiple* barriers to employment
- Barriers reduce work activity and wages
- Two of the most important barriers
 - Employment experience
 - Level of education
- Recent welfare leavers often face multiple barriers

Study Purpose

Research Questions

1. Barriers

- What do clients and staff believe are the main barriers welfare recipients face to employment?
- What are some of the barriers that clients face once employed?

2. Job Search Programs

- What are some of the reasons that clients cycle in and out of job search programs?

3. Administrative Changes

- What are some changes that can potentially make job search programs more effective?

Data Collection

Data Collection

- Summer 2007
 - Major metropolitan area
- Welfare-to-work program
 - National, for-profit company
 - Point-in-Time caseload of 800
 - Six weeks of job readiness training
 - Track employment up to 120 days
 - Paid based on participation and achievement of specified “payment points”

Data Collection

- 4 Main Components
 - Site visits
 - Staff interviews (10)
 - Focus groups (3)
 - Individual interviews (10)

- Additional Information
 - Home visits

Staff Interviews

- Interview protocol: 1 to 1.5 hours
 - Clients' previous work experience
 - Reasons clients cycle in and out of program
 - Main barriers clients face to employment
 - Suggestions for program improvement
- Ten completed interviews

Focus Groups

- In-house during lunch using digital recorder
- Protocol: approximately one hour each
 - Reasons clients cycle in and out of program
 - Main barriers clients face to employment
 - Suggestions for program improvement
- Participants
 - Attending Bonner 1 day to 5 months+
 - Previous welfare to work office experience
 - Group 1: seven participants
 - Group 2: eight participants
 - Group 3: five participants

Individual Interviews

- Completed 10 phone interviews
- Non-participants from June and July
 - Randomly selected 20 clients
 - Three attempts each
 - Weekday, weeknight, and weekend
- Protocol: fifteen to thirty minutes
 - Previous employment
 - Experience with welfare to work office
 - Why no longer attending

Home Visits

- Research Institute
 - Grant to address barriers to employment and participation with welfare to work office
 - Observation with caseworker (approx 50 homes)
 - Detailed questionnaire
 - Clients from all welfare to work offices
- Broader perspective on non-participating customers
 - Observed five interviews
 - Ages 29 to 50
 - One to six children

Limitations

- One employment welfare to work office
 - For a broader perspective of all welfare to work offices
 - Gathered data from home visit interviews
- Most representative of active participants
 - Included phone interviews for broader perspective

Preliminary Results: Clients and Barriers

Results: Types of Clients

- Come from diverse backgrounds
- Three general types of participants
 - Never worked
 - Some work experience
 - Always worked
- Successful client has individual drive

Results: Barriers to Employment

- All barriers exist
- Largest issues
 - Self-esteem
 - Lack of family support
- Difficult for recipients to self-disclose barriers

Results: Barriers Once Employed

- Average time on job is thirty days because of
 - Attitude
 - Job etiquette
 - Interaction with managers and co-workers
 - Attendance
 - Child care
 - Undesirable job

Preliminary Results: Recidivism in a Job Search Program

Recidivism in a Job Search Program

- Most clients return to this or another vendor
- Client Initial Impressions
 - Pro: Leave orientation excited
 - Con: Excitement soon fades
 - Con: Disorganization follows
- Experiences in the Classroom
 - Pro: Networking with other participants
 - Con: Short time period to overcome generational issues
 - Con: Extremely diverse skill levels among clients
 - Con: Quality of classroom experience

Recidivism in a Job Search Program

- Experiences with Staff
 - Pro: Having “people who care” is imperative
 - Con: High staff turnover

Recidivism in a Job Search Program

- Is the system really designed to prevent recidivism?
 - Tension between services clients need to become job-ready and what program is designed to provide
 - Clients and staff recognize system for what it is
 - How does this affect outcomes?
 - Many recipients return to TANF

Preliminary Results: Possible Changes to Job Search Programs

What Welfare-to-Work Program Can Do

- Increase number of staff
 - Will increase available services and staff creativity
 - Can reinstate Empowerment Sessions
 - Can offer computer classes
 - Hire on-site social worker or psychologist
 - Can deal directly with barriers
 - Offer anger management and self-esteem classes
 - Instructors can focus on teaching
- Promote success stories
 - Celebrate clients with perfect attendance
 - Start mentoring program
 - Bring in previous clients who have succeeded

What Welfare-to-Work Program Can Do

- Increase consistency and organization
 - Orientation
 - Introduce Program Director and case manager introductions
 - Classroom
 - Two-day preparation of resume before workshop
 - Divide classes by skill level
 - Employment
 - Provide more on-the-job training opportunities, especially for long-term clients

What DHS Can Do

- Increase interaction among vendors
 - Cross-vendor celebration of success stories
 - More opportunities for vendors to share ideas
 - More opportunities for employees to interact with DHS
- Integrate job search with existing work programs
 - Increase on-the-job training opportunities
- Change incentives to reward quality as well as quantity
- Repeat this project at all vendors and follow-up on the results

Future Research

- Include employer's perspectives on
 - Recidivism
 - Job quality
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