

Seven Years of Welfare Reform
Annotated Bibliography
Studies and Reports on Welfare Reform in Minnesota, 1997-2004¹

Alter, Joel, Dan Jacobson and John Patterson. *Program Evaluation Report: Welfare Reform.* St. Paul: Office of the Legislative Auditor, January 2000.

Web address: www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us – Report #00-03

Purpose: To evaluate the effects of Minnesota's welfare policy changes in the first two years of implementation.

Findings: Reports employment trends and characteristics of Minnesota's MFIP populations and compares the state's policy and performance with other states. Stresses the state's rising rate of out-of-wedlock births and the need to do more to prevent welfare dependency. Highlights the disproportionate rate of minorities in the MFIP caseload and the growing share of hard-to-serve families. Report includes recommendations, including intensified interventions for the hard-to-employ and raising maximum client sanctions.

Anderson, Dennis. *Report on the Temporary Assistance for Families Pilot –Dakota County, Minnesota.* West St. Paul: Dakota County Employment and Economic Assistance Department, August 2004.

Purpose: To test whether immediate job search, intense casework and extra cash to resolve crises could keep Dakota County families from going onto MFIP or help them leave MFIP more quickly.

Findings: Some 58 percent of TAF families left the system within four months and were not enrolled on MFIP at any of three follow-up points – five, nine and 15 months. By contrast, of the comparison group of families newly enrolled in MFIP, 21 percent left the system within four months and were not enrolled at any of the follow-up points. Other differences, including the percentage working at five months and percentage receiving MFIP benefits at 15 months, were less dramatic. TAF cost more in the short run because employment counselors had far smaller caseloads and spent more money for support services, particularly car repairs and housing assistance. But had the TAF families mirrored the experience of MFIP families, they would have relied on public assistance longer and cost \$458,000 more, county researchers concluded.

Anoka County Income Maintenance Division. *Anoka County MFIP Pilot Program Report to the Legislature.* Blaine: Anoka County Human Services Department, 2002.

Purpose: To report on the piloted use of no cash benefits until applicant attended Employment Services overview and 100 percent sanction for clients in sanction six months or more.

Findings: The county's sanction rate was cut in half, from 10 percent to five percent, over 16 months. Nearly seven out of 10 sanctions were cured, found exempt or closed voluntarily.

Attendance at Employment Services overview more than doubled.

In addition, the county's work participation rate (cases with work or work activities totaling at least 30 hours per week) rose from 38.2 percent during the first quarter of 2001 to 45.8 percent a year later.

¹ The reports summarized here are those gathered by the Minnesota Welfare Reform Research and Evaluation Roundtable in August, 2004 for purposes of this synthesis project. Efforts were made to be as inclusive as possible of research or evaluation studies conducted in Minnesota during the first seven years of statewide welfare reform. Studies brought to the attention of Roundtable members since August 2004 were not included in the synthesis or in this bibliography.

Brown, Meg, Scott Chazdon and Leslie Crichton. *Minnesota Family Investment Program Longitudinal Study: Special Report on Health Care Access Among Welfare Leavers 18 Months After Baseline.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, January 2002.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: To study health care coverage and utilization among families leaving MFIP, especially given findings that access to health insurance decreases the likelihood that a welfare leaver will return to the welfare program.

Findings: Even though a high percentage appeared to be eligible for public health insurance, 30% of welfare leavers in Minnesota were uninsured, five times the rate among Minnesota adults and nearly twice that among low-income adults statewide. Children of welfare leavers were more likely to be covered than their parents: 17% of recipient leavers' children were without insurance compared to 3% for all Minnesota children and 21% of low-income children in the state. MFIP leavers often worked part-time and had service sector jobs, which reduced their access to employer-sponsored insurance. Uninsured welfare leavers used fewer health care services than leavers with health insurance, but neither group made heavy use of emergency room care.

Chase, Richard and Ellen Shelton. *Child Care Use in Minnesota – Report of the 1999 Statewide Household Child Care Survey (summary).* St. Paul: Wilder Research Center, January 2001.

Web address: <http://www.wilder.org/research/reports/pdf/childcareuse1-01.pdf>

Purpose: Statewide telephone survey conducted in 1999 and 2000 to gauge the type and cost of child care used by Minnesota parents and their satisfaction with the care.

Findings: Two-thirds of Minnesota children aged 14 and younger were in non-parental, non-school care at some point during the week. Relatives were the most common caregivers, but the type of care varied by the children's age. Child-care challenges affected employment and families earning \$20,000 or less paid as much for child care as those earning \$75,000 or more. Some 43 percent of families earning less than 200 percent of poverty weren't aware of the state's child-care assistance program. Low-income children had less stability in their care.

Chazdon, Scott and Leslie Crichton. *Minnesota Family Investment Program Longitudinal Study: Baseline Report.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, August 1999.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: To describe the characteristics and experiences of MFIP clients and thereby set a basis for future analysis and measurement of change over time. Divides data into two groups – recipients and applicants – and provides a useful glossary and longitudinal study timeline. First in a series designed to help identify ways to enhance MFIP's effectiveness by providing in-depth information on characteristics and experiences of MFIP participants.

Findings: Baseline report

Chazdon, Scott and Nancy Vivian. *LIGSS (Local Intervention Grants for Self-Sufficiency): Lessons Learned.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, January 2003.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: To summarize design and effects of projects funded by federal TANF dollars and targeted at the most difficult-to-employ MFIP recipients.

Findings: Because many LIGSS projects were continuing and because only one project involved a control group, the findings are provisional. Findings include: Counties preferred to intensify existing services rather than dramatically innovate; choosing grantees outside the traditional system was a good way to spur initiatives tailored to diverse local communities but also created

administrative challenges. The report also notes that resolving or controlling employment barriers is crucial before many hard-to-employ MFIP participants can succeed in jobs, but measuring progress in those areas is difficult. The report also describes how hard the targeted population was to work with, why some participants resisted in-depth assessments and why home visits and compliance advocates were valuable.

Cohen, Barry and Melissa Martinson. *Hennepin County MFIP Sanctions Study.* Minneapolis: Rainbow Research, November 2002.

Purpose: To identify barriers faced by MFIP recipients who were sanctioned for four or more months, see what actions recipients had taken to have sanctions lifted and see how sanctioned recipients managed with reduced benefits.

Findings: In this sample of 21 sanctioned recipients, most families had multiple barriers to employment. Common ones included poor physical and mental health, significant developmental and learning disabilities and problems with their children's mental health and school-related issues. High refusal rates and other indicators suggested that domestic violence, child abuse and chemical dependency were common among the respondents. Housing was stable and not a barrier to employment; child care also was not an impediment. To get by on reduced benefits, recipients used community and emergency services, relied on help from family and friends and increased their debt load.

Collins, Barbara and Renee Obrecht-Como. *Mixed Messages and Missed Opportunities: Welfare Sanction Policy in Minnesota.* St. Paul: Legal Services Advocacy Project, February 2001.

Purpose: To analyze the sanction system under the Minnesota Family Investment Program.

Findings: Some 13.5% of adults required to participate in work activities were sanctioned in the second half of 1999 and the percentage of cases with sanctions was growing. Report reviews county variations in sanction rates, details reasons for sanctions and notes that the vast majority of participants resolved sanctions within four months.

Crichton, Leslie and Scott Chazdon. *Minnesota Family Investment Program Longitudinal Study: One Year After Baseline.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, December 2000.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: Continuation of five-year longitudinal study to document changes in the lives of MFIP single-parent participants over time, including the time period after a participant leaves the program. Divides sample into applicants, who were in their first month of MFIP when they joined the study and had not received cash assistance during the previous five months, and recipients, who were ongoing participants in MFIP during the baseline month.

Findings: MFIP participants are making progress in employment, income and reduced welfare use. At the 12-month mark, 60 percent of applicants and recipients were working. Child support is an important income source for many recipients who have left MFIP, and having a second parent in the home has a major effect on raising income and reducing the poverty level. Many participants are not engaged in employment services. The report highlights differences between those who were making progress and those who were not.

Crichton, Leslie and Vania Meyer. *Minnesota Family Investment Program Longitudinal Study: Two Years After Baseline.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, September 2002.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: Continuation of five-year longitudinal study to document changes in the lives of MFIP single caregiver participants over time, including the time period after a participant leaves the

program. Divides sample into applicants, who were in their first month of MFIP when they joined the study and had not received cash assistance during the previous five months, and recipients, who were ongoing participants in MFIP during the baseline month.

Findings: Both applicant and recipient groups made progress in terms of earnings and income, decreased welfare use, and for some, leaving poverty. More than half of both groups had family income above the poverty level. Nearly half the recipient group and two-thirds of applicants had left MFIP, while 28 percent of recipients and 19 percent of applicants were not working. The proportion of applicants living in deep poverty – 50 percent of the federal poverty guideline or less – fell from 42 percent to 10 percent – while the proportion among recipients rose from 5 percent to 8 percent.

Crichton, Leslie and Vania Meyer. *Minnesota Family Investment Program Longitudinal Study: Approaching the 60-Month Time Limit.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, September 2002.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: To see how long-term MFIP families (those that had used at least 36 months of possible 60 months by November 2001 and received cash assistance sometime in the previous six months) were faring under welfare reform and a weak economy in early 2002.

Findings: Identifies three distinct groups of long-term recipients. Some 15 percent were striving for self-sufficiency with a reasonable chance of success in the near future; 30 percent were making only tentative progress despite notable personal resources and genuine effort; 55 percent faced many barriers, had few resources and were unlikely to become self-sufficient in the foreseeable future. About two-thirds of the group had circumstances that could potentially make them eligible for extensions. The report highlights common traits among long-term MFIP users: major life problems, MFIP sanctions, little understanding of the time limit and extension policies, dreams of getting a good job but little success in employment services activities.

Crichton, Leslie. *Minnesota Family Investment Program Longitudinal Study: Special Report on Teen Mothers.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, January 2003.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: To provide a profile of teen mothers in a sample of MFIP applicants, with assessments of their backgrounds, involvement of the biological fathers of their children and adequacy of services for teen mothers.

Findings: At least 45 percent of teen mothers surveyed grew up in households that received welfare. Two-thirds were from single-parent homes and 61 percent of their mothers had their first children as teens. Fathers of the teens' children had significant barriers to successful parenting and economic stability, including substance abuse, violence and crime. Half of the fathers were unemployed when their child was born. The teen mothers showed some progress in finishing high school and going to work but had many continuing challenges; 40 percent had a second child while still teenagers.

Crichton, Leslie. *The Welfare Time Limit in Minnesota: A survey of families who lost MFIP eligibility as a result of the five-year time limit.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, July 2003.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: To check on the condition of Minnesota families whose MFIP benefits ended in July 2002 after reaching the 60-month time limit.

Findings: Families were generally in poor economic condition, with numerous other problems, and nearly half were rated by interviewers as having unstable, even chaotic lives. Some 72% had income below the federal poverty guideline and only half were working, mostly in low-paid service jobs. Nearly all received non-cash benefits like food stamps, Medical Assistance, housing subsidies and child care assistance. The report outlines barriers to self-sufficiency and demographic characteristics. African Americans were overrepresented in the timed-off group, as were Hennepin County residents.

Crichton, Leslie and Vania Meyer. *Minnesota Family Investment Program Longitudinal Study: Three Years After Baseline.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, December 2003.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: Continued tracking of MFIP participants as part of a five-year longitudinal study of applicants (new to MFIP when they entered the study) and recipients (on assistance already).

Findings: Continued increases in percentages of MFIP leavers, median work hours and hourly wages. But with a weaker economy in 2001, family earnings and income fell for recipients and poverty rates rose. Some 40 percent of recipients were off welfare and working at the three-year mark. Also includes information on MFIP participants' life situations and barriers to employment.

Friese, Sarah, Linda Harris, Barry B. Cohen and Margaret Celebrezze. *CHOICES Program Evaluation Final Report.* Minneapolis: Rainbow Research, March 2004.

Purpose: To test whether intensive case management of MFIP participants' mental health issues, chemical dependency problems and other health barriers would help improve their health status, the stability of their housing and ultimately their employment status.

Findings: This study could not answer all the evaluation questions definitively due to lack of data for some key measures, and a tracking time frame determined to be too short to determine whether the program had long-term, enduring effects, particularly in stabilizing clients' lives and reducing health care costs. The project did reduce use of homeless shelters and greatly increase use of mental health services, chemical dependency services and other types of health care. It also caused a shift from receiving care in emergency rooms and inpatient hospital settings to office visits and outpatient settings. Many participants got jobs; 6% left MFIP for full-time, unsubsidized employment and 18% were working part-time when they left MFIP.

Gennetian, Lisa. *The Long-Term Effects of the Minnesota Family Investment Program on Marriage and Divorce Among Two-Parent Families.* New York: MDRC, October 2003.

Web address: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/357/full.pdf>

Purpose: To examine why two-parent families assigned to the pilot MFIP of the mid-1990s were 40 percent more likely to be married at the three-year follow-up point than two-parent AFDC families.

Findings: The pilot MFIP's effects on sustaining marriage and reducing divorce were sustained seven years after they entered the study and were most pronounced among black recipient couples. Study posits several possible explanations for the persistence of the effects, including the streamlined eligibility rules and more generous earnings disregard of the pilot program.

Hage, David. *Reforming Welfare by Rewarding Work – On State's Successful Experiment.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Purpose: To chronicle the political battles, study and compromise that led to Minnesota's development of Minnesota's distinctive welfare reform strategy, which combines anti-poverty tools with work expectations.

Findings: Includes portraits of three women who exemplify different parts of the welfare caseload and recommendations for what the nation can learn from Minnesota's experience.

Hennessey, James and Jane Venohr. *Exploring Options: Child Support Arrears Forgiveness and Passthrough of Payments to Custodial Families.* St. Louis: Policy Studies, Inc., for the Minnesota Department of Human Services, February 2000.

Web address: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/children/documents/pub//DHS_id_008804.hcsp

Purpose: In the face of Minnesota's growing child support debt, this report reviews options and makes recommendations on forgiving child support arrears and passing on child-support payments to custodial families receiving cash welfare aid. Report includes a literature review, focus groups with custodial and non-custodial parents and a quantitative analysis

Findings: Identifies the need for a uniform statewide policy on debt compromise that ensures fair and equitable treatment for all citizens and recommends a one-time amnesty program for non-custodial parents who are delinquent in child-support obligations. Also recommends that the state develop a child support passthrough program for families receiving public assistance.

Hollister, David, Mary Martin and Connie Wanberg. *Findings from the First Phase of a Study of the Transition from Welfare to Work in Hennepin County, Minnesota.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, March 1999.

Purpose: To understand why some Hennepin County welfare recipients participate fully in welfare-to-work programs and others do not. Focuses on African-American and Caucasian MFIP clients. Based on face-to-face interviews with 86 welfare recipients, client focus groups and a focus group and mailed survey with employment counselors.

Findings: MFIP participants who were sanctioned for non-participation in welfare-to-work programs had lower levels of employment commitment, social support, and time management and responsibility than those who were not sanctioned. Study also reports common barriers cited by clients: Personal or family health problems, child care and transportation. Includes recommendations for addressing gaps in services and improving system performance.

Hollister, David, Mary Martin and Connie Wanberg. *Findings from the Second Phase of a Study of the Transition from Welfare to Work in Hennepin County, Minnesota.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, December 1999.

Purpose: To learn why some Hmong, Latino, Native American and Somali MFIP clients participate in welfare-to-work programs in Hennepin County while others do not, and to compare this group to an earlier report focused on African-American and Caucasian clients.

Findings: Participants who had not been sanctioned were much more conscientious and positive about work than sanctioned participants. The Hmong, Latino, Native American and Somali group reported significantly less social support than the African-American and Caucasian group, and distinct ethnic differences emerged. Hmong participants were especially worried about the cultural and language adaptations required by the work and training program. Somali participants worried about workplace discrimination and lack of respect within the work and training environment. Latino participants were the most positive but were concerned about the lack of job counselors who shared their language and culture. All groups of color were more negative about their financial counselors than were Caucasian participants. Report includes recommendations.

Hollister, David, Mary Martin, Jessica Toft, Ji-in Yeo and Youngmin Kim. *The Well-Being of Parents and Children in the Minnesota Family Investment Program in Hennepin County, Minnesota, 1998-2002.* St. Paul: University of Minnesota Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, November 2003.

Web address: <http://2ssw.che.umn.edu/cascw/pdf/MFIP%20publication.pdf>

Purpose: To discover the impact MFIP had on the well-being of families and children in Hennepin County.

Findings: Extensive workers had the most education, highest salaries, least amount of time spent in training and the most time living in the U.S. They also were most likely to lack health insurance and to move frequently. Families that left MFIP considered themselves better off financially but indicated that their children's emotional well-being had suffered because of the MFIP experience and that family time and household routines had been compromised.

Jefferys, Marcie and Elizabeth Davis. *Working in Minnesota: Parents' Employment and Earnings in the Child Care Assistance Program.* St. Paul: Minnesota Child Care Policy Research Partnership, July 2004.

Web address: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/children/documents/pub/DHS_id_008779.hcsp

Purpose: To analyze which industries employ recipients of Minnesota's Child Care Assistance Program.

Findings: CCAP jobs are concentrated in four industries: health care and social assistance, administrative and support, retail trade and accommodations and food service. These industries pay lower wages and provide fewer work hours than other sectors. MFIP CCAP recipients are the most concentrated in these low-wage industries.

Knox, Virginia Cynthia Miller and Lisa A. Gennetian. *Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work – A Summary of the Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program.* New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, September 2000.

Web address: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/27/summary.html>

Purpose: To summarize findings of a four-year MFIP pilot in seven Minnesota counties from April 1994 to June 1998, with a comparison to a control group of participants on the AFDC program.

Findings: The pilot MFIP produced substantial increases in employment and earnings for single-parent, long-term recipients. It also led to significant improvements in child well-being, including a dramatic decline in domestic abuse, a modest increase in marriage rates and better performance in school, with fewer behavioral problems. For two-parent families, MFIP reduced the financial pressure for both parents to work and increased marital stability.

Martin, Mary, David Hollister, Jessica Toft, Ji-in Yeo and Youngmin Kim. *Work, Race and Welfare Reform: A Study of the Minnesota Family Investment Program in Hennepin County 1998-2002.* St. Paul: University of Minnesota Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, 2002.

Purpose: To report on MFIP's impact on Hennepin County families based on in-depth interviews with 84 randomly selected MFIP participants.

Findings: Experience varies greatly depending on race/ethnicity and work patterns. Major findings include that immigrants on average completed only six years of school and are the most disadvantaged. The study also highlights the need for culturally differentiated services and the negative correlation between work and health insurance. A sample of findings on ethnic/racial differentials: African Americans in the sample moved more, got more training, used less child-care assistance and were more consistently covered by health insurance. The study raises questions about the reasons for differential experiences and offers recommendations for modifications of MFIP.

Meyer, Vania. *Provider Perspectives on the Issues Behind the Outcomes: Focus group findings on service delivery issues from the perspective of providers serving African American, American Indian, Hmong, and Somali participants in MFIP.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, June 2003.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: To use focus groups of MFIP employment service providers and financial workers as a means of achieving deeper understanding of the issues facing MFIP participants who are African American, American Indian, Hmong and Somali. These four groups tend to remain longer on MFIP and have less success in moving off welfare to work.

Findings: Providers identified mental illness as a major hidden barrier to work readiness. For African American and Somali clients who were new to Minnesota, the lack of information and support networks was often a big barrier. Immigrant households often include men who expect to support their families and expect mothers to stay home and care for children. Providers said that many African American and American Indian clients came from generational welfare families, believed they were entitled to government support and were unused to the demands of a working lifestyle. Somali and Hmong clients were generally seen as willing to work, though some Hmong clients cited promises of government support in exchange for their support in Vietnam. Providers worried that many clients are preoccupied with day-to-day survival, expected to have their benefits extended and weren't preparing for the possibility that they would not be. Report also highlights importance of client-worker relationship and difficulty of meeting MFIP job search and paperwork requirements.

Meyer, Vania. *Measuring Minnesota Family Investment Program Performance for Racial/Ethnic and Immigrant Groups.* St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Human Services, November 2003.

Web address:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/DHS_id_004113.hcsp#MFIP

Purpose: To provide a quantitative analysis of differences in MFIP outcomes for racial/ethnic and immigrant groups, while controlling for client demographic characteristics and county economic conditions and trying to identify possible role of bias.

Findings: African-Americans, American Indians, Somalis and other black immigrants underperformed the range of expected outcomes for the three-year Self-Support Index. Whites, Hispanics, Hmong and other Asians performed better than the predicted range. Empirical results do not prove bias but are consistent with the possibility of differential treatment of MFIP participants.

Nguyen, Khanh and Regina Wagner. *MFIP 'Reform' and Low-Wage Workers: Are Parents with Health Impairments Being Left Behind?* St. Paul: Legal Services Advocacy Project, December 2003.

Web address: <http://www.lsapmn.org>

Purpose: To examine the prevalence of health impairments among MFIP families by using administrative data and research by DHS and other organizations. The report also discusses MFIP policy changes and how they affect families with health problems.

Findings: Found that 10.6% of December 2002 caseload had been exempted from work requirements for health reasons in one or more months that year. Also compares estimates of families with health impairments to the number exempted and suggests that many MFIP families are not being granted exemptions they qualify for. Notes that health impairments are common among the hard-to-employ MFIP participants.

Nguyen, Khanh and Regina Wagner. *An Unaddressed Knowledge Gap: What Do Parents Understand About MFIP Assessments?* St. Paul: Legal Services Advocacy Project, February 2004.

Web address: <http://www.lsapmn.org>

Purpose: To examine the perceptions of MFIP parents about whether they had been assessed, the attributes of successful assessments, and parents' relationships with job counselors.

Findings: Parents with one or more serious barriers to employment were interviewed and found to have little understanding about MFIP assessments. Most were unable to explain why they were still on MFIP and what plans they had developed with their job counselors for obtaining work and leaving MFIP. Those who could explain why they were still on MFIP had generally been referred to a specialized employment services provider. Most MFIP parents spoke of their job counselors as adversaries with a rigid compliance focus. Includes recommendations.

Obrecht-Como, Renee and Carrie Thomas. *MFIP at the Midpoint: Challenges and Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency.* St. Paul: Legal Services Advocacy Project, December 2000.

Web address: <http://www.lsapmn.org>

Purpose: To summarize research on MFIP and low-wage employment and to assess whether MFIP is meeting its twin goals of reducing poverty and welfare dependency through employment.

Findings: Highlights differences between pilot MFIP and statewide version (caseloads, sanctions, work requirements, etc.) and summarizes early results from the statewide plan. Summarizes results from Wilder and DHS longitudinal study showing employment and modest earnings gains, as well as employment barriers and inadequate work supports. Also highlights training opportunities for low-wage workers and the need for more services in this area.

Owen, Greg, Corinna Roy, Ellen Shelton, and Amy Bush Stevens. *How welfare-to-work is working – Welfare reform through the eyes of Minnesota employers, welfare participants and local community partnerships (summary).* St. Paul: Wilder Research Center for The McKnight Foundation, March 2000.

Web address: <http://www.wilder.org/research/reports/pdf/howwelfareto-work3-00.pdf>

Purpose: To assess the effectiveness of community partnerships funded by The McKnight Foundation to fill the gaps in funding and services available under welfare reform in Minnesota. Evaluation uses case studies, interviews with employers and interviews with current and former MFIP participants.

Findings: Among the most promising local support services were loan programs for car purchases and repair, loan programs to child care providers and outreach to help parents identify resources, training in specific jobs skills and workplace mentoring. All these areas showed continuing challenges, however: The need for more transportation strategies for people without cars, high turnover of child care providers due to low pay and complex regulations for subsidies and employers' reluctance to deal with gaps in "soft skills." The report includes information on what strategies were effective with hard-to-serve families, employers and community partnerships. Survey of current and former MFIP participants measures attitudes toward MFIP, areas that need improvement, barriers to self-sufficiency and unmet needs.

Owen, Greg, Ellen Shelton and Corinna Roy. *Filling the Gaps in Welfare Reform – The Minnesota Welfare-to-work Partnerships Initiative.* St. Paul: Wilder Research Center for The McKnight Foundation, August 2001.

Web address: <http://www.wilder.org/research/reports/pdf/mcknightreport8-01.pdf>

Purpose: To examine the effectiveness of 22 community partnerships funded by The McKnight Foundation to offer services that would fill the gaps in the new time-limited, work-first MFIP system. Findings were based on interviews with 131 employers, leaders of 22 partnerships, case studies of 10 partnerships and interviews with 357 welfare participants.

Findings: Employers were mainly concerned with on-the-job issues; they expected recipients and participants to address job readiness and family issues. They participated partly because the strong economy increased their need for workers and the partnerships helped recruit and retain new workers. Partnership studies found no single, simple solution to problems and concluded that

the flexibility of McKnight funding was key in being able to respond quickly and effectively to changing needs. Transportation services were the greatest unmet needs and the most successful transportation strategies involved helping recipients buy and maintain their own cars. Report gives extensive information on challenges with child care, employment and the MFIP system.

Patterson, John, Adrienne Howard and Dan Jacobson. *Program Evaluation Report: Economic Status of Welfare Recipients.* St. Paul: Office of the Legislative Auditor, January 2002.

Web address: www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us – Report #02-05

Purpose: To evaluate how well Minnesota's programs to assist low-income families help families, encourage work and discourage dependency.

Findings: Report gives a generally positive assessment of the state system's effectiveness in promoting work, not dependency. Notes that most families that were on MFIP in 1998 had a family member working in 2000 and that the government aid they received – cash and non-cash – lifted most families above the federal poverty guideline. The report notes that once MFIP participants earn more than minimum wage, government assistance declines by nearly the same amount they would earn from increased hours or higher wages, greatly reducing the incentive to earn more. The report also includes great detail about cash and non-cash assistance available to low-income families in Minnesota.

Patton, Michael Quinn, Margaret Bringewatt, Jeanne Campbell, Thomas Dewar and Marsha Mueller. *The McKnight Foundation Aid to Families in Poverty Initiative – A Synthesis of Themes, Patterns and Lessons Learned.* Minneapolis: The McKnight Foundation, April 1993.

Purpose: To summarize the findings from 34 projects funded between 1988 and 1993 as part of McKnight Foundation's Aid to Families in Poverty initiative. Of these, 28 used model strategies for improving delivery of social services and six used a range of education and advocacy efforts aimed at changing community opinion and public policy.

Findings: Effective programs offered respectful, individualized approaches and intense and comprehensive services. They also had a strong sense of mission, were flexible and highly responsive to individual needs and challenged rules and attitudes of larger systems. For participants, taking first steps and arresting decline are important outcomes and it's important to have participants develop a plan, sense of direction and commitment to making progress. Also notes that having program staff engage in public policy education and advocacy are crucial to changing systems. Notes the challenge of having predominantly white, middle class staff work with poor people of color.

Pukstas, Kimberly, Dennis Albrecht, Lynne Auten, Vernon Drew and Samuel Dabruzzi. *Arrears Management for Low-Income Noncustodial Parents Evaluation Report.* St. Paul: Center for the Support of Families for the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Hennepin County Child Support Division, February 2004.

Web address: <http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrserver/Legacy/DHS-4083-ENG>

Purpose: To evaluate the performance of a demonstration program by Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Hennepin County Child Support Division to forgive public assistance arrears for low-income noncustodial parents in exchange for regular child-support payments.

Findings: Only 24 percent of enrollees were able to pay regular child-support payments for 12 months and thus have their public assistance arrears forgiven. Three factors predicted success: Higher income for the noncustodial parent, large arrears to be forgiven, and lower monthly child support payment. The size of the monthly payment appeared to have the most influence on outcomes. Also includes description of administrative challenges and recommendations for agencies considering debt-forgiveness programs.

Shelton, Ellen, Corinna Roy and Karen Ulstad. *Children's Home Society of Minnesota Client Focus Group Project – Parents' Views on Child Care and Child Care Assistance in the First Year of Statewide Welfare Reform.* St. Paul: Wilder Research Center, March 1999.

Web address: <http://www.wilder.org/research/reports/pdf/parentsviewsonchildcare03-99.pdf>

Purpose: To explore the views of low-income parents receiving a range of child care subsidies about how new welfare rules affect families and how Minnesota's child-care system is responding.

Findings: In 15 groups that met during 1998, parents expressed gratitude for child care assistance but frustration with funding policies that forced them to go on MFIP when they only need child care aid. Other concerns included heavy caseloads among welfare and child-care resource workers, confusing and frequently changing welfare rules, and income limits set too low to meet actual needs. Parents reported that the stress of their lives made them less patient and responsive to their children.

Shelton, Ellen, Corinna Roy and Karen Ulstad. *Children's Home Society of Minnesota Supplementary Report on Crisis Nurseries.* St. Paul: Wilder Research Center, March 1999.

Purpose: To explore how changes in the state's welfare system were affecting low-income parents and children and how the child care system could help them. This report is based on two focus groups of parents at crisis nurseries.

Findings: Parents described crisis nurseries as crucial sources of safe, good quality care for children, emotional support for parents and address to other community support. They complained that there is too little child care available, especially evenings, weekends, drop-in and overnight. Focus groups also identified other barriers, including confusing and poorly explained welfare rules, penalties imposed on parents who must care for sick children and transportation and housing barriers.

Shelton, Ellen, Greg Owen, Amy Bush Stevens, Justine Nelson-Christinedaughter, Corinna Roy and June Heineman. "Whose job is it? Employers' views on welfare reform." Paper presented at the Rural Dimensions of Welfare Reform Conference, Washington, D.C. St. Paul: Wilder Research Center, May 2000.

Web address: http://www.jcpr.org/wp/wpdownload.cfm?pdfink=wpfiles/Owen_Shelton.pdf

Purpose: To describe qualitative results from telephone interviews with 130 Minnesota employers who participated in local welfare-to-work partnerships with social service agencies and identify differences between welfare participant and employer views on service needs and barriers to self-sufficiency.

Findings: There were few differences in attitude and experience between urban/suburban and rural employers, though urban/suburban businesses seemed to be more affected by the tight labor market and more open to flexible hiring policies. Employers cited lack of "soft skills" as the primary barrier to workforce participation, while welfare participants cited structural problems such as low wages and lack of education and child care. Employers reported that involvement in the partnerships helped them recruit and retain employees.

Shelton, Ellen and Greg Owen. *The Issues Behind the Outcomes for Somali, Hmong, American Indian and African American Welfare Participants in Minnesota.* St. Paul: Wilder Research Center, April 2003.

Web address: <http://www.wilder.org/research/reports/pdf/welfareculturalissues4-03.pdf>

Purpose: Using 40 focus groups involving 191 current or recent welfare recipients, researchers sought to see how people from a range of ethnic groups experienced and reacted to MFIP policies and services. The report sought to identify particular obstacles that limited the ability of participants from these groups to get and keep jobs.

Findings: Many focus group participants supported the work goal of MFIP but found the actual

operation demeaning or hostile rather than supportive. For many, their perception of whether the job counselor was on their side was key. Common complaints about MFIP included: Excessive paperwork demands, inaccessibility of workers to answer questions and inconsistency about rules and supports. Report includes detailed insights into the particular barriers, experiences and attitudes of people from different ethnic groups. A large proportion reported that they lacked basic reading and math skills, familiarity with demands of the workplace and other skills usually needed for even entry-level work.

Shelton, Ellen, Greg Owen, Nicole Martin and Ben Shardlow. *Training Low-income Workers for Self-sufficiency – Learning from the McKnight Families Forward Initiative after Two Years.* St. Paul: Wilder Research Center, December 2003.

Web address: <http://www.wilder.org/research/reports.html?summary=1021>

Purpose: To evaluate four types of projects funded by the McKnight Foundation to increase low-income working parents' access to education and training and thereby to improve their jobs and earnings.

Findings: Summarizes promising strategies used by projects in the Families Forward Initiative. These include emphasis on individual assessments to identify needed services, help stabilizing day-to-day life and developing one-on-one relationships with mentors or staff members to help trainees sustain motivation and enthusiasm. Other recommended strategies include: Strong connection to multiple employers and education for employers about struggles faced by entry-level workers.

Stockdill, Stacey Hueftle, Rebecca Anderson and Marlene Stoehr. *Frogtown Family Connections – A preliminary evaluation report.* Golden Valley: EnSearch, Inc., August 2001.

Web address: <http://www.lifetrackresources.org/Administration/research.htm>

Purpose: To determine whether home visits could identify families' needs, develop support plans and help families become self-sufficient. The study was conducted with families who failed to attend an MFIP overview or intake meeting, had children under age 6, and lived in designated neighborhoods of St. Paul.

Findings: With tremendous persistence and ingenuity, the Frogtown Family Connections staff was able to contact 52 percent of 79 cases referred. Outcomes included getting families into compliance with MFIP rules, helping stabilize housing, helping obtain clothing and helping look for jobs. Among effective tools used with extremely challenged families were: Frequent visits at home, using cell phones to model effective communication, driving families to employment services appointment and writing goals and steps needed to achieve them. The report also describes the characteristics of active families and the barriers to attending MFIP overviews.

Stockdill, Stacey Hueftle, Rebecca Anderson, MaryJo Smith, Marlene Stoehr and Shirley Dean. *Lifetrack Resources Advancement Plus Program Evaluation Final Report.* Golden Valley: EnSearch, Inc., August 2002.

Web address: <http://www.lifetrackresources.org/Administration/research.htm>

Purpose: To study the effectiveness of six-month, paid and closely supervised work experience for people moving from welfare dependency to work.

Findings: The program cost \$8,000 per enrollee and 61% of trainees were placed in unsubsidized jobs, with a median hourly wage of \$8, comparing well to other transitional jobs programs. Report includes detailed information about the diverse population enrolled in Advancement Plus, most of whom had no significant work experience and half of whom spoke English as a second language. Also, the report gives significant findings about the prevalence of learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental illness (60 percent had one or more). The demonstration project found that trainees needed additional support to deal with workplace situations, punctuality and attendance.

Stockdill, Stacey Hueftle, Rebecca Anderson, MaryJo Smith, Marlene Stoehr and Shirley Dean. *A Report on Sanctions.* Golden Valley: EnSearch, Inc. for Lifetrack Resources, February 2003.

Web address: <http://www.lifetrackresources.org/Administration/research.htm>

Purpose: To evaluate the characteristics of Advancement Plus clients who were being sanctioned by MFIP.

Findings: Advancement Plus trainees who were sanctioned were the most vulnerable. They had the largest number of barriers to employment, including such severe barriers as chemical dependency, domestic violence, unreliable transportation, learning disabilities or literacy levels below eighth grade.

Stockdill, Stacey Hueftle, Rebecca Anderson, MaryJo Smith, Marlene Stoehr and Shirley Dean. *Occupational Therapy in Transitional Jobs: Innovations to Improve Life Skills.* Golden Valley: EnSearch, Inc. for Lifetrack Resources, November 2003.

Web address: <http://www.lifetrackresources.org/Administration/research.htm>

Purpose: To see how the addition of occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists to the temporary, paid work model affected outcomes.

Findings: Adding these specialists benefited many trainees who had undiagnosed medical conditions and traumatic brain injuries. The social skills classes designed by the specialists showed promise as a recruitment tool for occupational therapy and traumatic brain injury assessments. The specialists also found that employers might need to recognize trainees' limitations and provide reasonable accommodations in order for some trainees to be successful in subsidized and unsubsidized jobs.

Stockdill, Stacey Hueftle, Rebecca Anderson, MaryJo Smith, Marlene Stoehr, Shirley Dean and Bonnie Weakly. *2004 Comparison Study – An Evaluation that Compares Outcomes for Multi-Site Transitional Jobs Program with Random Samples of Participants in the Minnesota Family Investment Program.* Golden Valley: EnSearch, Inc., September 2004.

Web address: <http://www.lifetrackresources.org/Administration/research.htm>

Purpose: To see how participants in six-month paid work experience, including sub-groups, compared to the general MFIP welfare population in terms of barriers, employment, wages and welfare use.

Findings: Although its enrollees had more barriers to employment, the transitional jobs program performed well at helping challenged populations find unsubsidized employment at wages comparable to those earned by the MFIP comparison group. The model showed particular promise for ex-offenders, the homeless, youth, victims of domestic violence, people with chemical dependencies, mental illness and learning disabilities. Specialists – including occupational therapists and speech pathologists – were deemed crucial to helping trainees overcome barriers.

Toft, Jessica, Mary Martin, Ji-in Yeo and David Hollister. *Factors that Influence Health Care Coverage for Low-Income Populations under Welfare Reform (draft).* St. Paul: University of Minnesota School of Social Work, 2004.

Purpose: To explore why so many Minnesota families that leave welfare for work go without health insurance coverage despite their apparent eligibility for publicly funded medical programs. Also examines racial disparities in health insurance coverage. Focuses on a sample of 84 MFIP recipients in Hennepin County.

Findings: Minnesota adults who have left welfare and are working are nearly twice as likely as low-income adults statewide to be uninsured. Extensive workers, those who worked 36 or more months during the 42-month study period, were the most likely not to have health insurance, with

an average of 7.6 months uninsured. Moderate workers were more likely to use public health care coverage. The study found that Latinos were the least likely to have insurance, followed by Native Americans and whites. Researchers speculate that low-income workers do not see the linkage between work and publicly-funded health programs and therefore do not apply for these programs. The report also suggests that Medicaid's complicated eligibility rules and application procedures are a deterrent.

Urban Coalition. *Welfare Reform: Real Possibilities or Empty Promises, Volume One.* St. Paul: The Urban Coalition, July 1999.

Purpose: First of a series of reports on the impact of welfare reform in Minnesota. Reports largely rely on secondary sources. It includes state and county data as well as papers by people with regional and discipline-specific perspectives on welfare reform.

Findings: Includes data showing declining welfare caseloads in Minnesota, points out concentration of MFIP cases in a few poor Minneapolis and St. Paul neighborhoods and highlights the effects of welfare reform policies on immigrants and refugees. Service providers report high caseloads and average contact time of 10 minutes per family, leaving immigrants and refugees confused about the program. Cites Wisconsin data showing increased homelessness when new welfare rules caused caseload to decline dramatically.

Urban Coalition. *Welfare Reform: Real Possibilities or Empty Promises, Volume Two.* St. Paul: The Urban Coalition, March 2001

Purpose: Second in a series of reports on the impact of welfare reform in Minnesota.

Findings: Summarizes continued reductions in MFIP caseload and notes racial disparity in outcomes. Notes that welfare recipients are disproportionately people of color and highlights special barriers faced by this population. Includes information on trends in hunger, homelessness and barriers to work.

Urban Coalition. *Welfare Reform: Real Possibilities or Empty Promises, Volume Three.* St. Paul: The Urban Coalition, February 2002.

Purpose: Third and final report in a series tracking the impact of welfare reform in Minnesota.

Findings: The report evaluates continued caseload declines by race and finds that between January 2000 and July 2001, the number of people receiving MFIP benefits declined for all groups except African Americans and Latinos, which saw gains of 3.4 percent and 22.8 percent respectively. Also analyzes MFIP data for Hennepin and Ramsey counties and Minneapolis and St. Paul. Based on interviews with nine welfare recipients and 12 service providers, the report summarizes common work barriers and problems with the administration of MFIP, including high caseloads and a lack of culturally competent service providers.

Wagner, Regina, Khanh Nguyen, Maureen O'Connell and Barbara Collins. *MFIP Families and Sanctions: A Call for Services – sanctions as a predictor that many MFIP families struggle with employment barriers and need targeted services to succeed.* St. Paul: Legal Services Advocacy Project, 2002.

Web address: <http://www.lsapmn.org>

Purpose: A report to examine sanctions within MFIP.

Findings: More than one-fourth of the participants in the December 2001 MFIP caseload had been sanctioned during 2001 and significant disparities in sanction rates were occurring among different racial and ethnic groups. Rates were highest for African Americans (35.5%) and American Indians (30.6%). Also found that sanctioned participants had lower earnings, more difficulty maintaining employment and more months of MFIP cash assistance, suggesting that sanctions are an indicator of families with multiple barriers to employment.

Wanberg, Connie, David Hollister and Mary Martin. *Non-Participation in Welfare-to-Work Programs: A Summary of Findings from a Focus Group and Survey of Welfare-to-Work Professionals.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota and Metropolitan State University, February 1999.

Purpose: To learn why some welfare recipients do not participate in welfare-to-work programs and learn how participation could be increased.

Findings: Professionals cited a range of reasons, including clients' failure to believe time limits were real, low self-esteem, dependency problems and resistance to being told what to do. They also report that non-participating clients had more problems than the providers could address, did not believe they were employable and sometimes had other sources of income that ameliorated the effect of sanctions. Significant barriers, including cultural adjustment, transportation and housing and mental illness and chemical dependency, are also cited. Ideas for improvement are listed, including quicker sanctions and streamlined services, better assessments and greater encouragement for clients, incentives for participation and additional services.