Community Service Jobs in Wisconsin Works

The Milwaukee County Experience

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

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Overview

Within Wisconsin Works (W-2), the state's TANF program, community service jobs (CSJs) are the most commonly assigned category, or "tier," of activities for welfare recipients, both statewide and within Milwaukee County. The CSJ tier is intended for individuals who are deemed not ready for immediate regular employment and is designed to provide an opportunity to practice work habits and skills. Most program participants entering the CSJ tier, which has a 24-month time limit, are assigned to work experience, but they also can be assigned to other activities such as further assessment, employment search, education, and training. They receive a cash benefit, case management, and other supportive services, though their cash benefits can be reduced if they do not meet the requirements set forth in their employment plan.

This report examines the implementation of the CSJ component of W-2 in Milwaukee County during the first three years of its operation. Milwaukee County serves the majority of the statewide W-2 caseload, and the program is being implemented by nongovernmental agencies, some nonprofit and some for profit, under contract with the state.

Key Findings

- The initial assignments of program activities for entrants into the CSJ tier gradually changed over the early years of the program. Work experience remained important throughout the period, with between 60 percent and 80 percent of participants assigned to this activity. However, other activities such as orientation and assessment, employment training, education, and soft-skills training increased substantially in importance. For example, the proportion of those assigned to education rose from 15 percent in the early months of the program to 50 percent in the program's second year.

- "Work experience" could mean very different things depending on the worksite to which a participant was assigned. Most participants were assigned to thrift store work, office and customer service work, child or adult care, and light industrial work or housekeeping. But about 25 percent were assigned to work experiences that included formal vocational training.

- The five local W-2 agencies differed in how they developed worksites and assigned participants to them. Two assigned many participants to operations that were part of the W-2 agency; others relied on a dispersed network of community organizations or on placements developed by a county agency. Within several agencies without a centralized CSJ department, the access of case managers to information about available worksites differed. A participant's access to the various types of worksites, however, was a function of the agency that served his or her geographic area and the caseworker assigned the case. These differences in access to placements were important because the work habits and skills developed in work experience depended on the worksite placement.

- Within the W-2 agency, both worksite supervisors and case managers play a central role in the administration of the CSJ program, and it is important that they be in close communication. Worksite supervisors reported that they would have liked more frequent contact with staff from the W-2 agency.

- Because of the time limits on CSJ participation, it is important to monitor attendance and respond to problems quickly to ensure that participants receive the services intended to improve their employability. It is also important to close W-2 cases when participation has ended, to prevent the time-limit "clock" from running when no W-2 service is provided. Monitoring attendance at worksites, however, was a substantial challenge due to confusion over administrative responsibilities within some W-2 agencies, assignment of participants to multiple activities (often not colocated), turnover and gaps in staffing, and the constant development of new CSJ worksites.

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Preface

Community service jobs have been a part of federally funded public assistance programs for over four decades, but they are often seen as complicated to operate and, at times, controversial. Underlying the complexity and the controversy is a debate about the goals community service jobs programs are meant to achieve: Are they intended to promote work as a quid pro quo in return for benefits? Should they emphasize building skills and a résumé to help participants become more employable? Are they meant to employ people in the production of valued output? The pursuit of these alternative goals has important implications for the programs' design and operation.

The experiences of the State of Wisconsin and the County of Milwaukee offer special insights into the place of community service jobs in current public policy thinking and practice. Both Wisconsin and the city that serves its largest welfare caseload have experimented with various forms of community service jobs programs over the last decade; and unlike most such programs, theirs operated on a large scale. In fact, both statewide and within Milwaukee County, community service jobs have been the most commonly assigned component of Wisconsin Works (W-2), the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Interestingly, in Milwaukee County nongovernmental organizations operated W-2 under contract with the state, with considerable latitude in how they structured and operated the program. Thus, the experience in Milwaukee presents an unusual opportunity to learn about the design and operation of community service jobs programs.

This report illustrates the strengths and operational complexities of community service jobs for TANF recipients. In the programs' early years, many former recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the welfare program that preceded TANF, left the public assistance rolls, and the Milwaukee W-2 agencies served a smaller caseload composed of recipients who did not find employment in a very strong local labor market. As the W-2 program evolved and the local agencies gained experience, the agencies tried various ways to organize their community service jobs operations to serve this group. They grappled with the complexities of matching participants with appropriate worksites; maintaining strong communication among case managers, job developers, and worksite supervisors; monitoring attendance and worksite performance; and developing timely and effective responses to problems.

Today, federal and state time limits on the receipt of welfare benefits are forcing states to work with all welfare recipients, presenting a host of new challenges. States that are struggling to serve the job needs of single parents who present more substantial barriers to employment at a time when an economic slowdown has dampened private sector demand for employees may be seeking new ideas about how to serve the remaining families. Community service jobs are an important option. By highlighting the most pressing administrative issues in operating a large community service jobs program and assessing the ways local W-2 agencies tried to address them, this report draws on Milwaukee County's experience to illuminate ideas for how community service jobs programs in Wisconsin and elsewhere might be strengthened.

Gordon Berlin
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Executive Summary

In September 1997, Wisconsin replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program. Within W-2, community service jobs (CSJs) are the most commonly assigned component, or "tier" of activities, both statewide and within Milwaukee County. A substantially higher percentage of participants in Wisconsin's program are assigned to CSJs than in any other state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. States may turn more and more to CSJs as federal work participation requirements increase, as welfare caseloads increasingly consist of those who are most difficult to employ, and — in the current economic slowdown — as unsubsidized jobs become harder to find. Wisconsin's experiences with its large-scale CSJ program in W-2 may provide insights for other states as they consider greater use of community service jobs.

This report examines the implementation of the CSJ component of W-2 in Milwaukee County from 1997, when W-2 began, through mid-2000. Milwaukee's CSJ component is of particular interest because the county has the majority of Wisconsin's W-2 caseload and because nongovernmental service providers have implemented W-2 within six regions of the county, under contract to the state. During the study period, there were five W-2 service providers in Milwaukee County. One focus of this study is on the evolving nature of the administrative CSJ component of W-2 as the caseload and economy changed and as state and local W-2 agencies gained experience operating the program. This study also examines the daily experiences of the CSJ participants and their worksite supervisors, identifies administrative issues, and highlights lessons for other jurisdictions.

The Nature of Services in Wisconsin Works

Entrants into W-2 are assessed and typically are assigned to participate in one of four "tiers," or components, of the program. Each type of tier assignment involves specific activities, services, and responsibilities. In the CSJ tier, participants' activities range from work experience at an assigned worksite to further assessment and orientation, education, and job search.

- **During the first two years of W-2, the initial work activity assignments for entrants into the CSJ tier gradually changed; although work experience at an assigned worksite remained important throughout the period, the use of one or more additional activities increased.**

Work experience remained important throughout the first two years of W-2, with 60 percent to 80 percent of all entrants being assigned to CSJs. However, the use of other activities — including orientation and assessment, employment training, education, and soft-skills train-

ing — increased substantially. For example, the percentage of entrants who were assigned to education increased from 15 percent among the initial cohort to 50 percent among the late cohort. This shift partly reflects changing practices among the W-2 agencies operating the program in Milwaukee County, but it could also reflect the changing characteristics of program applicants as well as the ongoing debate within Wisconsin about the importance of academic and vocational skill-building (beyond the development of general work habits).

- **There was considerable variety in the ways that CSJ activities were structured and in the characteristics of worksites.**

Depending on W-2 agencies' options and caseworkers' discretion, CSJ participants were assigned to worksites that can be grouped into five categories: (1) thrift store work, (2) office work and customer service, (3) care work involving children or adults, (4) light industrial and housekeeping work, and (5) vocational training. The first four categories are *work-only placements,* in that they emphasize work habits, provide hands-on experience, and possibly constitute informal training but are without a formal training component. The last category, *vocational training,* provides a combination of hands-on experience and vocational or job skills training whereby participants receive formal recognition (a certificate or some other verification) of skills learned. Depending on where CSJ participants lived in Milwaukee County and, thus, on which W-2 agency was designated to serve their region, they had varying likelihoods of obtaining a specific work experience.

- **CSJ participants' worksite opportunities varied, depending on the W-2 agency that served their region and the staff member who was assigned to their case.**

Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies differed in the worksite placements they offered, in terms of the size of the workforce, the industry type, and the work activities involved. In part, these differences reflected how the various agencies developed their worksites. Of the five W-2 agencies studied, two of the agencies were affiliated with organizations that had large industrial or commercial operations and that placed many CSJ participants in these worksites. Other agencies developed dispersed placements in smaller organizations, and still others relied on a pool of placements in large public or nonprofit institutions developed by a county agency. But this variety of CSJ placements was also caused in some W-2 agencies by a lack of communication to staff working with participants; at times during the study, there was no central database of possible placements, so not all W-2 case managers (known as financial and employment planners, or FEPs) had the same information about worksite options.

- **CSJ participants practiced and learned quite different work habits and basic work skills, depending on the kind of worksite assignment they had.**

A survey of CSJ participants attending worksite activities collected information on a broad array of skills practiced in the worksites. Compared with participants in work-only placements, those whose assignments involved vocational training reported improving more on work habits and basic work skills (with the exception of office/clerical work), were given more responsibilities while at the worksite, expected to receive higher wages for future employment, and perceived that their CSJ work experience was preparing them for a job that would provide higher wages. Vocational training — as a CSJ work assignment — was not available to all participants; only about a quarter of the sample were placed in such assignments.

- **Most CSJ participants who attended worksite activities valued learning new skills and getting training, working at engaging tasks, and dealing with amicable supervisors and coworkers; but what they found most valuable depended on their assigned work activity.**

While most of the CSJ participants who were assigned to vocational training activities valued learning new skills, those in care work valued their daily tasks (which they found engaging), and those in thrift store work valued the people around them (in part because they did not find their work tasks engaging).

The Administration of Community Service Jobs

Research into the administration of CSJs has found that it can be complicated to operate large-scale work experience programs because of the variety of organizations involved, the need to monitor worksite activities and participation, and the importance of effective communication.

- **At times during this study, the local W-2 agencies did not have staff clearly responsible for key tasks in administering CSJs — or else multiple staff had partial responsibility for them; as a result, accountability was unclear, and communication was unnecessarily complicated.**

Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies used varying administrative structures to implement the CSJ tier and work experience activities, and several agencies shifted their practices as the program evolved or as funding became constrained. Over the course of the first two years of their CSJ programs, the W-2 agencies at times centralized administration in a single unit and at times dispersed aspects of this activity among staff in different parts of the organization. Overlapping administrative structures and unclear accountability were more likely when responsibilities were dispersed across departments within a W-2 agency, rather than having a specific entity responsible for coordinating all aspects of CSJ administration.

- **The complexity of administering the CSJ program — with each W-2 agency having an array of worksites and contracts — highlighted the**

need for good coordination between the worksites and the agencies, especially concerning the monitoring of participation.

W-2 agencies were expected to maintain close relationships with their worksites to ensure that the CSJ program was being implemented in a manner that accomplished its goals. Worksite supervisors reported low to moderate levels of communication from W-2 agency staff regarding the goals of the CSJ program. Though worksite supervisors were offered some forms of assistance (which in general they found helpful), they would have liked to have more assistance and information, and they often reported that they would prefer more consistent contact with their W-2 agency.

- **FEPs played a critical role in shaping CSJ participants' experiences with both W-2 and the CSJ program; their key tasks included worksite placement, explaining the program and its requirements to participants, and serving as the primary contact at the W-2 agency.**

CSJ participants' views of the W-2 program were strongly influenced by the nature of their interactions with FEPs. Participants who believed that FEPs listened to their needs and attempted to assign them to worksites that would be beneficial for them expressed gratitude toward the FEPs, and this influenced their satisfaction with their FEP and with the W-2 agency. Participants who believed that their FEP simply assigned them to any work experience without considering their background or goals felt that their possibilities had been limited. CSJ participants received much of their information about the program from FEPs. During initial assessment meetings — a crucial early step in the program — FEPs covered a great amount of information and topics in varying ways, and some CSJ participants left their meeting without a clear understanding of program requirements.

- **Worksite supervisors played a central role in administering the CSJ program at the worksite, helping participants navigate between worksite rules and W-2 agency requirements, providing training, and in many ways contributing to CSJ participants' overall work experience.**

Many worksite supervisors took on the role of mentoring CSJ participants on topics unrelated to specific work tasks. Some took on this mentoring role because they saw participants daily and got to know their needs better than W-2 agency staff. However, this varied by worksite size, as some supervisors in large worksites barely knew the CSJ participants. Participants expressed appreciation for worksite supervisors who showed them respect, had a positive attitude, and were good communicators and instructors.

Monitoring and Improving Worksite Attendance

- **The W-2 work experience program in Milwaukee County had a substantial issue regarding low attendance at CSJ worksites.**

Though sanctioning (reducing the welfare grants) of CSJ participants for unexcused absences from work activities did occur in Milwaukee County, the extent of the attendance issue was most apparent when researchers tried to locate CSJ participants at their worksites in order to administer a survey. Most randomly selected participants who had been assigned to a worksite could not be surveyed in that worksite, despite repeated efforts. The worksite supervisors supported this observation, reporting that attendance problems were the most common reason that placement of a CSJ participant in their worksite was unsatisfactory.

Monitoring the attendance of CSJ participants was a challenge because of the complexity of the program, the multiple layers of administration at the W-2 agencies and at the worksites, the turnover among W-2 agency staff, and the constant development of new worksites. The assignment of CSJ participants to multiple activities — not all of them colocated — further complicated monitoring. Attendance issues were frustrating to all parties: for W-2 agency staff, because of the paperwork and tasks involved in tracking attendance and documenting absences; for worksite supervisors, because of the unpredictability of their workforce and the extra time needed to notify the W-2 agencies regarding nonparticipation; and for CSJ participants, because of the reduction in their W-2 grant and the paperwork they needed to complete in order to receive a "good-cause" excuse and avoid being sanctioned — and because of the efforts needed to correct mistakes made by W-2 agency staff.

- **Poor attendance can present special problems for CSJ participants in a time-limited assistance program.**

If public assistance recipients face time limits on how long they can receive aid, poor attendance affects them differently than in an assistance program without time limits. During the study period, examples came to light of CSJ participants who had virtually or entirely stopped attending their assigned worksite activity but who remained on the W-2 caseload — even though CSJ tier assignments are limited to two years. In part this was due to procedural safeguards put in place to avoid inappropriate or premature closing of a case. But it also at times reflected problems with attendance monitoring, in that W-2 agencies were not aware that CSJ participants were no longer active or the agencies did not act quickly on such information. When W-2 recipients had stopped participating in assigned activities, they were no longer receiving the work assistance services (which are intended to improve their work habits, skills, and employment history), and yet their assistance "clock" continued to "tick." Thus, even though the recipients might have thought that their nonparticipation had resulted in the closing of their assistance case, in fact, their months of eligibility could gradually run out.

Lessons for the Design and Administration of CSJ Programs

This study's findings suggest several lessons for W-2 and for public assistance programs in general in their efforts to design and administer CSJ programs.

Lesson 1: Identify the many tasks involved in administering a CSJ program, and clearly designate responsibility for each.

Smooth operation of a CSJ program involves creating an adequate number and variety of worksite opportunities, sharing information about available worksites with staff who work directly with clients, assessing clients' characteristics and assigning them to appropriate worksites, communicating frequently with worksite supervisors and participants, monitoring participants' attendance and the quality of the worksite experience, and following up quickly to address problems that arise. Some of these tasks involve building relationships and strong communication with potential employers in the community; others, with staff within the administering agency; and still others, with worksite supervisors and participants. Given these various "communication links," it is important to identify them and to specify who is responsible for each link and how the needed communication will occur.

Lesson 2: Work to achieve strong and consistent communication among the administering agency, the worksites, and the participants.

Strong administration of a CSJ program requires that the three key parties — the administering agency, the worksite supervisors, and the participants — share information in a timely manner about their expectations, responsibilities, emerging problems, and promising responses. This three-way communication is important but not simple to achieve in a program like W-2, in which (1) the FEPs provide the primary contact between the agency and participants; (2) the CSJ coordinator or worksite developer is the primary contact between the agency and the worksites; and (3) those participants who are active in the program are in most frequent contact with a worksite supervisor, who is not formally part of the administrative team.

Lesson 3: Align the characteristics of work experience activities with the program's goals.

The specific focus of work experience activities can vary considerably within a public assistance program. At a minimum, work experience activities provide a venue for recipients to satisfy a participation requirement in order to receive aid. The activities may also strengthen work habits, develop an employment history to aid in job searches, and build participants' academic and vocational skills. The specific focus of work experience activities is affected by the overall political climate, the emphasis of programmatic policy, the local or national economy, and/or changes in participants' interests and characteristics. Put simply, some supporters of

work experience programs may favor a model that emphasizes academic or vocational skill-building, whereas others may favor a model that considers nearly any work experience to be suitable. Whatever model (or combination of models) a program may use, it is important that its goals be clear and that they be aligned with the work experience activities.

Likewise, evaluators must recognize the range of activities that can be considered "work experience." In order to accurately access and interpret the outcomes of work experience programs, it is important to compare apples with apples. The label "work experience" can encompass a range of activities among and within programs, as goals shift.

> Lesson 4: Acknowledge that attendance in assigned activities is especially important in the context of a time-limited work experience program; monitor attendance carefully, and respond to problems quickly.

First, quick follow-up and intervention can be effective when a CSJ participant does not attend a worksite. Second, the worksite assignment itself may well affect participation. In this study, attendance was better at worksites that offered more skills training, especially skills linked to employment. Third, travel time affects participation, and efforts to colocate activities in a common site can pay off in improved attendance. Finally, for participants with family health problems and child care needs, the availability of quality child care and transportation can be major problems, suggesting the efficacy of efforts to provide assistance in transporting participants' children to school and child care facilities.

Efforts like these require an effective communication and feedback system for resolving attendance issues. The methods by which worksite supervisors record attendance need to be a clearly articulated, and there should be careful monitoring of the accuracy of administrative records, more information about specific worksites and participants' activities, and clear procedures for determining whether participation has truly ended and for closing cases when appropriate (but not prematurely). These are all critically important tasks that have real implications for TANF participants who are seeking to obtain self-sufficiency in a time-limited assistance program.

Chapter 1

Introduction

When Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, the legislation allowed states and localities many important choices about how to structure programs for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). One of the choices that states had to make was whether and how to include community service jobs (CSJs) in their state welfare program. During the initial years of TANF, CSJs were not a major part of most states' programs, but recent developments give reasons to expect that this may change. As the U.S. General Accounting Office observed in a mid-2000 report, worksite activities are likely to grow in importance "as federal participation rates increase and as state welfare caseloads become increasingly composed of those who are most difficult to employ — or if the economy falters."[1] In the current economic slowdown, when unsubsidized jobs are harder to find, states may reconsider the role of CSJs. Further, as Congress returns to the reauthorization of TANF, it may consider the role of various types of employment services and their implementation experiences.

Though CSJs are known by many names (community service jobs, community service employment, workfare, work experience), the general underlying concept is that receipt of public assistance is contingent on a participant's performing work that may also in some way benefit the wider community or society at large. CSJs have been controversial since they were first debated nationally in the 1970s, and their prominence in welfare reform plans and their usage by the states have varied over time.[2]

In September 1997, Wisconsin replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program. Within W-2, the most common component, or "tier" of activities, involves CSJs, both statewide and within Milwaukee County. The use of work experience and community service in W-2 is substantially higher than in any other state's program. In fiscal year 1999 (the midpoint of the research presented in this report), 73 percent of W-2 families participated in these activities at some point, compared with approximately 5 percent of all TANF families nationally. In October 2002, approximately 40 percent of W-2 participants who were receiving cash assistance statewide — and 60 percent of recipients in Milwaukee County — were assigned to the CSJ tier of W-2.[3] The program's especially

[1]U.S. General Accounting Office, 2000. In this report, worksite activities include subsidized employment, community service jobs, on-the-job training, and work experience. The quoted language is from the transmittal letter that accompanied the report to Congress.

[2]The next section of this chapter briefly reviews the controversies surrounding CSJs.

[3]Previously posted at www.dwd.state.wi.us/dws/rsdata/docs/w-2_placements_oct02.xls.

strong emphasis on worksite activities and participation and the state's experience with CSJs in recent years may provide insights for other states as they once again consider greater use of community service positions.

The purpose of this report is to examine the implementation of the CSJ component of W-2 in Milwaukee County from 1997, when W-2 began, through mid-2000. Milwaukee's CSJ component is of particular interest because the county has the majority of Wisconsin's W-2 caseload and because nongovernmental service providers have implemented W-2 within six regions of the county, under contract to the state. During the time of this study, there were five nongovernmental service providers, but in the third round of implementation contracts, covering 2002-2003, the number dropped to four local W-2 agencies. This administrative structure offered the potential benefits of experimentation and competition in approach, decentralized administration below the county level, and the involvement of groups with special ties to the community.

One focus of this study is on the evolving nature of the administrative CSJ component of W-2 as the caseload and the economy changed and as state and local W-2 agencies gained experience operating the program. This study also examines the daily experiences of CSJ participants and their worksite supervisors, identifies administrative issues, and highlights lessons for other jurisdictions.

The Historical Context of Community Service Jobs

The history of federally funded assistance for families illustrates that Wisconsin's W-2 program represents innovative design and administrative choices on some key dimensions but that the implementation challenges identified in this report are not unique to W-2. From the founding of AFDC in 1935 and up until the 1980s, federal policies to increase the employment of welfare recipients generally assumed three forms: offerings of services intended to increase employability (such as job search assistance, education, and occupational skills training); income disregards or tax credits (such as the 30 and 1/3 disregard and the Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC]) that allow recipients to keep more of their earnings, thus providing a greater incentive to work; and requirements intended to link welfare eligibility to work obligations (including unpaid work experience).[4] As federally funded public assistance has evolved over time, requirements to participate in employment-related services have increased (most notably in 1988 and 1996); support services to aid those working have increased (especially such services as child care and child support enforcement); and the 1996 reforms have imposed time limits on the receipt of aid. This larger evolution of public assistance has affected the perception and role of CSJs.

[4]Brock, Butler, and Long, 1993, p. 6.

The first federally sponsored work requirement was the Community Work and Training (CWT) program. Implemented in 1962, this program was created simultaneously with the enactment of the AFDC-Unemployed Parent program, and it allowed states that adopted this optional program for two-parent households to require one of the parents to "work off" the family's assistance by working hours determined by the prevailing community wage rate for comparable work.[5] In most states, the CWT program remained small, and most agencies chose to expand social services rather than to require community work. The CWT program was not particularly controversial, in part because of its small size but also because it was limited to families in which two parents were present in the household and were receiving aid.

In 1967, Congress created the Work Incentive (WIN) program. Under WIN, states explicitly required certain adults receiving AFDC to participate in a welfare-to-work program or risk grant reductions (often called "sanctions") or termination of aid.[6] State and local officials found that the sanctioning procedures were administratively time-consuming, and they worried that grant reductions would harm families. Hence, sanctions were seldom applied. WIN was amended in 1971 to require all able-bodied AFDC recipients to register for the program. The amendments placed a new emphasis on employment-based training, and they required that one-third of program funds be devoted to on-the-job training or public service employment. Even so, WIN still continued to affect only a small percentage of AFDC families.

Two primary lessons emerged from the nation's welfare policies of the 1960s and 1970s: First, when legislation and regulations gave welfare agency staff a choice between implementing work-related services (such as job search assistance) and enforcing actual work requirements, services usually took precedence in most states. Second, where work requirements were attempted, they generally proved difficult to implement, and so mandatory work programs tended to be quite small.[7] Some states did experiment with unpaid community service requirements (often labeled "workfare"); California under Governor Ronald Reagan operated the most notable and controversial program, albeit at a small scale.

With the 1981 amendments to AFDC, states were given new options that opened the possibility of much larger community work programs and heightened the political controversy surrounding workfare. Under the Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) prevalent in the mid-1980s, recipients could be required to "work off their grant" in unpaid government or private nonprofit agency jobs to gain work experience. CWEP participants were intended to supplement the workforces of government and nonprofit agencies, performing work that would

[5]Brock, Butler, and Long, 1993, pp. 6-7.

[6]The adults who were required to participate were those in single-parent AFDC households without preschool-age children and without specific problems that kept them at home *and* one adult (usually the male) in two-parent families. For more on this history, see Gueron and Pauly (1991).

[7]Brock, Butler and Long, 1993, p. 8.

not otherwise be done (inasmuch as "displacement" of regular workers was forbidden). The government and nonprofit worksite employers provided supervision for the program participants and monitored and reported on their attendance and performance to the welfare agency.[8]

CWEP raised concerns about the potential for displacement of regular employees by "free" labor and about the perceived unfairness of requiring parents to work in "unpaid" employment rather than wage-paying jobs. Research conducted on these programs found that they could be operated in a way that provided real work experiences, not "make work," and that they were generally perceived by participants as fair (though participants did think that the worksites got the better deal). Yet the programs tended to pose complex administrative challenges. Low attendance in worksites could be a problem; monitoring attendance and responding to nonparticipation could be time-consuming; and CWEP alone did not lead to substantial positive impacts on employment and earnings.[9]

The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program — passed in 1988 as part of the federal Family Support Act — represented a change in policy emphasis away from CWEP. Congress expanded the definition of AFDC recipients who could be mandated to participate in employment-related services, set minimum standards for the percentage of the mandatory caseload participating in such services, and shifted the emphasis away from job search and CWEP to more intensive human capital activities, such as education and training. During the late 1980s and 1990s, attention in most states focused on welfare topics other than CWEP. But in Wisconsin, CSJs remained an important part of the welfare policy discussions.

The Context of Wisconsin's Welfare Reform

The story of CSJs in Wisconsin (and especially in Milwaukee County) does not begin with the W-2 program. The current CSJ component in W-2 was preceded by many innovations — some that operated through waivers of the usual federal AFDC requirements, and others that operated in the general assistance program (for adults without children) or within a community-based demonstration that served low-income adults, including those without children. (One

[8]Sherwood, 1999, p. 2.

[9]In their study of community work experience, Brock, Butler, and Long (1993, pp. 13-14) concluded that the use of CSJs has been low historically because (1) most states and localities have implemented programs that emphasize education and training more than work requirements; (2) welfare department staff find that work experience requires considerable site-development efforts; (3) there are administrative and political difficulties, since matching clients to work assignments, providing supervision, tracking attendance, and sanctioning clients for nonparticipation all require staffing and financing; (4) CSJs tend to be unpopular among advocacy groups, labor unions, and liberal political constituencies; and (5) states and localities elected to use work experience only after assigning clients to education, training, or job search — thus limiting the number of people who ever reach a worksite.

such program, New Hope, is described below.) All these innovations contributed to the knowledge base about CSJs and to the administrative infrastructure within Milwaukee County.

In the years leading up to the end of AFDC and the passage of TANF, Wisconsin was among the most active states in experimenting with alternatives under the federal waiver structure that authorized waivers of the usual rules under certain conditions. Beginning in 1987, with Tommy Thompson's inauguration as governor, the state began a series of changes that eventually led to the start of W-2 in September 1997.[10] Several of the reforms sought to closely link the provision of public assistance to participation in required work-related activities (most importantly, Pay-for-Performance and Self-Sufficiency First, which began statewide in March 1996). As the beginning of W-2 approached, exemptions from the AFDC employment program (JOBS) were ended, and so more families were required to participate in employment activities as a condition of assistance. Special efforts were made to enroll AFDC recipients into the JOBS program and to monitor their participation; some aspects of AFDC that were incompatible with W-2 were phased out; and agencies were required to assign AFDC recipients who were participating in JOBS to "pre-W-2 tracks" (linking them to a W-2 tier assignment). Between 1986 and mid-1995, the AFDC caseload in Milwaukee County hovered between 35,000 and 40,000 persons. Starting in late 1995, the caseload began a steady decline, dropping to 25,000 in early 1997 and to 17,199 in August 1997, when W-2 began.[11]

Several of the agencies that later became W-2 service providers in Milwaukee County were involved in these demonstrations, in their prior role as JOBS service providers, and they gradually gained some experience in administering CSJs. As the AFDC provider, Milwaukee County was also involved in the administration of the JOBS program — determining eligibility for AFDC and the JOBS participation requirements for recipients and assigning JOBS participants to employment service providers.

At the same time, Milwaukee County was also operating a large CSJ program for recipients of food stamps and the general assistance program. This program, named GATES, provided aid for adults who had no children or who did not qualify for AFDC, and it operated as a traditional community work experience program; recipients were required to "work off" their cash assistance check through employment at worksites. The program operated at a large scale, at times serving 5,000 recipients, and the county built up an administrative infrastructure and

[10]See Mead, 1999.

[11]To permit a comparison with later W-2 figures, this total does not include (1) "nonlegally" responsible relatives (child-only cases), (2) families in which a parent was receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and (3) two-parent families. The first two categories of recipients are eligible for TANF-funded programs separate from W-2 and are not normally tracked in W-2 caseload figures, and the third category makes up a very small part of the W-2 caseload.

connections to CSJ worksites throughout the area. GATES continued as a presence in W-2, despite the end of the general assistance program in September 1995.

During the early 1990s, a voluntary program called New Hope also was operating in Milwaukee County, as a demonstration of a work-based alternative to traditional public assistance. New Hope was operated by a community-based organization outside the administrative and financial structure of traditional public assistance programs. It offered an earnings supplement and subsidized health insurance and child care to participants who worked at least 30 hours per week and had an income below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. New Hope offered minimum-wage CSJs to participants who did not find employment in the unsubsidized economy or who needed additional hours of work to satisfy the work-hours requirement. These CSJs were structured as wage-paying employment rather than as a welfare service, enabling participants to qualify for the state and federal Earned Income Tax Credits (EITCs).

This distinction between wage-paying CSJs and unpaid CSJs that entitle a person to an assistance grant has drawn national attention[12] and was part of the debate over the design of W-2. Issues in the debate include (1) the appropriateness of making the government responsible for generating jobs rather than providing temporary support, (2) concerns about making CSJs more attractive relative to unsubsidized work by allowing CSJ workers to access the EITC, and (3) concerns about subjecting CSJ worksites to all the requirements of an employment relationship. Most recently, the inclusion of the CSJ component in W-2 (not structured as wage-paying) and the high level of assignment to this activity tier have kept CSJs an important part of welfare services in Wisconsin.

The Structure of Wisconsin Works

Under Wisconsin Works (W-2), applicants who are determined eligible are assigned to a W-2 tier and to specific activities based on their "job readiness" or employment status.[13] The originators of the program conceptualized a "W-2 employment ladder" (Figure 1.1) on which participants start from a subsidized tier, move up to the unsubsidized tier, and eventually move into the job market without any further connection to W-2.

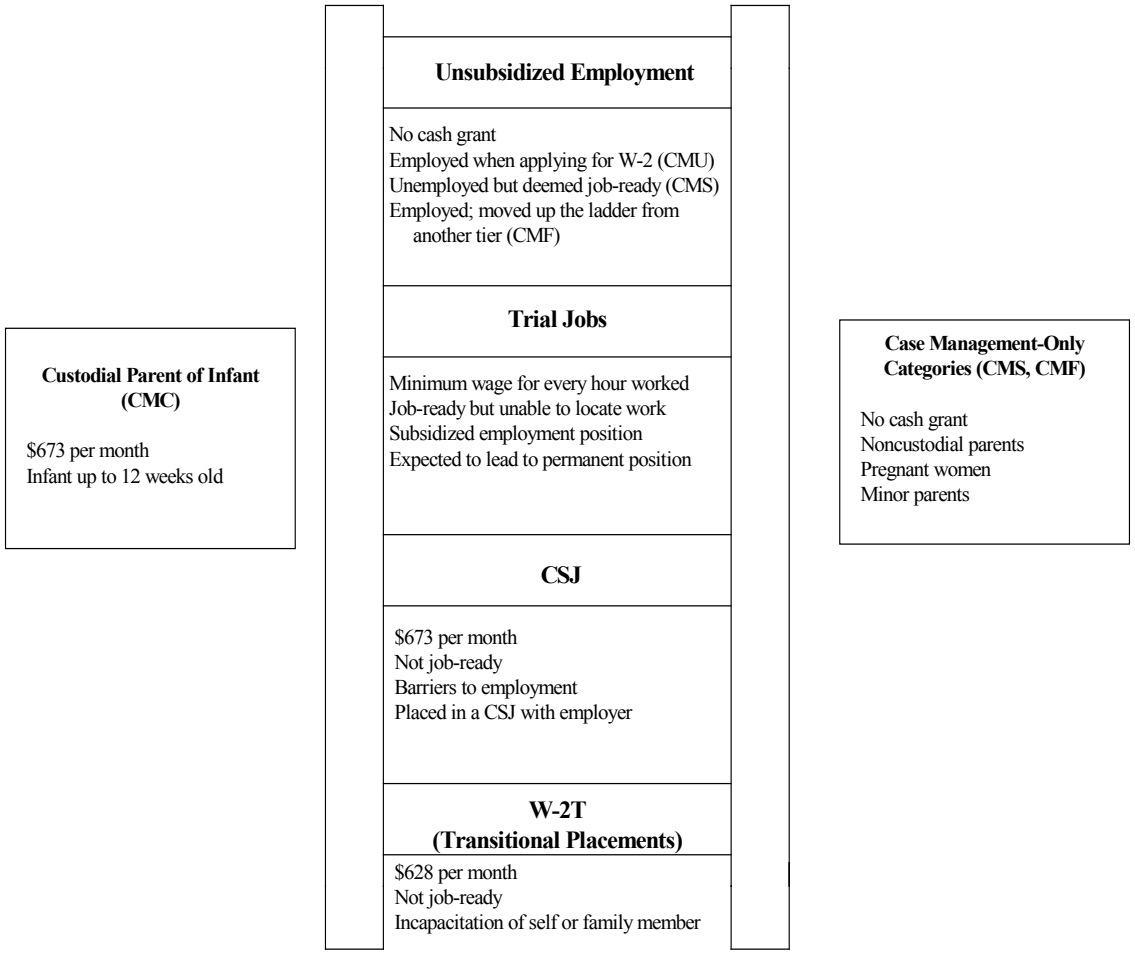
Each W-2 tier placement engages participants in a different set of requirements and activities. Depending on the tier, participants are provided different cash payments, and each tier

[12]See Savner and Greenberg, 1997; Emsellem and Savner, 1997; Sherwood, 1999.
[13]Gooden, Doolittle, and Glispie, 2001.

Implementing W-2 in Milwaukee County

Figure 1.1

The W-2 Employment Ladder



that provides cash benefits or subsidized employment has a time limit of 24 months.[14] There is an overall 60-month lifetime limit on W-2 eligibility. All participants, regardless of tier place ment, can receive other public assistance services (such as food stamps, subsidized child care, and Medicaid) if they are eligible under program rules.

The four basic W-2 tiers include:[15]

- **Unsubsidized Employment.** This tier is intended for participants who are considered job-ready and can earn market wages. Some are already working, possibly after prior W-2 services. Participants in this tier can receive case management and other services but do not receive a cash grant.

- **Trial Jobs.** W-2 participants who are assigned to this tier are considered to have the basic skills needed to work, but they lack sufficient work experience to meet employers' requirements. The trial jobs are subsidized employment positions with a private employer who provides on-the-job work experience and training that are expected to lead to permanent positions. Employers must pay participants a wage that is comparable to regular employees' pay for every hour worked, and employers receive a subsidy of up to $300 per month.

- **Community Service Jobs.** The CSJ tier is for participants who lack the basic skills and work habits needed in a regular job environment and who could benefit from positions offering real work opportunities with added supervision and support. Participants are generally assigned to specific activities, such as work experience, training, education, and job search; they are typically required to participate from 30 to 40 hours per week. They receive a cash payment of $673 per month but can be sanctioned the minimum wage of $5.15 for each hour that they do not participate in their assigned activities without an acceptable excuse.[16]

- **W-2T Transitional Placements.** This tier is reserved for those who, because of severe barriers, are unable to perform independent, self-sustaining work. The required activities and hours of participation vary based on an individual's circumstances. Specific activities within this tier are quite diverse, reflecting the variety of circumstances of participants assigned to it. Important activities

[14]1995 Wisconsin Act 289.

[15]Based on *Wisconsin Works (W-2): Overview* at www.dwd.state.wi.us/dws/w2/wisworks.htm.

[16]Those who do not participate in assigned activities can be sanctioned, which potentially can reduce their cash assistance by the minimum wage for each hour missed. The W-2 agency then must decide whether to remove the sanction because of a "good cause" excuse. This sometimes leads to discussions about how a participant was "sanctioned but good-caused," and so the benefit check was not reduced.

include further assessment, education, health-related services, and caring for a family member. Participants can receive a cash grant of $628 per month and can be sanctioned the minimum wage of $5.15 for each hour that they do not participate in their assigned activities without an acceptable excuse.[17]

The primary goal of the W-2 program is to help participants achieve self-sufficiency through employment. In order to meet this goal, W-2 case managers — better known as financial and employment planners (FEPs)[18] — assess applicants' job readiness and other personal circumstances[19] and assign participants to an appropriate tier and specific activities intended to assist them in building skills and reducing employment barriers. (These administrative steps are discussed in Chapter 2.) Given FEPs' central role in W-2 administration, their role in CSJ administration is an important part of this report.

The CSJ Tier in Wisconsin Works

Wisconsin Works (W-2) provides an important opportunity to examine community service jobs (CSJs), because Wisconsin is the only state so far to undertake a large-scale statewide CSJ effort under TANF.[20] W-2 policy envisioned the CSJ tier as serving specific purposes, reflected in this definition from the *Wisconsin Works Manual:*

> CSJs are intended to provide participants with an opportunity to practice work habits and skills that are necessary to succeed in any regular job environment, including punctuality, reliability, work social skills and the application of a sustained and productive effort. CSJ work training providers are expected to offer real work training opportunities with appropriate supervision within an environment which generally replicates that of a regular employment, realizing that job coaching and mentoring may be needed to help the participant succeed.[21]

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[17]Not all W-2 participants fit within this four-tier structure. For example, the category of custodial parents of infants (CMC) is a temporary placement and is given only to participants who have newborns younger than 12 weeks of age. CMC participants are given a cash grant of $673 per month to care for the newborn until 12 weeks of age, and then the participants are reassigned to another tier or can leave W-2. Minor parents and noncustodial parents can also receive W-2 case management and some services, though they are not eligible for any cash assistance.

[18]The financial and employment planner (FEP) is a case manager employed by a W-2 agency who provides eligibility determination, job readiness screening, employability planning, and ongoing financial and employment case management services.

[19]For more detail, see Gooden, Doolittle, and Glispie (2001).

[20]Although New York has a large CSJ program, it is concentrated in New York City.

[21]*Wisconsin Works Manual* (State of Wisconsin, 1999, Section 7.3.1; subsequent citations identify (continued)

This definition of the CSJ tier coincides with the way in which community service employment has traditionally been viewed. It focuses on placement in a worksite to provide work experience, and it envisions that the work experience will strengthen a participant's ability to function in the world of work (by developing what are sometimes called "soft skills") rather than necessarily providing an opportunity to learn, say, basic literacy or math skills or occupational skills. In contrast, Wisconsin advocates of an alternative view of welfare policy argue that CSJ placements should have more explicit skill-building goals[22] (beyond the skills required in any employment). Importantly, a commission appointed by the governor issued a report calling for an increasing emphasis within existing laws and policy on education and training to appropriately serve the caseload of public assistance recipients remaining on the rolls.[23]

This debate over the emphasis on various types of skill-building played out in a special way within the Wisconsin context. The state's dramatic decline in the public assistance caseload — the largest percentage decline in the country — lessened the pressures for further caseload reduction. With the lengthy period of economic expansion in Wisconsin, the extended period of low unemployment, and the strong push to reduce the public assistance caseload prior to and at the start of W-2, there was a growing sense that many of the recipients who could find and retain employment quickly had done so and that the remaining caseload probably had lower skills and faced more complex barriers to employment. The state and local W-2 agencies were less focused on quickly moving W-2 participants into jobs and off the rolls and were more focused on the complexities of serving those who remained on the caseload. With the reduced caseload and the growing experience of the agencies, administrative practices gradually changed even without an explicit shift in policy.

These debates and pressures were played out in the administration of W-2. Throughout the first two years of the program, the CSJ tier remained the most common placement; nearly half of all W-2 participants were assigned to this tier. Between September 1997 and December 1999, from 35 percent to 47 percent of the total expenditures of the five Milwaukee County W-2 agencies, and from 81 percent to 88 percent of the total cash benefits for subsidized placements, were spent on CSJs — percentages higher than the expenditures statewide.[24]

Within the CSJ tier, W-2 agency staff members assign participants to one or more specific activities. The evolution in the program's administrative practice is reflected in the specific

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the manual, not the state).

[22]See Medaris, 2001; Mulligan-Hansel, 2001; Moore, 2000.

[23]State of Wisconsin, 1998.

[24]State of Wisconsin, Legislative Audit Bureau, 2001.

activities that individuals were initially assigned to within the tier. Table 1.1 shows the initial activity assignments for W-2 entrants who were placed in the CSJ tier, in three time periods.[25]

Table 1.1

Initial Activity Assignments in the CSJ Tier, by Cohort

Activity Assignment (%)	Early Cohort	Middle Cohort	Later Cohort
Employed full time	6.6	2.4	1.6
Employed part time	3.9	4.1	4.6
Employment search	68.0	68.5	63.2
Work experience	62.7	75.3	79.2
Employment training	9.7	23.6	28.6
Education	15.1	25.9	50.3
Soft-skills training	5.4	14.5	23.0
Physical/mental rehabilitation	0.4	1.1	1.8
Drug rehabilitation	0.1	0.4	0.4
Orientation/enrollment/assessment	56.3	49.9	85.2
Caring for family member	1.0	2.6	1.1
Other	5.0	12.0	8.9
Sample size	8,078	1,956	1,678

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative data for W-2 participants from August 1997 to August 1999, as provided by the State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

NOTE: The early cohort entered W-2 between October 1997 and March 1998, as AFDC was ending. The middle cohort entered between April and October 1998. The later cohort entered between November 1998 and October 1999.

(Note that the percentages do not add to 100 percent because individuals could be assigned to more than one initial activity.) The *early cohort* is made up largely of those who were receiving AFDC and who transferred directly to W-2 when AFDC ended in March 1998; a smaller number of the early cohort had their AFDC case closed and then applied for W-2 and were found eligible. The *middle cohort* entered W-2 following this initial rush of activity. By this time, it was apparent that the overall public assistance caseload both statewide and in Milwaukee County had shrunk dramatically with the implementation of W-2 and that the program was serving many fewer people than were projected in initial plans and budgets. The *later cohort*

[25]Some of these activity categories are groups of activities, in which case the names reflect the content of the groups rather than the names used in the automated system that tracks assignments.

includes entrants who came into W-2 during a period when — given the dramatic caseload decline — there was a debate within Wisconsin about whether the focus of W-2 should shift toward a greater emphasis on education and training.

In Milwaukee County, throughout the period shown in Table 1.1, work experience remained an important activity within the CSJ tier and actually increased in frequency over the three cohorts. This activity refers to assignment to a specific worksite, where an individual is expected to appear for work on a regular basis — the traditional meaning of a CSJ.[26] Throughout the period, employment search also remained important, and about two-thirds of participants were assigned to this activity, reflecting the view that the CSJ tier is intended to be a transition to regular employment.

Over the period, though, other activity categories became much more common in the CSJ tier, reflecting the changing administrative perspective that skill-building outside of work experience was also important. Soft-skills training was offered in settings outside of work experience, as activities like job readiness and motivation classes became more common. Employment training activities like occupational job skills training, on-the-job training, occupational assessment, and counseling increased in frequency — from about 10 percent of entrants in the early cohort to nearly 30 percent of entrants in the later cohort. In addition, education services increased in frequency, growing from 15 percent of entrants in the early cohort to 26 percent in the middle cohort to 50 percent in the later cohort. Further, in the later cohort, many more entrants were assigned to additional orientation and enrollment activities, reflecting the desire to assess their circumstances more fully as a prelude to developing a service plan.

These changes had several implications for the administration of the CSJ program. First, the changes reflect a more ambitious set of purposes to be served by the CSJ tier. This shift also affected participants' expectations about the nature of CSJ placement and work experience. Entrants were more likely to expect that they would learn new skills (beyond the soft skills) that would help them advance their own employment goals. Second, the increasing use of multiple activities in the CSJ tier complicated the scheduling of activities and the monitoring of participation and made it more difficult for worksite supervisors to count on participants to appear for work. Third, with the increasing practice of assigning CSJ participants to activities beyond work experience and with the approach of 24-month time limits on cash benefits and subsidized employment, nonparticipation took on a new significance. If the goal of a CSJ placement was primarily to provide cash assistance to the extent that a person participated in assigned

[26]The early cohort's somewhat lower level of placement in work experience probably reflects two factors: (1) delays in identifying worksites as the W-2 program began and (2) the fact that some entrants during this period automatically transferred from AFDC to W-2 without a substantial initial interview or assessment, resulting in less clarity about their immediate readiness for work experience and somewhat greater use of orientation and enrollment activities than in the middle cohort.

activities and thus built up work experience, then nonparticipation largely had financial implications: Less assistance was paid out.[27] But to the extent that the CSJ tier was a vehicle for broader skill-building and was subject to time limits, nonparticipation posed an obstacle to accomplishing this skill-building objective. The new demands could put a premium on close monitoring of participation, follow-up to determine reasons for nonparticipation, and, possibly, a service response to make greater participation possible.

The new, more complex practices within the CSJ tier also created new challenges for administration in a decentralized structure. Initially, the main administrative task within the CSJ tier was to identify worksites that would provide an opportunity to enhance participants' soft skills and build a better work history to aid in their search for regular employment; to place participants in these worksites (with little need to tailor the sites to specific individuals); to monitor participation in work experience activities; and to link cash assistance to participation by enforcing sanctions for nonattendance. Under these circumstances, the main concern about administrative consistency across the W-2 agencies related to the way in which assistance was linked to participation. Was attendance monitored? Was nonparticipation sanctioned in consistent ways? Were similar rules used for deciding whether nonparticipation and sanctions were excused because of a good-cause exception? Were there appropriate procedural protections for the rights of participants?[28]

As W-2 administrative practice evolved, CSJ worksites were often expected to provide more than just work experience (at least, participants and advocates expected more). And, as discussed in Chapter 2 the individual W-2 agencies developed these worksites in different ways, with different results. Further, within the W-2 agencies, there were often substantial differences in what the case managers (FEPs) knew about worksite opportunities, in how they chose to match participants and worksites, and in how much connection they maintained with the worksite supervisors to see whether the broader goals for the CSJ program were being met and to address barriers that might emerge as participants faced the new demands of regularly showing up for work. Thus, CSJ participants could be exposed to quite different opportunities, obligations, and support services, depending on the W-2 agency and staff member serving them.

As a transition to a broader discussion of the evolution of CSJ administrative practice in Milwaukee County's W-2 program, it is important to understand the distinct roles of the state, the regional W-2 agency, and the worksite staff. Table 1.2 presents the key administrative tasks assumed by each organization. The state develops the basic CSJ program and its administrative structure, establishes eligibility rules (overall and for specific services), and sets performance ex-

[27]Under the first implementation contracts (from 1997 to 1999), W-2 agencies retained a portion of unspent funds.

[28]On this point, see Lynn (2001) for a discussion of complaint resolution procedures among the Milwaukee County W-2 agencies and how these procedures evolved over time.

Table 1.2

CSJ Administration: Roles of the State, the W-2 Agency, and Worksite Staff

State	W-2 Agency	Worksite Staff
Specify basic structure of W-2 program and its tiers Identify goals and balance of goals for tiers Provide funding for program Identify permitted activities and define basic eligibility rules and assessment criteria Set up service network and identify service providers Determine performance expectations and monitor service provider performance	Identify worksites that have a variety of characteristics Assess individual applicants and participants to identify those appropriate for CSJ tier Match participants to worksites Set up performance feedback and response system • Attendance • Worksite performance issues • Barriers, service needs Respond to issues that arise during participation Decide if and when tier is no longer appropriate	Designate supervisor Identify tasks for participants, reflecting needs of worksite and skill levels of participants Provide mentoring/training so participants can perform in worksite Monitor performance Respond to issues by • Providing feedback to participants • Providing feedback to agencies • Crafting responses to problems

pectations for participants and service providers. The local W-2 agency develops an inventory of possible worksites, assesses and matches participants with these worksites, sets up a performance-monitoring system, and decides how to respond to issues that arise (including decisions about other possible tier assignments for participants). The worksite must designate a supervisor, identify appropriate tasks, provide mentoring and some training so that participants can perform, monitor performance, and respond to issues. Chapters 2 through 4 discuss the administrative activities of Milwaukee County's five local W-2 agencies and their CSJ worksites.

The Data and Structure of This Study

Four primary data sources inform this study, and all the data were collected between October 1999 and October 2000:

- **Interviews with CSJ Participants and Their Worksite Supervisors.** Field research was conducted through survey interviews at 47 worksites with 100

CSJ participants and their direct supervisors.[29] Separate survey instruments were used for participants and for worksite supervisors, and the goal was to interview 20 participants and their supervisors from each of the five local W-2 agencies.[30]

- **Interviews with Case Managers (FEPs).** In order to better track participants assigned to the CSJ tier, a random sample was drawn from 10 percent of all cases assigned to that tier as of November 30, 1999.[31] Participants were tracked by interviewing their case managers (FEPs) at two points in time regarding the participants' assignments, activities, and sanctions.[32]

- **Interviews with Administrators.** W-2 agency administrators from the five local agencies and from the Milwaukee County GATES program were interviewed. These administrators were contacted throughout the study to discuss the CSJ component of W-2 and its implementation.

- **Review of Administrative Records.** This study incorporates data from Wisconsin's statewide automated record system, CARES (short for "Client Assistance for Re-Employment and Economic Support"), which is used to establish W-2 eligibility and to record case management activities.

These four data sources made it possible to examine the CSJ experience from the perspectives of the W-2 agencies in Milwaukee County, the worksite supervisors, and the CSJ participants. The report's structure and key questions follow.

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[29]Chapter 3 describes the way in which this sample was drawn. The participant survey asks questions regarding former employment, present CSJ experience (including skills needed and performance), and feelings toward the workplace and supervisor. The supervisor survey asks questions regarding the worksite, experiences with the CSJ program, and the CSJ participant's work experience

[30]The final sample includes 100 participants and 96 supervisors. The figures for each W-2 agency are as follows: Region 1, YW Works = 20 participants and 19 supervisors; Region 2, United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS) = 20 participants and 20 supervisors; Region 3, Opportunities Industrialization Center of Greater Milwaukee (OIC) = 19 participants and 17 supervisors; Regions 4 and 5, Employment Solutions of Milwaukee = 22 participants and 21 supervisors; and Region 6, Maximus, = 19 participants and 19 supervisors.

[31]This sample was drawn from a list of cases provided by the Milwaukee County Private Industry Council, which at the time served as a contract administrator for the five Milwaukee County W-2 agencies.

[32]From a sample size of 258, a total of 183 surveys were obtained, for a response rate of 72 percent. Four cases that initially were selected were not included because the participants were actually assigned to placements other than the CSJ tier. The response rates across agencies follow, in descending order: UMOS = 49 of 49 (100 percent); Maximus = 48 of 54 (89 percent); YW Works = 20 of 28 (71 percent); Employment Solutions = 48 of 83 (58 percent); and OIC = 25 of 51 (49 percent).

- **Chapter 2:** What is the basic structure of the CSJ component of W-2 in Milwaukee County, and how has the work experience program evolved? How did the local W-2 agencies administer the CSJ component during the period of this research?

- **Chapter 3:** Did the historically common problem of low attendance in work experience activities emerge in W-2? How did the W-2 agencies attempt to address this problem?

- **Chapter 4:** How did the CSJ program operate within worksites, and what were the daily experiences of active participants and their worksite supervisors?

- **Chapter 5:** What major issues regarding the CSJ component have been identified across worksites and W-2 agencies? What lessons about operating CSJ programs have emerged from this study?

The main finding of this report is that there was a gradual change in the way the CSJ tier was operated by local W-2 agencies, with an evolution toward greater use of activities designed to build participants' basic and vocational skills. This occurred through the provision of more formal training within worksites, more frequent assignment to education activities, and greater efforts to provide work that presented an opportunity to learn and practice new basic and vocational skills — though participants' experiences did vary substantially, depending on their specific worksite.

The administration of the CSJ program was complicated by attendance problems in work experience activities. Given the evolving practice of using the CSJ tier to help participants build a broader range of skills, the W-2 agencies needed (1) much fuller information about the nature of the CSJ worksites and the specific placements within them, (2) a means to match participants more carefully with appropriate worksites, and (3) timely feedback about participants' attendance, performance, and emerging barriers to employment. The shift toward building a broader range of skills implied needed changes in administrative practices, and (for a variety of reasons) these did not occur during the period of this research at pace with the changing use of CSJs — causing problems for the W-2 agencies, the CSJ worksites, and the participants.

Chapter 2

The Administration of Community Service Jobs in Milwaukee County

This chapter examines Milwaukee County's general structure for administering Wisconsin Works (W-2), the administrative steps in operating W-2's community service job (CSJ) activity, and how the W-2 agencies in Milwaukee County administered the CSJ tier during the first two years of the work experience program. The data presented in this chapter come from information collected about a sample of 10 percent of the CSJ participants in Milwaukee County, from interviews with W-2 agency staff, and from surveys of CSJ participants and worksite supervisors.

Organizing to Administer Wisconsin Works in Milwaukee County

The passage of the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and gave states and localities increased discretion in designing and administering welfare programs. In Wisconsin, the W-2 program passes significant areas of discretion on to the local service providers. In January 1997, the State of Wisconsin selected five agencies to implement W-2 in Milwaukee County (see Table 2.1); four of the agencies (all but Maximus) had been employment service providers in Milwaukee under the previous Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program.

The W-2 framework gives the local agencies discretion within the state statute and operating guidelines to develop and implement the W-2 program in a way that is most suitable for the needs of their region. On the one hand, decentralization gives the agencies flexibility to be innovative and to administer W-2 efficiently, based on their resources and clientele. On the other hand, their nonstandardized procedures make it more complicated to monitor and evaluate the W-2 program across agencies. Although Milwaukee County was served by five agencies during the period of this study,[1] participants were normally required to attend the agency that administered the W-2 program in their region of residence.[2] Therefore, the W-2 participants' choices of services and activities were confined to that agency's offerings, which may have differed in substantial ways from those of another W-2 agency located in a different region. The varia-

[1]As of January 2002, the six regions of Milwaukee County have been served by four W-2 agencies.
[2]Participants in other Wisconsin counties also typically received services from a single local W-2 agency.

Table 2.1

W-2 Service Providers in Milwaukee County, 1997-2001

- **Region 1: YW Works.** Founded in 1996, YW Works began as a limited-liability, for-profit organization formed by three partners. YWCA of Greater Milwaukee, the managing partner of YW, is a nonprofit organization that has a 105-year history in the community, with experience in management and employment training. CNR Health, Inc., is an organization that provides health care management and employee assistance programs nationwide. In this partnership, its particular strength is working with risk-based contracts, expertise in technology, and experience with alcohol, drug, and domestic violence issues. The Kaiser Group, Inc., a for-profit organization, had over 17 years of experience in workforce development and skills training.[a]

- **Region 2: United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc. (UMOS).** UMOS, a nonprofit, community-based organization, was founded in 1965 to provide services to migrant and seasonal farm workers and other at-risk, underserved targeted populations throughout Wisconsin. Prior to W-2, UMOS provided services in the JOBS, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), and Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET).

- **Region 3: Opportunities Industrialization Center of Greater Milwaukee, Inc. (OIC).** OIC is a nonprofit organization founded nationally in 1967 by the Reverend Leon Sullivan to provide employment services to low-income, inner-city residents. Prior to W-2, OIC had been providing services in the JOBS, Pay for Performance (PFP), Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET), and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs.

- **Regions 4 and 5: Employment Solutions of Milwaukee, Inc.** Employment Solutions is a nonprofit organization that has been a subsidiary of Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin, Inc., since the mid-1980s. In 1995, it became a JOBS center, where it operated Pay for Performance (PFP), Self-Sufficiency First, Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET), and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs.

- **Region 6: Maximus, Inc.** Founded in 1975, Maximus is a for-profit firm that provides human services management in the areas of child support enforcement, case management, computer systems, Medicaid, AFDC, food stamps, and employment services for federal, state, and local government clients.

NOTE: [a]As of January 2000, the Kaiser Group was no longer a partner of YW Works.

tions relating to CSJs could involve differences in worksite offerings, in monitoring participation and sanctioning for nonparticipation, and in providing services designed to build skills.

Within this context of decentralization — and in order to encourage the regional W-2 agencies to develop their own ideas at the start of W-2 — the State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development provided loosely structured guidelines for administering the CSJ tier and for CSJ work experience activity (see Box 2.1). Based on the state guidelines, the five Milwaukee County agencies developed and implemented their own CSJ programs. Though all of the programs had the goal of providing participants with "an opportunity to practice work habits and skills that are necessary to succeed in any regular job environment,"[3] the CSJ administrative structures differed both across agencies and between the agencies and their CSJ worksites, as discussed later in this chapter.

Administering the Work Experience Activity in Wisconsin Works

This section presents the basic sequence of tasks involved in administering the W-2 work experience activity in Milwaukee County and highlights the administrative and managerial issues that are explored more fully later in the report. Although the discussion is generally illustrative of the initial years of W-2 in Milwaukee County, it is important to recognize that administrative practices change frequently. This section draws on analysis of a random sample of 10 percent of all W-2 participants who were assigned to the CSJ tier as of November 30, 1999.[4]

Step 1: Determining W-2 Eligibility and Making Tier Assignments

When families apply for W-2, a case manager — known as a financial and employment planner (FEP) — determines their eligibility. If the applicants meet eligibility requirements for

[3] *Wisconsin Works Manual* (State of Wisconsin, 1999; subsequent citations identify the manual, not the state).

[4] This date was far enough into the implementation of W-2 and the CSJ programs to reflect the evolution in administrative practices. To understand participants' activities during November 1999 and the following two months, the analysis incorporates data from interviews with the appropriate W-2 case managers (better known as financial and employment planners, or FEPs) as well as data from CARES (short for "Client Assistance for Re-Employment and Economic Support" — Wisconsin's statewide automated record system, which is used to establish W-2 eligibility and to record case management activities). The original sample consisted of 258 participants, and an effort was made to interview the appropriate FEP regarding the status of each case. Data were collected on 183 participants in the CSJ tier, for a response rate of 72 percent. Four other participants' tier placements had been incorrectly entered into CARES, so they should not have been in the original sample. The remaining 28 percent of the sample (71 cases) were not included in this analysis because their FEP had left the agency or an interview could not be arranged during the period of data collection.

Box 2.1

Guidelines for CSJ Administration

Wisconsin Works Manual, October 1999

7.3.1.6 CSJ Administration

The W-2 agency is responsible for identifying, creating, and managing CSJ positions. CSJ placements may be with the public, private non-profit and private for profit work training providers. The agency may contract for all or part of the operations.

1. CSJ positions must:

- Serve as a useful public purpose or be a project of which the costs are partially or wholly offset by revenue generated from it;
- Replicate actual conditions of work;
- Have responsibilities and expectations similar to unsubsidized employees to the extent feasible; and
- Have a work training site supervisor. The work training site supervisor should provide a structured work environment to include close supervision and a willingness to mentor and coach CSJ participants to succeed in the workplace.

2. Management of CSJ positions include:

- Obtaining new work training sites;
- Maintaining relations with existing providers;
- Promoting entrepreneurial activities;
- Making available CSJ placements within the W-2 agency;
- Providing special or additional supervision of CSJ participants at the work training site when necessary;
- Providing or arranging for reasonable accommodations, translator or other supportive services;
- Acting as a liaison between work training providers and CSJ participants (when necessary);
- Maintaining and updating an inventory of CSJ placements;
- Providing worker's compensation coverage for all participants, except when the W-2 work training provider provides the coverage; and
- Ensuring that an adequate number of CSJs exist.

W-2, the FEP places them into a subsidized or an unsubsidized tier assignment.[5] The CSJ tier is commonly reserved for participants who have no major barriers to employment but who, on initial assessment, are found to lack work experience, need to develop soft and/or hard skills, and do not have a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Applicants who have substantial barriers to employment are typically assigned to the W-2T tier, a transitional placement. Those who are already working or who are deemed ready for employment are assigned to either the trial job tier or the unsubsidized employment tier.[6] (Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 explains the tier assignments and illustrates how they constitute the W-2 "employment ladder.")

Step 2: Selecting CSJ Activities and Assigning Worksites

When FEPs assign participants to the CSJ tier, they also assign specific activities that must be performed in order to receive a full monthly check.[7] The FEPs have a variety of activities from which to choose, and participants in this study were often assigned to multiple activities throughout the week. Based on administrative records for all W-2 entrants in the first two years of the program, combinations of activities were common. For the 10 percent sample mentioned above, the most commonly assigned activities included a combination of work experience, education, and job search. Less frequently used activities were job skills training, counseling, and parenting classes.[8] The most frequent combinations of activities for this sample of participants assigned to the CSJ tier were:

- 20 hours of work experience, 10 hours of basic education, and 10 hours of job search (commonly used in four agencies)
- 20 hours of work experience and 20 hours of job search (commonly used in three agencies)
- 20 hours of work experience and 10 hours of basic education (commonly used in one agency)

In general, the overall total of service hours ranged from 30 to 40 hours per week. Two-thirds of these participants were assigned to 40 hours of weekly activities; one-fourth had from 30 to 39 hours of activities; and the remainder had assignments of either fewer then 29 hours weekly

[5]For more detail on assessing welfare clients, see Gooden, Doolittle, and Glispie (2001).

[6]As noted in Chapter 1, some applicants — for example, parents of a newborn child — are assigned to other, special tiers.

[7]In most of the W-2 agencies, the FEPs assign the CSJ activities, including work experience, though in some instances a CSJ coordinator has that responsibility.

[8]Administrative data from CARES were available to identify specific activity assignments for 127 of the 136 participants who were assigned to a CSJ worksite.

(6 percent) or more than 40 hours (3 percent). In terms of the work experience component, most participants were assigned either to 20 hours (63 percent) or to 30 hours (19 percent) weekly.

Reflecting the importance of the work experience activity within the CSJ tier, 74 percent of the participants who were assigned to the CSJ tier at the end of 1999 were placed in a work experience activity and were assigned to a worksite. The remaining 26 percent were placed in orientation that involved short-term education or training that was not considered "work experience"; or they had found a job but still remained in the CSJ tier; or they were temporarily excused from work experience for medical reasons.

The percentage of participants who were assigned to the work experience activity varied across agencies. Listed in ascending order, Maximus (Region 6) had 56 percent of participants assigned to work experience; YW Works (Region 1) and Employment Solutions (Region 5) had 75 percent; OIC (Region 3) had 80 percent; UMOS (Region 2) had 83 percent; and Employment Solutions (Region 4) had 86 percent. These differences can be explained in part by the different administrative procedures involved in assigning participants to the work experience component, as will be described later in this chapter.[9] Another explanation for the differences is the variety of ways that FEPs and agencies defined "work experience" and how they coded and entered the activity in CARES, Wisconsin's statewide automated records system. For example, one agency might consider job skills training to be part of a work experience placement and might code it as "work experience"; another agency might consider such training as separate from work experience and might code it as "job skills training" instead.

Step 3: Setting Participation Expectations

In order to take part in W-2, participants sign an employability plan agreeing to attend the assigned activities. Clients in the CSJ tier can receive $673 per month for participating but are limited to 24 months in that tier, as stated under W-2 guidelines. If they do not attend their assigned CSJ activities, they can be sanctioned. Depending on their reason for absence, on their past history of participation or participation problems, and on the way their FEP chooses to exercise discretion granted by the W-2 agency, (1) the monthly payment is reduced at a rate equal to the minimum wage of $5.15 per hour to reflect the hours of nonparticipation or (2) they are granted a "good-cause" exception for recorded absences and the monthly payment is not reduced. CSJ participants may be fully or partially sanctioned, or they may be given a good-cause exception.

[9]In some agencies, participants attended an orientation or motivational class prior to worksite assignment; in other agencies, participants were assigned immediately to a worksite.

Step 4: Monitoring Participation and Performance

An important goal of the CSJ work experience assignment is to have an opportunity to practice soft skills, including attendance, punctuality, reliability, and social skills on the job.[10] However, during the period of this study, attendance was the only soft skill that was routinely monitored and recorded in CARES.

Because of how W-2 was designed, monitoring attendance is critical, since the proportion of the cash benefit received depends on participation. Further, participants are subject to both the overall five-year time limit on W-2 and the 24-month limit on tier placements that include cash benefits or subsidized employment (the CSJ, W-2T, and trial job tiers). If a client stops participating in an assigned activity, the time clock continues to tick until the FEP decides to terminate the person from W-2. If there are substantial lags in the monitoring of attendance, months of the time clock can elapse with the client's receiving neither cash grants nor services, because of nonparticipation. (Chapter 3 focuses on tracking attendance in work experience activities.)

Reporting attendance is driven by the W-2 payment cycle, which bases a client's grant on participation in a previous period.[11] The goal is to enter attendance data in CARES in time to accurately calculate the grant and any sanctions. Attendance is formally recorded at the location of assigned activities. Since most CSJ participants are assigned to a worksite and spend most of their time there, the worksites play a vital role in reporting attendance to the W-2 agencies; the worksites are obligated to report periodically (usually weekly or biweekly). Depending on the W-2 agency, a CSJ coordinator, a FEP, or some other administrator is responsible for monitoring a participant's attendance and performance in CSJ activities. Attendance data are reviewed either when a W-2 agency staff person receives them or when they are entered into CARES in a batch as the month ends and grants are calculated. In addition to this formal reporting by the worksites, each CSJ participant also periodically meets with the FEP and/or CSJ coordinator to discuss W-2 experiences.

As discussed in Chapter 3, monitoring attendance in W-2's work experience activities is made challenging by several administrative complexities, including differences in tracking procedures across W-2 agencies and CSJ worksites and the assignment of participants to multiple activities and shifting activities (see Step 5).

Sanctioning was quite common in this study. FEPs imposed a reduction in the cash benefit linked to November 1999 participation for 42 percent of the sample of CSJ tier assign-

[10] *Wisconsin Works Manual,* Section 7.3.1.

[11] As discussed in Chapter 1, participation from the middle of a month to the middle of the following month is used to determine the payment made on the first of the next month. For example, a check that is paid on December 1 reflects participation from October 15 to November 15.

ees; 10 percent of the sanctions eliminated the payment completely, and 32 percent partly reduced the benefit. There was also considerable use of good-cause exceptions for sanctions; 17 percent of the sample received a good-cause exception for nonparticipation. Exceptions could be granted because excuses were deemed acceptable by the FEP or because it was determined that a client's lack of participation reflected an administrative error. Most good-cause exceptions (88 percent) still reduced the client's benefits, because only part of the nonparticipation was excused.

Step 5: Changing a Client's Employability Plan or W-2 Status

To reflect changing circumstances over time, a FEP and a W-2 participant can agree to change the employability plan that designates assigned activities. Circumstances that might lead to this include medical problems, schedule changes, a change in worksite preferences, and employment. Modifications in the employability plan can include a tier change either upward or downward on the W-2 employment ladder (Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1) or activity changes within the CSJ tier, such as eliminating job search and adding training.

The experiences of the 10 percent sample in this study indicate that the employability plan of participants who were assigned to the CSJ tier changed quite frequently. From November 1999 to January 2000 — just a few months — 16 percent of the participants had a tier change, and 46 percent changed CSJ worksites, though not all of these changes were reflected in amendments to the clients' formal employability plans. A change from the CSJ tier to another tier can occur for a variety of reasons, including medical issues pertaining to the participant or the participant's family, increased employment, or imposition of the 24-month time limit on placement in the CSJ tier.[12]

Administering the CSJ Tier in Milwaukee County

Wisconsin Works is an evolving program with changes occurring over time in how the W-2 agencies organize themselves and in the procedures they use. This section of the chapter illustrates how Milwaukee County's five local W-2 agencies administered the CSJ program during the middle of the second implementation contract (late 2000). The goal is not to characterize specific W-2 agencies but, rather, to describe the range of administrative strategies and practices that they used and the administrative issues and challenges that they faced in implementing this large-scale work program.

[12]For more detailed information regarding time limits, see Gooden and Doolittle (2001).

Variation in Administrative Structures at the W-2 Agencies

Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies established administrative structures to implement the CSJ tier and its work experience activities. All five of the agencies had a primary administrative structure for handling the key tasks in CSJ administration, but four of them also had secondary administrative structures for aspects of this work. These redundant, overlapping structures added to the complexity of coordinating, managing, and monitoring CSJ program activities.

Two of the agencies had a CSJ department with several staff members who were responsible for all major administrative tasks involved in developing and monitoring the CSJ worksites and tracking participants. Two other agencies placed responsibility for these tasks primarily on one individual, while staff in other departments provided support, such as tracking attendance. By the fall of 2000, the fifth agency had eliminated its CSJ coordinator position and did not have a specific individual who was responsible for the CSJ program.

One important overlapping administrative structure for four of the five W-2 agencies was GATES, a CSJ program that was administered by the Milwaukee County Department for Human Services before W-2 began; it served recipients under both federally funded public assistance and state-funded general assistance.[13] With the start of W-2, the W-2 agencies began to develop CSJ worksites, but they also contracted for hundreds of work slots through GATES. During the period covered by this report, Milwaukee Employment and Training (MET) administered GATES worksites, coordinating work slots and tracking the attendance of CSJ participants separately from the participants who were assigned to W-2 worksites.

There were also other overlapping administrative structures. In at least three of the W-2 agencies, FEPs developed worksites independent of a CSJ coordinator. In two of the agencies, FEPs developed the worksites and were consequently responsible for monitoring them and the CSJ participants; at the third agency, FEPs developed worksites and subsequently handed over the information to a CSJ coordinator, who was then supposed to monitor the worksites and participants.

Table 2.2 illustrates the range of decentralization and organizational complexity in the W-2 agencies. As the examples show, the implementation and management of the CSJ program was either facilitated or made more complex depending on (1) the number of overlapping administrative structures and (2) how well coordinated these structures were, including whether CSJ administrative tasks were consolidated in a central location or dispersed across departments.

[13]The general assistance program ended before the start of W-2.

Implementing W-2 in Milwaukee County

Table 2.2

Variety of W-2 Agency Practices and Administrative Complexity

Agency Practice	Administrative Complexity		
	Agency A	Agency B	Agency C
Are administrative procedures located in a centralized location?	Yes - There is one primary CSJ department.	No - There are several overlapping administrative structures.	No - There is one primary unit, but such tasks as tracking attendance are allocated to other departments.
Is CSJ participants' attendance tracked from a centralized location?	Yes - The CSJ department keeps track of CSJ participants' attendance.	No - Some participants are tracked by the CSJ coordinator,[a] others by the organizations that have contracts with the agency. Still other participants are tracked by the MET, the organization that administers GATES sites.	No - One agency staff member tracked attendance of agency-developed worksites, and another staff member in a different department tracked participants assigned to GATES sites.
Is there a consolidated list of available CSJ worksite options?	Yes - A single list of worksite options is available.	No - Several agency staff members develop CSJ worksites; the organizations under contract to the agency develop their own placements; and the MET develops GATES sites. There is no consolidated list available that shows all CSJ worksite options.	No - There are a few agency staff members developing worksites, including some FEPs. Separate lists of worksite contracts are kept in separate departments.
Do all FEPs have the same information available to them regarding CSJ worksite options?	Yes - All FEPs use a single list of CSJ worksite options in order to choose worksites for their participants.	No - FEPs do not have access to the same information and are not aware of all CSJ worksite options.	No – FEPs do not have access to the same information and are not aware of all CSJ worksite options.
Is it easy for CSJ worksites and CSJ participants to access information?	Yes - Each worksite has a distinct code, making it easy to access data using CARES; the agency was able to give researchers the information immediately.[b]	No - Each primary worksite has a distinct code. Since there is no consolidated list of worksites, researchers needed to do lots of work to get a list of worksite options.	No - All CSJ worksites have the same code, making it impossible to differentiate worksites. Researchers were able to obtain a list only after several weeks and many phone calls to different departments.[c]

NOTES: [a]This agency's CSJ coordinator was eliminated in the fall of 2000.

[b]In a follow-up visit in the spring of 2002, it remained easy to access a list of CSJ worksites.

[c]In a follow-up visit in the spring of 2002 — after several weeks and repeated phone calls — the agency was never able to provide a list of CSJ worksites.

Developing the CSJ Worksites

Formal and Informal Contracts

Milwaukee County's five W-2 agencies varied in how they structured their relationships with CSJ worksites. Two agencies (YW Works and Employment Solutions, a subsidiary of Goodwill) had affiliated operations that were used as large worksites. The other three agencies distributed CSJ participants among many different organizations, most of which were community-based or other nonprofit organizations.

In general, larger worksites that had slots for several CSJ participants at a time entered into formal contracts with a W-2 agency to provide certain services for a specified period, and they received a payment for this work. These worksites were primarily nonprofit community-based groups that provided CSJ participants with such services as education, training, and work experience. In some cases, the larger worksites provided education and training but assigned CSJ participants to other, smaller worksites for work experience.

Many smaller CSJ worksites — with slots for only one or a few participants — had informal contracts with a W-2 agency, allowing them to enter or exit the program at any time without consequences. These worksites did not receive any form of payment from the W-2 agencies and were usually nonprofit organizations and privately owned businesses.

GATES, which had hundreds of worksite slots administered by MET, was used by four of the five W-2 agencies. GATES had two levels of worksites. Level I worksites could always accept new workers, so CSJ participants were initially assigned to them for *immediate engagement*. This allowed a participant to start work immediately and thus establish eligibility for a cash grant; it also provided an opportunity for the W-2 agency and the worksite supervisors to learn more about the participant's work habits and skills. Level I worksites were large, generally nonprofit organizations and could accommodate 50 to 100 participants daily.[14] Based on performance (primarily defined in terms of attendance), CSJ participants were then reassigned to Level II worksites, which were smaller and provided more interesting work and more training opportunities. During the field research, almost all GATES participants were assigned to Level I worksites. Though a few individuals were listed as being at Level II worksites, these employees could never be located at the worksites.[15]

[14]Though these worksites could accommodate 50 to 100 participants, usually only a handful of them attended daily during the fieldwork for this study. Chapter 3 presents information about attendance issues in the CSJ programs.

[15]See Chapter 3 for more information on attendance issues.

Variation in Worksite Size and Activities

In general, Milwaukee County's five W-2 agencies developed a variety of worksites in which to place CSJ participants.[16] As instructed by the *Wisconsin Works Manual*, CSJ worksites were to be nonprofit, for-profit, or public organizations.[17] The size of worksites varied by W-2 agency; smaller worksites had from 1 to 20 regular employees, and larger worksites had more than 20 employees. For instance, YW Works and Employment Solutions had affiliated operations that operated large facilities. In the 10 percent sample used in this analysis, 65 percent of CSJ participants who were sampled at YW Works and 87 percent who were sampled at Employment Solutions were assigned to worksites with more than 20 employees. In contrast, less than half the CSJ participants who were sampled at UMOS and Maximus were assigned to larger worksites.

Fostering and Maintaining Relationships with CSJ Worksites

Though the W-2 agencies had several types of contracts with CSJ worksites and developed various worksite placements, they had the common goal of providing participants with opportunities to practice and enhance work habits and skills. This goal was to be accomplished "by offering real work training opportunities with appropriate supervision within an environment which replicates that of a regular employment, realizing that job coaching and mentoring may be needed to help the participants succeed."[18] According to the W-2 policy manual, obtaining new work and training sites is only the first part of the agencies' responsibilities. In addition, they are expected to maintain close working relationships with the worksites and to monitor the administration of the work experience activity to ensure that it is being implemented in a manner that accomplishes the program's goals (see Box 2.1). W-2 policy allows each agency the discretion to develop its own system.

In order to understand how the Milwaukee County W-2 agencies established and maintained relationships with the worksites and oversaw the administration of the CSJ program, this research examined how the agencies (1) familiarized worksites with the goals of CSJ work experience, (2) offered assistance in structuring the CSJ program, and (3) established communication for monitoring and follow-up.

Familiarizing Worksite Supervisors with the Goals of Work Experience Activity

CSJ participants' work experience activity takes place at specified worksites, almost always off the premises of W-2 agencies. For worksite supervisors to implement the work ex-

[16]Chapter 4 presents a detailed description of CSJ worksites.
[17]*Wisconsin Works Manual,* 1999, Section 7.3.1.3.
[18]*Wisconsin Works Manual,* 1999.

perience activity in a way that serves the W-2 agencies' objectives, it is important that supervisors clearly understand the CSJ program's goals. When W-2 agencies specify clear program goals, they (1) help guide the worksite supervisors in structuring participants' daily work activities and (2) establish a baseline by which to evaluate how well a worksite is implementing the CSJ program.

In general, worksite supervisors in this study reported low to moderate levels of communication from W-2 agency staff regarding the goals of the CSJ program. Slightly over half the worksite supervisors (56 percent) said that someone from a W-2 agency had indicated to them what was supposed to be accomplished by the CSJ work experience, either by speaking with them or in printed material.

Fifty worksite supervisors were interviewed as part of this survey effort.[19] Most of them believed that the CSJ program's goals were to develop occupational skills and to make participants more employable or help them become independent and self-sufficient by finding permanent positions that provide job security and benefits. These worksite supervisors' beliefs most closely resemble the idea that CSJ work experience is for broader skill-building rather than for just gaining work experience or "working off" the W-2 benefit check.

Assisting Worksite Supervisors in Structuring the Work Experience Activity

To operate an efficient CSJ program, it is critical that W-2 agencies assist worksite supervisors in structuring the work experience activity. Consistency in providing assistance can create administrative standardization across worksites and facilitate monitoring. Worksite supervisors in the survey reported that W-2 agencies provided various types of assistance, including advice on appropriate work assignments (28 percent), help with time sheets (19 percent), advice on structuring jobs or training (16 percent), help with training (14 percent), and help with supervision or monitoring (14 percent). Only 9 percent of worksite supervisors were offered advice on evaluating participants' performance. Just 20 percent were offered a combination of the foregoing assistance.

Three-quarters of the worksite supervisors reported that the assistance that they did receive was helpful and said that they would find it useful to have more assistance and information from the W-2 agencies. Worksite supervisors mentioned that clearer guidelines and better information about the CSJ program — even in the form of a checklist — would improve their understanding of what is expected from the worksites and from the participants:

[19]Chapter 4 explains this sample, which includes the worksite supervisors of the CSJ participants who were surveyed.

> I would like more communication between FEPs and [our organization] in regards to what CSJs are expected to do in the placement process because then it reflects on the employee. For example, if the participants have to report to the FEP, the employer needs to understand that [that] is transport time. This information needs to be shared with the employers so that they are aware of it. This [lack of communication] contributes to employees' leaving . . . because the pressure is on the participant to let the employer know of agency requirements.

The survey responses suggest that a checklist about how to structure work experience positions — based on W-2 agencies' and CSJ worksites' experiences and lessons learned — could save time for both parties; the worksite supervisors would not have to create "new" systems, and standardization would also make it easier for the W-2 agencies to monitor and manage the worksites.

Establishing Communication for Monitoring and Follow-Up

Establishing effective communication to monitor and address problems is a major step in maintaining good working relationships between W-2 agencies and CSJ worksites. The patterns of communication that were found in this study can be divided into two groups. In the first group, 42 percent of worksite supervisors said that someone from the W-2 agency contacted them regularly, at least weekly or monthly. In the second group, 40 percent of worksite supervisors said that contact was infrequent; the W-2 agency rarely or never made contact or made contact only at the beginning of the relationship — or only when the worksite supervisor called the agency.[20]

Regardless of the frequency of contact, 72 percent of worksite supervisors reported initiating contact with their W-2 agency at some point. The most common reason that supervisors called agency staff had to do with CSJ participants' lack of attendance or poor performance (54 percent). Other reasons for contacting the agency related to participants' personal concerns or work assignments, matters regarding the W-2 program, or administrative issues.

Of the 72 percent of worksite supervisors who initiated contact with the W-2 agency, 37 percent reached agency staff on the first try; 51 percent reached them in one to three days; and 6 percent needed more than three days to make contact. A few worksite supervisors said that the lag time depended on the FEP: "Some answered the same day; some, never." The urgency of

[20]A few worksite supervisors (4 percent) said that frequency of contact with the W-2 agency depended on the situation.

reaching W-2 agency staff or FEPs depended on the situation. Worksite supervisors said that not being able to reach staff about issues that needed immediate attention was frustrating:

> I don't know if there is adequate supervision and an adequate way to get through the system when there is a problem, and this is frustrating to worksite supervisors and participants. There is no one at the [W-2 agency] to take care of the problems expeditiously.

Also, some worksite supervisors were not always sure of whom to contactor how to do it:

> Agency contacts and work [are] very inconsistent and confusing. I am never sure whom to contact. The process is not clear.

Across worksites, about 42 percent of worksite supervisors reported being satisfied with the services from W-2 agencies, and 40 percent were somewhat satisfied. Yet worksite supervisors mentioned that they would prefer more consistent assistance and monitoring from the agencies, and they made two major suggestions to facilitate communication.

The first suggestion is simply that W-2 agency staff should contact the worksites more regularly, such as every week or every two weeks, by phone or in person. This idea was of particular interest to those worksite supervisors who reported infrequent communication with the W-2 agencies:

> The W-2 agency should have something to check up on participants maybe once or twice a month [so that] the participants would feel like they matter. Similar to what temp agencies [do]. Have a coordinator meet with the CSJ participant and see how the CSJ is doing. Need people who know both sides. Maybe someone who has been a W-2 participant in the past.

The second suggestion is that W-2 agency staff should meet more consistently with worksite supervisors, perhaps by inviting the supervisors to periodic meetings. This could allow worksite supervisors to be involved in various stages of the development and administration of CSJs:

> Worksites should be involved in planning meetings and assessment for [the] workers' program and [the] needs of the agency.

In such a forum, W-2 agency staff and worksite supervisors could keep each other up to date.[21] One major concern for both supervisors and agency staff is participants' attendance. As

[21]One W-2 agency had already established regular meetings with a network of six of its community-based organizations, and these organizations found the arrangement helpful. The meetings did not include the agency's other worksites.

discussed earlier, the high number of CSJ participants who changed worksites or W-2 tiers — along with the layers of administration for tracking attendance at each W-2 agency — made it challenging to monitor CSJ participants' attendance:

> There are breakdowns in communication. I fax [information about] attendance, and the FEP doesn't get that for one week, and then they call the participant, but two weeks have gone by. There is a lull in processing time sheets. Also, it would be good to have a biweekly check-in, because we could flag [problems for] the FEP.

Similarly, W-2 agency administrators mentioned their frustration with some worksites because supervisors did not submit time sheets regularly, adding to the difficulty of monitoring CSJ participants.

This administrative complexity — wherein each W-2 agency has an array of CSJ worksites with varying contracts and varying levels of communication — highlights the need for good coordination between worksites and their W-2 agency, especially in terms of accurate record keeping. Inaccurate records lead to mistakes in sanctioning. Considering that only 19 percent of worksite supervisors reported that W-2 agencies had advised them about time sheets and that only 14 percent had received advice about supervising and monitoring participants, more contact between W-2 agency staff and worksite supervisors could increase the efficiency of monitoring and could reduce discrepancies relating to attendance and sanctioning.

Fostering and Maintaining Relationships with CSJ Participants

W-2 agency staff — particularly FEPs — play a critical role in CSJ participants' experiences with W-2 and the CSJ program.[22] In most agencies, FEPs are the staff members primarily responsible for (1) assigning CSJ participants to their worksite, (2) explaining the requirements of W-2 and the CSJ program, and (3) providing ongoing contact with both programs. Also, CSJ participants themselves reported that the way they viewed their treatment in the W-2 program depended in part on their interactions with FEPs.

FEPs' Role in Worksite Assignments and CSJ Participants' Experiences

FEPs assign CSJ participants to activities, including the work experience component of W-2. FEPs' decisions about worksite assignments depend on several factors: (1) the work ex-

[22]The findings reported in this section are from a survey of participants who were regularly attending their CSJ assignment. This sample — described in detail in Chapter 4 — is not representative of all CSJ assignees but does add the valuable perspective of those who are most likely to participate in the CSJ experience.

perience options that have been developed by that W-2 agency's staff or CSJ coordinators; (2) the availability of work slots at the worksites; (3) the FEPs' knowledge of existing options; and (4) a CSJ participant's background, including skills, work experience, and goals. FEPs may not have much control over the work experience options developed by the W-2 agency, the availability of work slots at the worksites, or the information flow about the types work experience options available at their W-2 agency. Nevertheless, FEPs can influence how much they know about CSJ participants' skills, work experience, and goals and how responsive they are to participants' concerns and worksite preferences.

The initial assessment meetings — in which FEPs assign CSJ participants to a worksite — influence the participants' work experience significantly. CSJ participants reported varying experiences in the assessment meetings, but their interactions fall into two main groups: (1) CSJ participants who believe that the FEPs listened to their needs and attempted to assign them to worksites that would be beneficial and (2) those who believe that the FEPs simply assigned them to any worksite, without considering their backgrounds or goals.

A number of factors influenced the first group's more positive experience: FEPs discussed the CSJ participants' skills and work experience (78 percent) and gave the participants choices regarding their CSJ worksite assignment (56 percent). Most of the participants who reported being given a choice of worksite by their FEP believe that they were assigned to the worksite they wanted. Of the participants who were given a choice of worksite, 43 percent chose one where they could acquire training; 41 percent chose a worksite that provided work activities that they already knew they liked or that employed people they knew; and 15 percent said that they chose a worksite that was located close to their home or that had convenient transportation.

The CSJ participants in this satisfied group mentioned feeling grateful toward the FEPs and the W-2 agency staff who assigned them to a CSJ worksite that benefited them either professionally or personally.

The second group of CSJ participants did not get the same attention from their FEPs. They reported that the FEPs rarely discussed their skills or work experience before assigning them to a worksite (21 percent) and that they were not given a choice of worksites but were just told where to report to work (41 percent). These CSJ participants commented on how the lack of choice or being assigned to an unsuitable work experience affected their perspective of the program:

> They get angry when they don't have a choice. Improve [the program] by letting CSJs do homework about where they want to go.

> Make sure that a person that's in the CSJ program is in the right program for . . . getting jobs. Find people the right CSJ work experience or training. Do not just stick people in any program. People work for a grant. Sometimes people who are in CSJs work more than the regular employees.

The FEPs' responsiveness to worksite preferences and concerns influenced participants' satisfaction with both the FEPs and the CSJ program. In the survey, CSJ participants described a variety of FEP practices; in general, some FEPs limited participants' possibilities, while others responded to their needs and requests:

> Originally when I applied to W-2, I got placed in [motivational classes] for three weeks. I never missed a day. Then I was waiting at home doing nothing. I was just waiting for my FEP to contact me or send me a letter so I could get a placement. Finally, I decided to enroll in [a training program] and then I contacted my FEP to let him know. He was unhappy and told me he didn't want me doing it because I wasn't suppose to be doing any training beyond high school. I got the [training program manager] to contact the FEP supervisor because there were other W-2 students in that [training program]. The FEP supervisor approved it. I never missed a day and got the highest grades. [The W-2 agency] changed my FEP, and he helped me find other CSJ jobs to apply to. I interviewed here, and I liked the work, and [the supervisor] liked that I already had some classes from the [training program]. I love my boss and my work.

> I have had some good experiences with some FEPs and then had a terrible experience with "Mr. *!&*." I was in a [CSJ] where multi-problems occurred. When I complained to my FEP, my FEP said I had to stay. So I got myself fired to get away, and the FEP refused to help me. This experience made me resist coming back to [the W-2 agency], even with pregnancy complications. But now I have an excellent FEP.

FEPs clearly play the primary role in worksite assignments, and their interactions with CSJ participants concerning this decision (in understanding participants' needs and assigning them to worksites that they find beneficial) affected participants' perspectives of the CSJ work experience program and of W-2 overall.

FEPs' Role in Participants' Understanding of Requirements

CSJ participants get much of their information about the CSJ program and its requirements from their FEP.[23] The FEPs need to cover many complex topics during the assessment meetings, and they differ in the ways they present this information.[24] All CSJ participants sign an employability plan that lays out the participation requirements and sanctioning rules. Some FEPs have the CSJ participant read the employability plan, and they ask whether the participant has any questions; other FEPs review the employability plan and other information orally. As a result, not all CSJ participants leave the assessment meeting with clear a understanding of the program's requirements and sanctioning rules.

In this study, the information that CSJ participants knew and retained varied, as demonstrated by Table 2.3, which shows their responses to a survey question that asked what would happen to them (1) if they refused to accept their worksite assignment and (2) if they left their worksite and just stopped showing up. In reality, depending on the FEP, a CSJ participant who refuses to accept a work assignment might be given another assignment or might lose the cash grant; and a CSJ participant who stops showing up at the worksite might be partially or fully sanctioned, and the cash grant might be reduced. Table 2.3 shows that, for each of the two questions, CSJ participants chose a variety of responses. While about three-quarters of them gave correct responses, at least one-quarter wrongly believed that the two situations would lead to losing all of their cash grant and such other benefits as food stamps, Medicaid, and child care. When these CSJ participants were asked how they had learned this information, 70 percent said that someone at the W-2 agency had told them that these outcomes would occur. The way in which the CSJ requirements and sanctioning rules were presented and what the participants understood varied. A few participants mentioned that they did not have a clear idea of how the CSJ program works, and one stated that the W-2 agencies "could improve on FEP communication with clients and [give a] better idea of how [the CSJ] program works. Lots of women don't understand how it works."

A few CSJ participants had a better idea of what they wanted from W-2 and understood its requirements because they had proactively learned about the options:

> I read up on W-2 benefits that are available for people before I went to the FEP, so I knew what I wanted before the meeting, then told the FEP what I was looking for.

[23]Other W-2 agency staff — such as resource specialists and CSJ coordinators — may also review this information.

[24]For more detail, see Gooden, Doolittle, and Glispie (2001).

Table 2.3

CSJ Participants' Understanding of W-2 Rules

What Would Happen…	If you refused to accept your worksite assignment	If you left your worksite (that is, stopped showing up)
Nothing, just would not be working (%)	2.0	5.0
Would be given another assignment (%)	30.0	12.0
Welfare cash grant would be reduced (%)	14.0	19.0
Would lose all welfare cash grant (%)	18.0	29.0
Would lose all welfare benefits (cash, grant, food stamps, Medicaid, child care) (%)	26.0	26.0
Other (%)	1.0	0.0
Do not know (%)	3.0	2.0
Did not respond to question (%)	6.0	8.0

Others wanted to get a better understanding of W-2 but did not know enough about the program in order to ask the right sorts of questions:

> They don't volunteer information. You have to ask, and often you don't know what to ask, since I hadn't been in the program all of my life.

Improving the Contact Between W-2 Agencies and CSJ Participants

CSJ participants viewed FEPs as their main contact person for assisting them through the W-2 process and as their point person if worksite issues arose. However, as shown in Chapter 4, many of the CSJ participants surveyed in this study first turned to their worksite supervisors when personal issues arose. Of all CSJ participants in the survey, only 24 percent said they had tried contacting their FEP.

About half the CSJ participants who tried contacting their FEP did so because of an administrative issue; attendance and sanctioning problems were the most common issues. For example, one CSJ participant mentioned:

> Every month we have problems with the W-2. For example, this month they said I won't get a paycheck because I hadn't come in for a review in April. But I had. FEP hadn't put it into the computer. Last month they cut my check

> because I stopped going to school because of my complications with my pregnancy. I came in with an excuse, but they still cut my paycheck.

About a third of the 24 percent who had contacted their FEP did so in regard to their worksite assignment. In some cases, FEPs wanted updates on how the participants liked their placements. Other participants called their FEP regarding new training possibilities, or they asked to be transferred to a different worksite.

As with the worksite supervisors, CSJ participants' abilities to contact FEPs by phone differed. Approximately a third of the 24 percent of CSJ participants who had tried contacting their FEP said that they were able to establish contact on the first try:

> I have a good caseworker, and she is wonderful. She helps me out and has always been there. And when I call, she is there.

Of the CSJ participants who tried contacting their FEP, 21 percent reported that it took between one and three days to do so, and another 21 percent reported that it took more than three days:

> It would be better to get hold of the caseworker. Need different workers for child care, Medicaid. Need a way to get a hold of them faster, because sometimes you need to do things that can affect you.

> FEPs should be more available. It is hard to find them sometimes. It should be easier to get in contact with them.

Finally, 17 percent of CSJ participants who tried contacting their FEPs said that they never got a response:

> I would like . . . FEPs [to be] more reachable, because every time I call, I get voicemail, and she never returns phone calls.

Of the CSJ participants and worksite supervisors who tried contacting FEPs, about a third were able to do so on the first try. However, if the contact was *not* made on the first attempt, FEPs more often returned the calls of worksite supervisors than of CSJ participants. Whereas 51 percent of worksite supervisors reported getting a return call from the FEP within one to three days, only 21 percent of CSJ participants did. Conversely, whereas only 6 percent of worksite supervisors said that they had waited three days or more for a return call, 21 percent of CSJ participants waited that long. And while only a very small percentage of worksite supervisors reported that they had never received a return call from the FEP, 17 percent of CSJ participants said that they were never called back.

Summary

Wisconsin's guidelines have given the local W-2 agencies flexibility in structuring CSJ and worksite activities. On the one hand, the W-2 agencies benefit from the state's flexibility because they can tailor their CSJ programs to fit their distinctive philosophies, existing operations, and client population. On the other hand, during the period of this study, the agencies' variations in administrative procedures demonstrated different levels of coordination and efficiency in managing the CSJ program. Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies vary considerably in how they are organized to operate, in the information that FEPs provide to CSJ participants, and in the ongoing relationships of FEPs and W-2 agencies with worksite supervisors and CSJ participants. In general, communication is the key factor in fostering and maintaining strong relationships. This chapter suggests that the flow of information could be improved. In cases where the W-2 agency's feedback system was more responsive (beginning with an understanding of the CSJ program and making an effort to provide ongoing contact), CSJ participants and worksite supervisors reported higher levels of satisfaction.

A responsive feedback system is also critical for efficient administration of the CSJ program and for sharing information more accurately — especially given the large scale of Milwaukee County's CSJ program and the W-2 agencies' varying and decentralized administrative structures. Chapter 3 examines a particular aspect of this feedback challenge: the monitoring of CSJ participants' attendance at assigned activities.

Chapter 3

Monitoring Attendance at Community Service Jobs

Historically, work programs have tended to have low participation rates, and monitoring attendance — even in small work programs — has been administratively time-consuming. As the authors of an earlier MDRC study on work experience noted, "in addition to the work involved in creating worksites, evaluating and matching clients to work assignments, providing supervision, and tracking attendance all require staff attention and money."[1] The information feedback system that was in place at the time of this study's field research focused primarily on collecting information about participants' attendance at community service job (CSJ) worksites. A close analysis of practices related to attendance reporting reveals the challenges of monitoring performance at worksites and the complexities of responding to the evolving use of multiple activities aimed at broader skill-building for participants within the CSJ tier of Wisconsin Works (W-2).

Typically, work experience participants are dispersed across multiple worksites in agencies that have missions other than meeting W-2's objectives and procedures. Thus, staff in Milwaukee County's local W-2 agencies have had to develop administrative systems and outreach efforts to monitor and respond to problems that emerged in the CSJ worksites. Considering that W-2 is a large-scale program in which cash payments are linked to participation and that there is a two-year time limit on assignment to the CSJ tier, monitoring attendance is critical for administering the CSJ program effectively and fairly.

Low Attendance: Does the Pattern Hold for Milwaukee County?

Have Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies found ways to avoid or alleviate the historical problem of low attendance in work experience programs? Concrete information about this issue was a byproduct of the effort to field a survey of CSJ participants at their worksites. The initial plan was to survey a random sample of 200 CSJ participants from the universe of all those assigned to W-2 work experience at the end of 1999.[2] But when the survey team sought to find the CSJ participants who were drawn in this sample, very few of them could be located at the worksites reported on the list.

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[1]Brock, Butler, and Long, 1993.

[2]In December 1999, the Private Industry Council of Milwaukee County — which served as contract administrator for W-2 — provided MDRC with a list of 2,580 CSJ participants that was generated by Wisconsin's automated record system, CARES (short for "Client Assistance for Re-Employment and Economic Support"). MDRC's goal was to interview 200 randomly selected CSJ participants.

In the first sampling strategy for this study, the list of CSJ participants was grouped by W-2 agency, and 40 *participants* were randomly selected for each of the five W-2 agencies in Milwaukee County. One W-2 agency was randomly chosen to begin the survey fielding, and the MDRC researchers attempted to find the first 40 CSJ participants at the agency's worksites. However, not a single participant could be located at these worksites. Next, the researchers attempted to locate CSJ participants from a second W-2 agency, and only one could be found at the assigned worksite. Thus, over the course of two weeks, the researchers looked for 80 CSJ participants from two W-2 agencies and found only one person at an assigned worksite. This degree of lack of participation was prevalent across the county's W-2 agencies.[3]

Considering the frequency of changes in W-2 participants' circumstances and tier assignments and how quickly a CSJ list can become outdated, the location of these 80 CSJ participants was investigated further. W-2 agency staff reviewed each of the names on the list and found two main reasons why the participants were not at their worksites: Some had changed their tier assignment since the list was created, and others were on medical leave. But this still failed to account for other CSJ participants on the list. The worksite supervisors noted that there were communication challenges between the W-2 agencies and the worksites. The supervisors reported that many CSJ participants either had not shown up for work or had shown up for only a few days and never returned; the supervisors did not know the participants' current status in W-2.

After this initial experience, the strategy of sampling participants was abandoned, and the sample size was reduced to 100. The second sampling strategy was based on each W-2 agency's list of *worksites* where CSJ participants were assigned. The worksites were grouped by size; several were selected from each size category;[4] those worksites were visited on a specified day; the CSJ participants who were present on that day were interviewed;[5] and then ar-

[3]In one W-2 agency, MDRC researchers could not find 20 active worksite participants for several weeks, though the agency's CARES list showed hundreds of names in the CSJ tier.

[4]From 65 percent to 70 percent of participants for each of the five W-2 agencies were assigned to worksites that had 11 or more CSJ participants, and the others were assigned to worksites with 10 or fewer CSJ participants. Therefore, for each W-2 agency, the researchers attempted to interview 65 percent (n = 13) of CSJ participants at the larger worksites and 35 percent (n = 7) of CSJ participants at the smaller worksites. Each W-2 agency had from three to six large worksites; thus, the researchers interviewed two or three participants at each of the larger worksites and then randomly selected seven of the smaller worksites from the list and interviewed one participant at each of them. In an effort to get a cross-section of worksites (large and small, those with different types of work activities), interviews were conducted not just at worksites where participants showed up consistently, since the data then would be biased in that direction. Instead, the researchers repeatedly contacted the worksites from the original sample to find the specific participants listed. After several weeks, however, some of these worksites had to be replaced, since the participants were not attending them.

[5]Researchers interviewed participants who had been at the CSJ worksite for at least one week. If more than one such participant was at a worksite, then a single participant was randomly selected.

rangements were made to interview each of those participants' worksite supervisors. This new sampling strategy was more successful, but challenges remained.[6]

In short, the final sample of CSJ participants illustrates the experience of a specific group: those who attended their assigned worksite with some degree of consistency. This group is not representative of CSJ participants in general, however. Rather, the sample presents a picture of how the W-2 work experience activity was operating and was being experienced by the few participants for whom the CSJ activity was working as planned.

Despite generally low attendance at the CSJ worksites, there was some variation. Work experience that was integrated with a training program had higher attendance, whereas in larger worksites without a training program, attendance was very low. Worksite supervisors in subsequent interviews reported that the main reason they referred participants back to the W-2 agency was for nonparticipation. And during the field research, staff at the W-2 agencies agreed that absenteeism was a problem. They estimated that the daily absence rate at CSJ worksites was between 30 percent and 70 percent, and the rate varied somewhat by worksite. Programs that directly provided specific job or career skills leading to employment had better attendance than work experience programs did.

Personal matters that arose outside the W-2 agencies and CSJ worksites also affected whether participants attended their work experience activities. The major reason cited by this sample of participants for missing their work assignment was a family health problem affecting either their child or a relative who needed care. Many participants could not make the necessary arrangements to get to work if their child was sick, because many daycare providers would not accept sick children. Parents also found it difficult to find someone who could care for a severely disabled child. For example, two participants in the sample reported that their children were paraplegic and that they felt a parental responsibility to stay at home when the children were seriously ill.

Though the survey respondents were generally satisfied with their child care arrangements,[7] certain issues were still a common concern. Some respondents reported that they were

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[6]Ultimately, across 47 CSJ worksites in Milwaukee County over six months, 100 participants and 96 worksite supervisors were interviewed. The findings from these surveys are presented in Chapters 2 and 4.

[7]Among this sample of CSJ participants who showed up at the worksite, 90 percent of survey respondents said that they were generally satisfied with their child care arrangements. Approximately three-fourths of their children stayed at a daycare center, with the next most common arrangement being care by a relative. For nearly two-thirds of the children in this sample, the child care arrangements had not changed as a result of their mother's (and/or father's) participating in W-2. For those children whose care arrangements had changed, 45 percent of respondents reported that the new arrangement was better; 42 percent said that it was the same; and 13 percent said that it was worse. Respondents who had one child reported more problems with daycare than those who had more than one child.

unable to leave their children in child care if the provider were ill. Several people reported that there were times when the child care provider simply failed to show up. Other problems that caused these CSJ participants to miss work were related to housing, transportation, and the administration of the W-2 program.

Indeed, this survey effort revealed the variety of administrative procedures across the five W-2 agencies in Milwaukee County. In some cases, the procedures presented obstacles to tracking participation in work experience activities. For example, although some of the W-2 agencies could easily produce a complete and accurate list of current CSJ worksites and participants, developing such a list was a laborious task for other W-2 agencies. Further, the feedback process by which the worksites gave information to the agencies was often convoluted, and the agencies reviewed the information primarily to determine sanctions for nonparticipation — which they did on a schedule that was driven by the W-2 budgeting cycle.

The Importance of Monitoring Attendance

Having an effective attendance-monitoring system is essential for a well-run, large-scale work program. Such a system is especially significant in W-2, because information on attendance in the CSJ program affects both the participants and the agencies, in several ways. First, attendance affects the cash payments that participants receive. Slow-moving information and inaccurate record keeping can lead to mistakes in sanctioning, as was noted in one report by Wisconsin's Legislative Audit Bureau.[8] Second, as job skills training and vocational training increase and become more important activities within CSJs, low worksite attendance undercuts the ability of these activities to provide the services and opportunities that make vocational skill-building possible. W-2 agencies need to respond quickly to poor attendance, to determine its causes and to amend their service plan if necessary. Third, the agencies' responses to attendance problems can affect the way that W-2 time limits affect CSJ participants.

It is useful to expand on this third point. W-2 participants can be assigned to the CSJ tier for only 24 months, unless they are granted an extension, and they face a lifetime limit of five years of W-2 support.[9] A CSJ participant who finds regular employment or decides to leave W-2 for any reason is supposed to notify the W-2 agency, which then closes the case in order to stop the time clock and W-2 grants. If a CSJ participant does not notify the W-2 agency or the agency does not close the case, the participant may be recorded as not attending the worksite, may be sanctioned, and may remain on the W-2 time clock even without receiving payments or other W-2 support. Such a participant might receive a statement showing a zero total and might

[8]State of Wisconsin, Legislative Audit Bureau, 2002.

[9]For more information on the criteria for an extension, see the *Wisconsin Works Manual.*

assume that, without a W-2 grant, the case is no longer open and the W-2 time clock is not running. But the time clock stops only when the W-2 agency closes the case.

Even if CSJ participants do not request that their case be closed, W-2 agencies have the responsibility to monitor worksite attendance, and they need to follow certain procedures in order to ensure (1) that a participant's case is not closed prematurely and (2) that someone who is not participating does not just remain in the W-2 system.

Procedural steps (phone calls, mailings, home visits, and so forth) were put in place in an effort to protect W-2 participants against inappropriate closure of their case. Ironically, however, the procedures and requirements needed to document "due diligence" prior to case closure for someone no longer attending CSJ activities sometimes actually work against the participant, in that they might keep the person's W-2 time clock running. During the effort to identify a survey sample for this study, records for CSJ participants were accessed in Wisconsin's statewide automated system, CARES (short for "Client Assistance for Re-Employment and Economic Support"). Many times, especially in one W-2 agency, CSJ participants were listed as still being in the W-2 system but had not attended the worksite for many months — in one case, for more than a year. The participants are then caught between ideal W-2 procedures and procedures as actually implemented.

For the W-2 agencies' procedures to be effective and also serve the needs of CSJ participants, the monitoring of attendance and follow-up must be done quickly, to determine the causes of nonparticipation. As in many public assistance programs, it appears that in W-2 some families may experience a change in circumstances (relating to employment, for example, or to family structure), and they just leave welfare without notifying the W-2 agency. Unless the agency then affirmatively seeks out information quickly, the participant's access to future support might be lessened. When time limits are in place, a financial and employment planner (FEP) who is slow to close a case in which participation has truly ended can actually cause future problems for that client. The different practices across W-2 agencies, along with inefficiencies in tracking worksite attendance, could mean that CSJ participants face different applications of the rules on time limits.

Finally, it is important for W-2 agencies to monitor attendance and the status of W-2 leavers, since the agencies' performance and payments from the state are linked to getting participants off the caseload and into a job. Under the second and third rounds of performance contracts for W-2 agencies — in place from January 2000 to December 2003 — W-2 agencies' receipt of performance incentives is dependent on meeting targets for job placement, wage at placement, and ongoing employment. When a CSJ participant just stops showing up and the worksite and the W-2 agency lose touch, important information can be lost.

Factors That Limit the Monitoring of Attendance

The Milwaukee County W-2 agencies' monitoring of attendance at CSJ worksites has been affected by several factors, including delays by the worksites in recording attendance, delays by the W-2 agencies in following up on nonattendance, and turnover and vacancies among W-2 agency staff.

Delays by the Worksites in Recording Attendance

During the period of this study's field research, CSJ worksites recorded attendance either manually or with time clocks. Depending on the W-2 agency, worksites were required to submit attendance information weekly, biweekly, or monthly. Some worksites were timely in sending information, while others lagged behind. One W-2 agency reported that some worksites were taking from 30 to 90 days to report attendance. The W-2 agencies were frustrated by the lag time in worksites' reporting of attendance, and they instituted ways to reduce it. One agency required worksites to submit attendance information weekly. Another gave its worksites an "alert form": If a participant did not show up for two days, the worksite supervisor was asked to send the form to the participant's FEP.

Delays by the W-2 Agencies in Following Up on Nonattendance

As Chapter 2 notes, Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies manage the administrative tasks associated with W-2's work experience component in varying ways: A few centralize the tasks, while others disperse them. In one W-2 agency, Milwaukee Employment and Training (MET) tracks attendance for some sites and then gives the information to the FEPs every two weeks. The FEPs are then responsible for recording the information and dealing with CSJ participants. In another W-2 agency, the worksites send the information directly to the FEPs. The various procedures mean that the W-2 agencies have different lag times in recording attendance information, depending on the layers of administration through which the records must pass and depending on the press of other business for the staff who receive the attendance information.

Once a CSJ participant's lack of attendance is known, the W-2 agency attempts to contact that participant. W-2 agencies agree that early intervention is better for tracking participants, identifying issues, and increasing attendance. The agencies and their FEPs use various approaches in contacting CSJ participants: Some intervene within a few days, while others wait out a payment period. In one agency, a FEP who cannot reach a CSJ participant notifies a subcontractor, who then makes a home visit within 48 hours.

Turnover and Vacancies Among W-2 Agency Staff

W-2 agencies' organizational changes, staff turnover, and changing assignment of cases to FEPs also make it difficult to monitor CSJ participants' attendance. In some W-2 agencies, a small number of staff members administer the many tasks related to the CSJ program: developing worksites and maintaining contact with them, assigning CSJ participants to worksites, tracking and monitoring the participants, changing their worksite assignments, notifying FEPs of attendance information and changes in assignments, and so forth. Vacancies in any staff positions severely undercut the monitoring efforts. During this study's field research, one W-2 agency had no CSJ coordinator, though the agency anticipated hiring someone to fill this position. At another agency, a single staff member was handling CSJ administration but could not keep up with all the associated tasks. This led to poor communication with the worksites; the agency's management did not know what was going on with the CSJ program; FEPs were unaware of the variety of worksites available; the status of CSJ participants was not monitored; and attendance information stopped flowing to the FEPs. Remedies for these situations included putting several staff members to work on the CSJ program and having FEPs physically walk participants to the CSJ department, where they set up worksite interviews.

Steps to Increase Participation in CSJ Activities

As Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies are monitoring the attendance of CSJ participants, they are also acquiring a better understanding of why attendance in assigned CSJ activities has been low. The agencies are taking steps like the following to increase participation.

Early Intervention

Just as early intervention assists in tracking CSJ participants, the W-2 agencies are finding that it also improves attendance in assigned activities. In some cases, home visits have revealed such problems as domestic violence, which are likely to go undetected during a meeting at the W-2 agency. Such information helps agency staff make better decisions about a participant's W-2 tier placement, assigned activities, and needed services.

Developing and Selecting Worksites

W-2 agency administrators report that attendance and participation in activities improve when the CSJ assignment involves a training component. They note that participants are more strongly motivated and that attendance is better at worksites that include job skills training, especially if the training is linked to employment. (Chapter 4 describes the types of worksites and training that CSJ participants encountered during their work experience assignments.) One W-2 agency reported that the majority of CSJ participants who attended customized training that was

directly linked to employment had perfect attendance.[10] Other agencies are also developing such training to provide new opportunities that lead to jobs. A few agencies with a high percentage of non-English-speaking clients are trying to accommodate them by offering more work experience and training in other languages (for example, Spanish).

Several W-2 agencies mentioned that CSJ participants respond better to individualized attention, both during orientation and at the worksites. One agency that had offered orientation classes switched to individual orientation sessions and decided that smaller worksites seem to provide more individualized attention, sometimes in the form of mentoring. Another agency reported that it is trying to involve CSJ participants in the selection of worksites, in order to find the assignment that is most interesting to them.

Colocating Worksite Activities with Other Services

One W-2 agency has moved educational activities into the same locations as its worksites, which reduces the travel time for participants and thus improves attendance. Some agencies have been able to locate FEPs at the worksites. This makes it easier for participants and FEPs to meet during work breaks, and it also helps the FEPs monitor attendance.

Facilitating Child Care

Both W-2 agency staff and CSJ participants mentioned that child care is a major factor affecting participation in assigned activities. In some cases, agency staff reported problems with the availability of good-quality child care. In other cases, FEPs referred CSJ participants to worksites too quickly, before issues relating to child care and housing could be addressed. It usually takes from 7 to 10 days to set up child care arrangements, depending on availability and the W-2 agency's authorization process. A few agencies reported that they are emphasizing case management early on and are trying to resolve child care issues before CSJ participants begin their work assignments.

Related to child care — and also an influence on participation in assigned work activities — is transportation. CSJ participants reported significant differences in the time it took to get to their worksite, depending on whether or not they first needed to deliver their children somewhere. Most participants who had to drop off their children took longer than 20 minutes to get to their worksite. Only 16 percent of this group reported travel times of under 20 minutes, compared with 61 percent of participants who did *not* need to drop off their children on the way

[10]The same agency evaluated which types of work experience assignments would be most beneficial to CSJ participants and decided to emphasize short-term training that leads to a job.

to their worksite.[11] Two W-2 agencies mentioned offering transportation for CSJ participants' children, who are picked up at home and brought to their school or child care provider.

Summary

For a large-scale work program to function efficiently and fairly, its feedback system needs to incorporate up-to-date information about participants' attendance in assigned activities. As has historically been true of work experience programs, participation in the CSJ program of Wisconsin Works has been low. The nature and complexity of the program — involving five W-2 agencies and an array of constantly changing worksites — requires coordination and communication among various administrative layers. Although Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies have begun to take steps to improve the monitoring of attendance and to increase CSJ participation, more remains to be done. Chapter 5 presents some recommendations about these aspects of a work experience program.

Next, Chapter 4 explores how W-2's assigned work experience activities are administered at the worksite level and shares the perspectives of CSJ participants and their worksite supervisors.

[11]No notable relationship was found between transportation time and the number of children that participants had.

Chapter 4

Experiences at the CSJ Worksites

This chapter examines the day-to-day operations of the community service job (CSJ) component of Wisconsin Works (W-2). Focusing on the experiences of CSJ participants and worksite supervisors in Milwaukee County, the chapter discusses (1) the types of worksites to which CSJ participants are assigned, (2) the skills that the participants are learning, (3) how the participants view their work environment, and (4) the roles of worksite supervisors in administering the CSJ program and managing participants' work experience activities.

The findings herein are based largely on a survey sample made up of (1) W-2 participants who were assigned to the CSJ tier and a work experience activity and who were participating regularly enough at their worksite assignment to be included in the survey and (2) their direct worksite supervisors. The sample is thus not representative of all CSJ participants, because it does not include those who did not attend their assigned activity.[1] Though comparisons with the broader CSJ population in terms of prior work experience were not feasible, it is important to note that 85 percent of CSJ participants in this sample had prior work experience.[2]

The CSJ Worksites

Types of Worksites and Work Activities

Milwaukee County's local W-2 agencies offer a variety of CSJ worksites. As shown in Table 4.1, of the 47 worksites included in the survey sample, the majority are private nonprofit organizations (68 percent) or for-profit businesses (21 percent). Slightly more than half (53 percent) are smaller-sized worksites that have from 1 to 20 regular employees and W-2 par-

[1]Nevertheless, this survey sample (n = 100) is similar to the overall CSJ population in Milwaukee County during the early period of W-2 in terms of gender, language spoken, marital status, and education credential. The survey sample is slightly older, on average, and includes a slightly higher percentage of Hispanics and a slightly lower percentage of African-Americans. These comparisons are based on analysis of Wisconsin's automated records data for all W-2 participants assigned to the CSJ tier in Milwaukee County at some point between October 1997 and February 1999. Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 illustrates how the CSJ tier fits into the W-2 "employment ladder."

[2]Of the CSJ participants with prior work experience, 38 percent reported that their longest job had been less than a year; 32 percent had held their longest job from one year to three years; and 15 percent had held their longest job for more than three years. Among those who had not worked outside the home, a few were the primary caretaker of a chronically ill child, and a few had lived in rural areas, where they did not have opportunities for employment or their language barriers prevented it.

Table 4.1

Characteristics of CSJ Worksites

Characteristic	Percentage of Worksites (n = 47)
Type of organization	
Nonprofit	68.0
For profit	21.0
Public	6.0
Combination (nonprofit and profit)	4.0
Number of employees and CSJ participants	
1 - 10	25.0
11 - 20	28.0
21 - 50	17.0
51 or more	30.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on the survey of CSJ participants.

ticipants and include offices, child care locations, and retail businesses. The other, larger worksites (47 percent) have more than 20 employees and include warehouses, factories, and stores.

Within a worksite, CSJ participants are usually assigned to activities that relate to the worksite's main function. For instance, at a light industrial worksite, they work on assembly; at a child care location, they work with children. Occasionally, CSJ participants fulfill a worksite's daily administrative or maintenance needs. For example, at a social service organization or a retail worksite, they might be assigned to clerical or janitorial duties.

Based on the types of tasks that the survey sample members were performing at the worksites, Table 4.2 groups the CSJ work activities into five categories: (1) thrift store work, (2) office and customer service work, (3) care work (with children or adults), (4) light industrial and housekeeping work, and (5) vocational training leading to formal certification or verification. These five categories were created to reflect the survey data and are not meant to coincide with the data in CARES (short for "Client Assistance for Re-Employment and Economic Support" — Wisconsin's automated records system).

Table 4.2

Categories and Tasks of CSJ Activity Assignments

Work Activity Assignment	Tasks	Percentage of Sample (n = 100)
Thrift store	Stocking, ticketing, sorting clothes and household items	14.0
Office work/customer service	Receptionist duties, filing, faxing, copying, some computer work, customer service	26.0
Care work	Activities related to caring for other individuals – children, elders, the disabled, or youth	11.0
Light industrial/housekeeping	Warehouse work, sorting and packing, assembly-line work, sewing, janitorial services	22.0
Vocational training	Any training that leads to a certificate or some form of acknowledgment	27.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on survey of CSJ participants.

The first four categories in Table 4.2 are "work-only positions," in that they emphasize work habits, provide hands-on experience, and possibly constitute informal training but are without a formal training component. The last category, "vocational training," provides a combination of hands-on experience and vocational or job skills training whereby participants receive some formal recognition (a certificate or some other verification) of skills learned. This category is not coded this way in CARES, where it may be coded simply as "work experience," just as the work-only positions are coded.[3]

For many of these work activity assignments, it was not possible to differentiate the combination of hands-on experience and skills training from the CARES-generated list, but that became apparent only when the researchers visited the worksites. Those sample members who were placed in vocational training were assigned to an array of activities: light industrial training (including forklift, electrical, mechanical, and machine operations); office administration (including computer training, basic business training, clerical work, and translation); child care; nursing assistant; auto mechanic; and food service.

[3]There were also cases in which CARES coded "vocational training" as part work experience and part job skills training. This allowed the participant to attend *one* worksite and to focus on specific activities for a longer period of time each week (for example, 30 hours) instead of having to report for work experience at one site (15 hours) and then for skills training at another site (15 hours).

Worksite and Work Activity Opportunities Across Milwaukee County

As discussed in Chapter 2, the five W-2 agencies that were operating in Milwaukee County during the period of this study varied in terms of the size and activities of their worksites, and CSJ participants' opportunities to obtain specific types of skills depended on their assigned agency and worksite. As Table 4.3 indicates, YW Works emphasized vocational training and light industrial/housekeeping work, while Employment Solutions stressed thrift stores in its mix of worksites. Both agencies relied on affiliated organizations to operate these types of businesses. At United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS), office work/customer service was by far the most common assignment, while vocational training was emphasized at Maximus. The Opportunities Industrialization Center of Greater Milwaukee OIC tended to spread CSJ participants more evenly across the five categories of work activities.

Table 4.3

Categories of CSJ Work Activity Assignments, by W-2 Agency

W-2 Agency	Thrift Store	Office Work/ Customer Service	Care Work	Vocational Training	Light Industrial/ Housekeeping	Total
YW Works	0%	10% (2)	5% (1)	30% (6)	55% (11)	20
UMOS	15% (3)	60%[a](12)	21%[a] (4)	0%[a]	5% (1)	20
OIC	11% (2)	32% (6)	21% (4)	26% (5)	11% (2)	19
Employment Solutions	41% (9)	0%	0%	32% (7)	27% (6)	22
Maximus	0%	32% (6)	11% (2)	47% (9)	11% (2)	19

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on the survey of CSJ participants.

NOTE: [a]For UMOS, at least half the positions in office work and care work are vocational training positions in that they combine hands-on training and lead to some form of formal certification; however, they were not categorized as such by the participants. For the rest of the calculations in this chapter, UMOS worksites are separated into the work-only and the vocational training assignments.

Thus, depending on where CSJ participants lived and which W-2 agency was designated to serve their region, they had varying likelihoods of obtaining a specific work experience. This is significant inasmuch as it affected their opportunities to learn the skills needed to succeed in a regular job environment and to replicate the type of work that they desired in the future. The next section examines CSJ work activities and skill-building more closely.

Skill-Building at the CSJ Worksites

During the W-2 assessment process, financial and employment planners (FEPs) placed clients into the CSJ tier because the clients had one or more barriers to employment and therefore were not "job-ready" for regular subsidized employment.[4] This initial assessment was typically based on participants' employment status or job readiness, educational status, and personal circumstances. According to the data from randomly selected participants who were assigned to the CSJ tier at the end of 1999, these work activities most often combined 30 to 40 hours of work experience, education (to obtain a General Educational Development [GED]certificate), and job search. Approximately three-quarters of CSJ participants were assigned to worksites.[5]

Monitoring CSJ participants' worksite performance and skills development is time-consuming. Although W-2 agency staff routinely recorded attendance information in CARES, they did not systematically record information about other aspects of job performance, the skills demanded at the worksite, or improvements in participants' skills. Thus, in order to examine which work habits and basic or vocational skills the CSJ participants were obtaining and improving at the worksites, this study chose to survey the participants and their worksite supervisors.

Worksite Demands and Improvements in Skills

The CSJ participants who were sampled for this study were asked about the skills that they were using on their current work assignment and about their perceptions of whether those skills had worsened, stayed the same, or improved as a result of their CSJ assignment.[6] The first group of skills that was examined was *work habits* ("soft skills"), which includes attendance and punctuality; calling in when absent or late; and the abilities to concentrate, to work efficiently, to complete tasks, to learn from constructive criticism, and to follow instructions. For the sample as a whole, 3 percent said that these skills had worsened since starting at the worksite; 60 percent reported that their soft skills had stayed the same, and 37 percent said that their skills had improved (Table 4.4).[7]

The second group of skills that was examined was *basic work skills* ("hard skills"), which includes reading and writing, math, communication skills, cooperation with coworkers, dealing with the public or clients, working well without close supervision, and creative problem

[4]Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 illustrates and explains the W-2 tier assignments.

[5]Chapter 2 provides more detail. As discussed there, the CSJ participants who were not assigned to worksites were assigned to orientation or education; or they found a job but remained in the CSJ tier; or they were temporarily excused from work experience for medical reasons.

[6]Unless otherwise noted, this chapter's findings on differences in responses among groups of participants are statistically significant at the .05 level.

[7]These percentages were calculated by averaging the responses across the six specific skills within this category.

Table 4.4

Changes in Work Habits at Current CSJ Work Activity Assignment

Work Habit (%)	Worsened	Stayed the Same	Improved
Attendance and punctuality	11.0	60.0	29.0
Ability to concentrate	2.0	57.0	41.0
Ability to work efficiently	0.0	60.0	40.0
Calling in when absent or late	5.0	75.0	20.0
Ability to complete tasks	0.0	61.0	38.0
Ability to learn from constructive crticism	0.0	46.0	54.0
Ability to follow instructions	0.0	63.0	37.0
Average of all work habits	2.6	60.3	37.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on the survey of CSJ participants.

solving. On average, 26 percent of CSJ participants said that they did not use these skills at the worksite; 35 percent said that their hard skills had stayed the same since they began the work experience; and 39 percent said these skills had improved (Table 4.5).[8]

Further analysis regarding changes in CSJ participants' skills suggests that the extent of improvement was associated with (1) the type of work experience placement and (2) the length of participation at the worksite. These relationships are associations rather than causal links, because it is likely that the characteristics of participants who attended CSJs for a long time differed from the characteristics of those who did not attend. Nevertheless, these associations do provide useful insights for program planners and implementers, and they suggest that certain types of placements may be more effective in supporting skill-building goals.[9]

[8]These percentages were calculated by averaging the responses across the seven specific skills within this category.

[9]The study also examined skill changes as grouped by worksite size and W-2 agency. Although worksite size had little effect on skill change, some differences emerged across agencies, and these are noted, when relevant.

Table 4.5

Basic Work Skills Demanded and Changes in Skills at Current CSJ Work Activity Assignment

	Use and Change in Skill (%)			
Basic Work Skill Demanded	Did Not Use	Worsened	Stayed the Same	Improved
Reading and writing	32.0	1.0	39.0	28.0
Math	56.0	1.0	20.0	23.0
Communication skills	13.0	0.0	33.0	54.0
Cooperation with coworkers	11.0	0.0	48.0	41.0
Dealing with the public or clients	33.0	0.0	30.0	45.0
Work well without close supervision	15.0	0.0	40.0	44.0
Creative problem solving	25.0	0.0	37.0	38.0
Average of all work skills	26.4	0.3	35.3	39.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on the survey of CSJ participants.

Type of Work Activity and Skill-Building

Differences in changes in skill level are visible among the five categories of work experience activities to which the CSJ participants were assigned.

Work Habits. As shown in Table 4.6, for the group of skills associated with work habits, more participants reported improvements when assigned to office work/customer service (45 percent) and to vocational training (42 percent). Fewer participants reported that their work habits improved when engaged in light industrial/housekeeping (39 percent), thrift store work (28 percent), and care work (12 percent). Across all work activity categories, the only skill that participants reported as worsening was attendance and punctuality**.**

Basic Work Skills. Thrift store work and light industrial/housekeeping tended to be the least demanding categories in terms of basic work skills (Table 4.7). On average, well over a third of participants in these two work activities reported not using these skills. More participants reported improving their basic work skills when assigned to office work/customer service (average of 49 percent) and to vocational training (average of 45 percent) than when assigned to care work (average of 35 percent), light industrial/housekeeping (average of 28 percent), and

Table 4.6

Changes in Work Habits, by Type of CSJ Work Activity Assignment

	Work Habits (%)		
Work Activity	Worsened	Stayed the Same	Improved
Thrift store (n = 14)	3.0	68.0	28.0
Office work/customer service (n = 26)	3.0	52.0	45.0
Care work (n = 11)	1.0	87.0	12.0
Light industrial/housekeeping (n = 22)	3.0	57.0	39.0
Vocational training (n = 27)	2.0	56.0	42.0
Average[a]	2.4	64.0	33.2

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on the survey of CSJ participants.

NOTE: [a]The average of the following work habits: attendance and punctuality, ability to concentrate, ability to work efficiently, calling in when absent or late, ability to complete tasks, ability to learn from constructive crticism, and ability to follow instructions.

Table 4.7

Changes in Basic Work Skills Demanded and Used, by Type of CSJ Work Activity Assignment

	Use and Change in Skill (%)			
Work Activity	Did Not Use	Worsened	Stayed the Same	Improved
Thrift store (n = 14)	36.0	1.0	37.0	27.0
Office work/customer service (n = 26)	14.0	0.0	37.0	49.0
Care work (n = 11)	27.0	0.0	38.0	35.0
Light industrial/housekeeping (n = 22)	49.0	0.0	23.0	28.0
Vocational training (n = 27)	17.0	1.0	38.0	45.0
Average[a]	28.6	0.4	34.6	36.8

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on the survey of CSJ participants.

NOTE: [a]The average of the following basic work skills: reading and writing, math, communication skills, cooperation with coworkers, dealing with the public or clients, working well without supervision, and creative problem solving.

thrift store work (average of 27 percent).[10] Across all five work categories, math was the least used skill, and the greatest difference was found between thrift store work (in which 79 percent reported not using math) and vocational training (19 percent).

Length of Participation and Skill-Building

At the time of the survey, about a third of these CSJ participants had been at their current worksite for 4 weeks or less; another third had been at their site for 5 to 12 weeks; and the remaining third had attended for 13 weeks or more. The longer participants had been at a worksite, the greater their reported improvements in work habits and basic work skills.[11]

Work Habits. Among participants who attended their worksite for 8 weeks or less, 30 percent reported improvement in work habits, compared with 38 percent of those in attendance for 9 to 12 weeks and 48 percent of those attending for 13 weeks or more. One specific skill in the work habits category is attendance and punctuality. While there was some improvement in this skill as participants spent more time at the worksites, it was also the only skill that 10 percent or more of participants reported as worsening.

Basic Work Skills. There is suggestive evidence that as participants spent more time at the worksite, their basic work skills improved; but the differences are not statistically significant, and the increases were most pronounced after 13 weeks. Whereas 32 percent of participants who had been at worksites for up to 4 weeks reported that their basic work skills had improved, 46 percent reported improvements when at the worksite for 13 weeks or more. Across all lengths of participation, math was reported to be the least used skill, and it did not improve over time.

Work Activities and Worksite Responsibilities

One aspect of improving people's work habits and basic skills is enabling them to assume growing responsibilities on the job. In this study, the type of work activity appears to have influenced whether CSJ participants' worksite responsibilities increased. Approximately three-fourths of participants who were assigned to worksites with vocational training (74 percent) or office work/customer service (69 percent) reported being given more responsibility than when they first began their CSJ assignment, compared with about half of participants assigned to thrift store work (57 percent), care work (54 percent), or light industrial/housekeeping (50 percent).

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[10]These percentages are the averages of the seven basic skills defined above. Creative problem solving and reading and writing showed the greatest difference; participants assigned to office work/customer service reported the highest percentage of improvements in these basic skills, while those in thrift store work reported the lowest percentages.

[11]The characteristics of participants who had different lengths of participation could also vary, which could influence the extent to which participants acquired new skills.

Participants' Expectations About Employment and Wages

Work experience and skill-building efforts affect how people view their job prospects and desired wages. Though CSJ work experiences differ, a majority of the participants who were surveyed believed that their work assignment was an opportunity to get training or experience that would help them get a job later. Almost all of the participants who were assigned to vocational training (96 percent), office work (92 percent), and care work (91 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with these ideas, compared with about three-quarters of participants assigned to light industrial/housekeeping (77 percent) and about half of participants assigned to thrift store work (57 percent).

Survey respondents were also asked to specify the lowest hourly wage that they would accept in a future full-time job that includes fringe benefits, and again their responses varied by work activity. Those who were assigned to vocational training quoted the highest wage of the five work categories, followed by office work/customer service, light industrial/housekeeping, care work, and thrift store work (Table 4.8). Following are the mean lowest wages that participants in each category would accept in a future full-time job that includes benefits:

- Vocational training, $8.91
- Light industrial/housekeeping, $8.00
- Office work/customer service, $7.94
- Care work, $7.51
- Thrift store work, $6.78

More than 80 percent of the participants in vocational training (89 percent), office work/customer service (85 percent), and care work (82 percent) believed that their CSJ was preparing them for a job that would pay their lowest acceptable hourly wage for working full time, compared with 50 percent of participants in light industrial/housekeeping and thrift store work.

The wages quoted above are modest and reflect respondents' accurate expectations of what their skills might be worth in the labor market. For a family of three to be at poverty level, a person needs to earn $6.67 per hour for full-time work (40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year). For a family of four, the poverty-level wage is $8.03 per hour, full time. Clearly, the CSJ participants in this study who were assigned to vocational training had higher expectations of finding a job that might pay somewhat more — and possibly a wage above the poverty line — than partici-

Table 4.8

Lowest Acceptable Hourly Wage, by Type of CSJ Work Assignment

CSJ Work Assignment	Lowest Acceptable Hourly Wage (%)					
	Up to $5.15	$5.15 to $6.99	$7.00 to $7.99	$8.00 to $8.99	$9.00 to $9.99	$10.00 and Up
Thrift store	7.1	14.3	57.1	7.1	7.1	7.1
Office work/customer service	3.9	11.5	38.5	30.8	11.5	3.9
Care work	9.1	9.1	54.6	18.2	0.0	9.1
Vocational training	0.0	7.4	18.5	33.3	22.2	18.5
Light industrial/ housekeeping	4.6	13.6	31.8	36.4	4.6	9.1
Total	4.9	11.2	40.1	25.5	6.8	9.6

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on the survey of CSJ participants.

pants in the other work-only categories, particularly thrift store work. According to leavers' studies, these lower expected incomes match what people reported receiving after leaving W-2.[12]

The CSJ Worksite Environment

The physical and social aspects of a worksite environment were of particular importance to the overall CSJ experience. Though a few participants mentioned liking "everything" ("[I like] everything; I like the computer, teacher/supervisor, coworkers, and the challenge") or nothing ("[I like] the breaks and going home"), most participants valued learning new skills, doing their daily work activities, and being with amicable coworkers and supervisors. Not surprisingly, given the variety of worksites in Milwaukee County, the most valued environmental feature varied by type of assignment (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9

Worksite Features Valued by CSJ Participants

	Valued Feature (%)					
Type of CSJ Worksite	Learning New Skills	Daily Work Activities	Amicable Coworkers	Everything	Nothing	Other
Thrift store	29.0	14.0	29.0	7.0	14.0	7.0
Office work/customer service	15.0	38.0	35.0	8.0	4.0	0.0
Care work	9.0	73.0	18.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Light industrial/ housekeeping	78.0	70.0	0.1	7.0	0.0	0.0
Vocational training	23.0	46.0	23.0	0.0	9.0	0.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on the survey of CSJ participants.

Learning New Skills

Slightly more than a third of the full sample of CSJ participants said that they most valued learning new skills and acquiring training. For some participants, the learning itself was valuable: "I like learning something totally different — a skill for the rest of my life that I can use." Nonetheless, learning new skills was most valued when participants believed that they

[12]State of Wisconsin, 2001.

would use those skills in the future, especially if the new skills could lead to a stable and good-paying job:

> You are learning some and have an opportunity to get a job afterward.
>
> They should put people where they are going to get the most benefits and [where] they could get a good job.

When the most valued feature of the CSJ experience was examined by work activity, 78 percent of participants in vocational training expressed that what they liked best was learning new skills, compared with 29 percent of participants in thrift store work, 23 percent in light industrial/housekeeping, 15 percent in office work/customer service, and 9 percent in care work.

Daily Work Activities

One-third of the CSJ participants reported that they most liked the actual daily work activities, especially the activities that they considered engaging, such as working with children and computers. As one participant stated: "[What I like best is] the work experience — using the computers, meeting with people with small businesses."

Participants liked keeping busy, and they liked work activities that kept them feeling enthusiastic. Across worksites, they reported wanting a CSJ experience that they would look forward to doing, rather than feeling forced into an assignment that they did not enjoy:

> I want to be somewhere where I am going to be happy and look forward to coming to work, not a place where I am miserable.
>
> You love your research, what you're doing. What if your boss came to you and said now your CSJ assignment is to pick up garbage? You wouldn't like that. If you put people in a CSJ that they don't care about, they won't learn, because they don't care about it and they are not happy. It won't work. To make changes, [the work assignment] can't be on a forceful basis.

Participants did not like periods when they had little or nothing to do, and they complained about feeling bored during those hours. One participant recommended: "Find more jobs that equal the skills that people have. People won't come to a boring job. There has to be some reason why a person should come to work everyday. They need to like what they do."

Of all the work activities, the one that most participants identified as providing constant stimulation and having the lowest level of boredom was child care. One participant who was working with children stated that what she liked best was "working with the kids — I love

working with the kids." Even those who had assignments in child care did acknowledge there was some down time "when [the children] are sleeping and there is nothing to do."

Not surprisingly, then, 73 percent of the participants who were assigned to care work found that what they liked best about their CSJ was the daily work activities; in light industrial/housekeeping, the comparable figure was 46 percent; and in office work/customer service, it was 38 percent. Only a few participants in thrift store work and in vocational training mentioned that they most valued their daily work activities. This is reasonable, considering that participants who were assigned to thrift stores complained about the tasks of sorting "other people's dirty clothes" and that participants in vocational training favored the learning aspects of their assignment.

Amicable Coworkers and Supervisors

Nearly one-quarter of participants in the sample identified friendly coworkers and supervisors as a favorite aspect of their job:

> The people that I work with are very warm and friendly. They welcome you with open arms. [This] makes it a nice environment to be in.
>
> I like working with the people most. People are nice. I like working on computers too.

Even participants who did not find their work activities particularly engaging — such as those who were assigned to thrift store work — mentioned that one of the benefits of the CSJ work experience was having the chance to meet new people, especially coworkers in the same position.

Administering the CSJ Program: The Worksite Supervisors' Central Role

Supervisors' Roles in Administration and Training

Once a relationship has been established between a W-2 agency and its worksites, the worksite supervisors play critical roles in administering the CSJ program, training participants, and structuring participants' work experiences.[13] The worksite supervisors in the survey sample are a diverse group, with an array of experience as supervisors and working with W-2 partici-

[13]Though the discussion refers to CSJ participants' direct superiors simply as "supervisors," those in the survey sample held various positions and job titles — including president, director, manager, supervisor, coordinator, trainer, and job coach — depending on the structure and size of their organization.

pants.[14] Overall, at the time of the survey, 65 percent of the supervisors had been at their current position for one year or longer, and 65 percent had supervised 11 or more participants.[15]

The worksite supervisors' responsibilities for the CSJ program fell into two categories. At about two-thirds of the worksites, the direct supervisors were in charge of most of the tasks that related to participants, including contacting the W-2 agency if problems arose (67 percent), sending a participant back to the agency if the placement did not work out (68 percent), monitoring participants' attendance (60 percent), and evaluating performance (50 percent). For the most part, the task of training participants was shared among various supervisors in the worksite (60 percent). Only about one-third of direct supervisors (31 percent) trained participants themselves.

At the remaining one-third of worksites, responsibilities for the CSJ program were distributed among several individuals, not necessarily the participants' direct supervisors. For instance, at some worksites, the person who was designated a participant's formal worksite supervisor was in charge of sending attendance reports to the W-2 agency but had no daily contact or little contact with the participant and, therefore, was not responsible for training and could not evaluate performance. At other worksites, the direct supervisors trained participants and evaluated their performance, but other supervisors monitored attendance and contacted the W-2 agency.

The CSJ participants reported that their worksite supervisors played an important role in helping them learn their job. Nearly all the participants (93 percent) reported that they were learning their job at the worksite by listening to instructions from supervisors. Other important ways that participants learned their job was from other worksite employees and other CSJ workers (72 percent) and from formal classroom training (42 percent). Almost a quarter of participants said that past work experience had helped them with their current CSJ. Over a third of them (37 percent) believed that instruction from their supervisor was the most important method of learning their job.

[14]In this sample of supervisors, 76 percent are female. At the time of the survey, 86 percent had at least a high school diploma or a GED certificate, while 50 percent held a postsecondary degree (associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree). Fifty-eight percent had at least one child under age 18. In terms of ethnicity, 42 percent categorized themselves as African-American; 32 percent, as white; 8 percent, as Hispanic; 2 percent, as Asian; and 4 percent, as multiracial. In the past, 42 percent of the supervisors had received some form of public assistance, and 10 percent had participated in W-2.

[15]Among the sample of supervisors, 36 percent had been in their position one year or less; 53 percent had held their position from one year to four years; and 22 percent had been in their position for more than four years. Since the beginning of W-2 in September 1997, 35 percent of the direct worksite supervisors had supervised from 1 to 10 CSJ participants; 39 percent had supervised from 11 to 50 participants; and 26 percent had supervised more than 50 participants.

Supervisors' Supportive Role: Mentoring

A significant responsibility that many worksite supervisors assumed was mentoring CSJ participants. The W-2 manual states that "job coaching or mentoring may be needed to help participants succeed," though the manual does not make clear what type of mentoring and how much of it is required. Among this sample of CSJ participants, 62 percent were offered some form of mentoring and personal support from worksite supervisors, on topics unrelated to specific work tasks, including access to community resources, referrals to services, and employment and education counseling (see Box 4.1). At times, worksite supervisors assumed responsibilities that were generally reserved for W-2 agency staff, such as helping participants address issues related to housing, transportation, and child care and making referrals to substance abuse counseling.

Worksite supervisors in the survey sample reported that they spent time mentoring CSJ participants because they see them daily and get to know them and their needs better than W-2 agency staff:

> The FEP sees the client once. I see the client every day. Usually, constant communication. FEPs don't have it. FEPs make decisions on one interview. For FEPs to do a good job, FEPs should be assigned to the workplace. [That puts them] in better position to know outside issues with clients. Clients either lie or are afraid; sometimes FEPs' decisions are very subjective. I feel my job, my real job, is to be an advocate for the client. I am put in a position where I know more then the FEP does.

Some worksite supervisors reported that — because of the difficulty they and the participants had in reaching and communicating with W-2 agency staff — they felt a sense of responsibility to take on an advocacy role for the participants concerning personal or W-2 administrative matters.

Not all worksite supervisors took on the added responsibilities of mentoring CSJ participants and providing support. Nearly 40 percent of supervisors in the sample reported that they did not provide support other than was related to specific work activities. While this decision might be driven by personal preferences, it could also be related to the size of the worksite. At a few worksites with more than 20 employees, designated supervisors barely knew the participants and could not answer any survey questions regarding participants' performance.

Supervisors' Attitudes and Management Styles

Just as CSJ participants reported feeling positive toward FEPs who showed concern and responded to their needs, participants across worksites expressed how much they appreciated it when supervisors also showed concern for their well-being and treated them with respect: "She

Box 4.1

Examples of Mentoring and Personal Support Provided by CSJ Worksite Supervisors

- About one-third of the worksite supervisors who were involved in mentoring reported giving CSJ participants advice, encouragement, or "a listening ear" regarding work or personal matters.

  [I help her with] personal issues, such as helping her with [her] burglary, and parent coaching. I have an open-door policy, so she can inform me about her needs.

  Yes, [I help] with personal issues. She can call me, her supervisor, at any time, and also at home.

- Nearly half (44 percent) of the supervisors who were involved in mentoring reported supplying information about accessing resources and helping to arrange referrals to social services. Considering that many worksites are nonprofit or community-based organizations that deal with social services and education, worksite supervisors have knowledge about resources and social services in the community that can assist CSJ participants and their families.

  I won't wait for the FEP. I'll call around. I tell them, the FEPs, what I've done. I help them find clothes and food. It's part of my job to address barriers.

  Yes,[I help with] placement to facilitate counseling for domestic abuse.

- Worksite supervisors who were involved in mentoring offered employment and education counseling to 24 percent of CSJ participants. This counseling included discussions on furthering their education and setting educational goals and advising the participants about work attitudes and attendance.

  Yes,[I tell her] look for a steady job, type résumés, and fax them out.

  Yes, I support her to get a college scholarship, fill out applications . . .

- And at least 21 percent of the advice that worksite supervisors offered to CSJ participants addressed a combination of issues.

  Yes, [I am] helping her brainstorm child care concerns, offering information on other jobs besides health care, and offering how to develop Spanish speaking skills.

  Yes, [I talk about] resources, where to go with problems, referrals for jobs, [and I] write letters to the FEP if there is a problem, letters of recommendation for a job.

talks to me and is very open — sometimes very supportive. She keeps me happy and cares about me and my well-being." Between 85 percent and 95 percent of CSJ participants agreed or strongly agreed that their worksite supervisors were really concerned about them, treated them fairly, and praised their work.[16]

A Good Attitude

When asked what they liked most about how their worksite supervisor dealt with them, nearly half the CSJ participants identified their supervisor's good attitude, including how the supervisor spoke to and treated them and the supervisor's willingness to understand and empathize with their position:

> She treats me [as an] equal and gives me respect. She recognizes when I'm doing good.
>
> She is very professional [and] gets on me when I am late. She is strict when she needs to be but is understanding.

Likewise, what participants described liking least about worksite supervisors was a negative attitude, especially when a supervisor talked down to or disrespected them. One participant said that she liked least "the way she [the supervisor] talks to me. She treats me like a child and like the gofer in the worksite." Another participant stated that her supervisor was "patronizing — talks to you like you are a little kid."

Communication Skills

Almost a third of the CSJ participants reported that what they liked most about worksite supervisors was their communication skills and advocacy. Several said that their supervisors were "good communicators" who motivated them and were not only supportive of their work but also helpful with personal issues:

> She's lovely. I talk with her about anything. She is a good listener and problem solver.
>
> He wants to make sure you have all your problems together — housing child care — but you don't do it on job time.

Just as participants reported that they liked supervisors who could speak with them openly, they did not like it when supervisors were unavailable: "She doesn't have time to talk to

[16]A related finding is that more than 90 percent of CSJ participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their supervisors criticized their work.

me when I want to see her." Another participant mentioned that her supervisor was "not as available as I would like."

Good Instruction

About 10 percent of the CSJ participants mentioned that what they liked most about their worksite supervisors was that they were good instructors:

> [The supervisors] explain things in a way you could understand them. They tell you when you are doing something wrong.
>
> She is real concerned for every student in the class. She'll be tough on you if she has to, but even if you screw up, she will be concerned about you.

Likewise, participants noticed when supervisors were not good instructors or did not give them enough to do. One participant reported not liking that the supervisor "doesn't give me the hands-on training that I need."

Mediating Between Worksite Rules and W-2 Agency Requirements

The worksite supervisors in this study reported tensions between the worksite rules and the W-2 agency requirements for administering the CSJ program, and they said that they needed to negotiate between the agency requirements and participants' needs. Some worksite supervisors felt as though participants had to respond to two sets of rules and bosses: the W-2 agency's and the worksite's. For instance, the agency tells the supervisors that the CSJ experience has to replicate a regular job. Yet, even though employees in a regular job need to use their own time to run errands and take care of personal matters, some FEPs scheduled meetings with participants during work time — and did not relate this to the supervisor, so the participants were caught between competing demands. As the supervisors put it:

> What we have experienced over time with all the agencies is that they require a participant to come in and miss [training at the CSJ worksite], so that perturbs me the most, because it slows their progress. Every month they have to meet with the FEPs or supportive services planners [SSPs] — that's three hours a month. If there are other problems with the bureaucracy, then they have to miss more hours. They just can't get up and leave a regular job, so why should they be able to leave training?
>
> The old CSJ person scheduled appointments for the participants during breaks. The new CSJ person doesn't schedule. Participants have to make their own appointments and miss work.

At times, such overlapping requirements caused tension for both participants and supervisors. The participants were caught between needing to go to the W-2 agency and feeling pressure from their supervisor to be at work. And since the worksite supervisors were not the participants' real, wage-paying employers, they were limited in how they could deal with such issues as attendance and motivation. Among the supervisors who were responsible for both CSJ participants and regular employees, 24 percent found it harder to deal with the CSJ participants regarding problems with attendance and punctuality. Some of these supervisors explained that the difficulties arose partly because the CSJ participants needed to answer to several individuals:

> It is much harder because of the chain of command. So many entities in the system they are working in, and there are loopholes. In a company, there is a clear chain of command in one place. Also, [the system] has not been held accountable to workplace standards in a long time.
>
> It is somewhat harder . . . there are other people she answers to at the agency.

Summary

The information presented in this chapter derives from surveys of worksite supervisors and those CSJ participants who attended their assigned work experience activity fairly regularly. In general, the CSJ participants valued the same things that most workers find important: interesting work that provides an opportunity to learn new skills and assume greater responsibility and supervisors who treat them with respect, help them learn their jobs, and communicate effectively. The survey also found that — depending on the nature of their work assignment — CSJ participants felt differently about the extent to which the work experience activity helped them use existing skills and learn new ones. Worksite supervisors played a central role in the administration of the CSJ program, mediating between worksite rules and W-2 agency requirements, training participants, and structuring the overall CSJ work experience.

Chapter 5 summarizes the lessons learned from this research into Wisconsin's CSJ program and offers recommendations that may assist all states in implementing a work experience program as part of their public assistance effort.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Community service jobs (CSJs) are the most common tier assignment in Wisconsin Works (W-2), both statewide and within Milwaukee County.[1] Implementing such a large-scale work experience program is complex, poses several administrative challenges, and requires substantial investments of time and effort from W-2 agency staff and from CSJ participants and worksite supervisors. The evolution seen over the initial years of this ambitious undertaking provides insights for W-2 agencies throughout Wisconsin — and for other states using or considering using CSJs as part of a public assistance program. This chapter explores four key lessons arising out of this experience, grounding them in a summation of findings from Milwaukee County's CSJ program.

Lesson 1: Identify the many tasks involved in administering a CSJ program, and clearly designate responsibility for each.

Smooth operation of a CSJ program involves creating an adequate number and variety of worksite opportunities, sharing information about available worksites with the staff who work directly with clients, assessing clients' characteristics and assigning them to appropriate worksites, communicating frequently with worksite supervisors and participants, monitoring participants' attendance and the quality of the worksite experience, and following up quickly to address problems that arise. Some of these tasks involve building relationships and strong communication with potential employers in the community; others, with staff within the administering agency; and still others, with worksite supervisors and participants. Given these various "communication links," it is important to identify them and to specify who is responsible for each and how the needed communication will occur. Someone who is focused primarily on one aspect of CSJ administration may not be in contact with key parties involved in other aspects of the program, and key tasks could go unattended.

The five local W-2 agencies in this study of Milwaukee County's CSJ program used various administrative structures to implement the CSJ tier and work experience activities, and some of the agencies shifted their practices as the program evolved. As a result, administrative tasks sometimes went uncovered, or multiple staff had partial responsibility for them — which meant that accountability was unclear and communication was unnecessarily complicated. Overlapping responsibilities and unclear accountability were more likely when the tasks of CSJ administration were dispersed across departments within a W-2 agency, rather than being coor-

[1]Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 summarizes the W-2 tier assignments.

dinated by one specific entity. If other administrative goals (such as continuity of contact with participants) or cost factors prevent creation of a CSJ department, then the agency must nevertheless find ways to clearly identify tasks and designate staff responsibilities.

Before implementing a large-scale CSJ program, agencies should examine how administrative responsibilities are allocated, coordinated, and monitored; the extent to which these tasks and needed information are centralized or dispersed across departments; and whether there are overlapping structures and responsibilities that lead to redundancies or ineffective communication.

Lesson 2: Work to achieve strong and consistent communication among the administering agency, the worksites, and the participants.

Strong administration of a CSJ program requires that the three key parties — the administering agency, the worksite supervisors, and the participants — share information in a timely manner about their expectations, responsibilities, emerging problems, and promising responses. This three-way communication is important but not simple to achieve in a program like W-2, in which (1) the financial and employment planners (FEPs, or case managers) provide the primary contact between the agency and participants; (2) the CSJ coordinator or worksite developer is the primary contact between the agency and the worksites; and (3) those participants who are active in the program are in most frequent contact with a worksite supervisor, who is not formally part of the administrative team.

The Link Between W-2 Agency and CSJ Worksites

The administrative complexity of administering Milwaukee County's CSJ program — in which each local W-2 agency has an array of CSJ worksites and contracts — highlights the need for effective coordination between worksites and their W-2 agency, especially as it relates to accurate monitoring of participants' attendance (discussed below) and record keeping, without which sanctioning errors can arise. W-2 agencies are expected to maintain close working relationships with their worksites, to ensure that the CSJ program is being implemented in a manner that accomplishes its goals. However, worksite supervisors in this study reported low to moderate levels of communication with W-2 agency staff regarding the goals of the CSJ program. Although worksite supervisors were offered some forms of assistance (which they generally found helpful), they would like the W-2 agencies to provide more assistance and information. They reported that they were either in regular contact with their W-2 agency or had infrequent contact, suggesting that some agencies or staff emphasized and maintained good communication while others did not. Overall, the worksite supervisors mentioned they would prefer more consistent contact and monitoring from their W-2 agency.

It is important for agencies that administer a CSJ program to provide clear guidelines and information to each worksite. This might be eased by developing a booklet or a checklist

that explains the goals of CSJs and gives advice on appropriate work assignments, structuring job responsibilities or training, completing time sheets, and supervising and monitoring participants' performance. The agency should also give worksite supervisors specific contact information to help them address questions or issues that may arise.

Frequent contact between the agency and the worksite supervisors is important, especially for new worksites or supervisors. Periodic meetings between agency staff and worksite supervisors may help resolve issues and keep each other up to date. Agency contact with the supervisor who is most directly involved with the CSJ participants may be most beneficial. This is especially important for assessing a client and developing an overall self-sufficiency plan, because worksite supervisors have knowledge about CSJ participants and program administration that may not be readily available to agency staff.

The Link Between W-2 Agency and CSJ Participants

W-2 agency staff — particularly the FEPs — play a critical role in CSJ participants' experiences. They explain the program and its requirements, assign participants to worksites, and serve as the participants' primary contact with the agency. As a result, CSJ participants' treatment in the W-2 program is strongly influenced by their interactions with FEPs.

The findings in this report and other related work highlight the importance of communication about program requirements. CSJ participants receive much of their information about the W-2 program from their FEP, and the initial intake and assessment meeting is especially important in this regard. But FEPs need to cover many topics and a great amount of information at this meeting, and they do it in a variety of ways. Thus, not all participants leave the initial meeting with a clear understanding of the W-2 program's requirements.

Information about program requirements should be presented several times, possibly through a videotape or clear and easy-to-use pamphlets (including contact information). Also, W-2 participants may need time to absorb the information and should be encouraged to ask questions or to call later if questions arise. Clients need access to FEPs or other agency staff in order to get clarification about program requirements and to have their questions answered.

CSJ participants especially valued communication and FEPs' responsiveness regarding worksite assignments. In interviews, they expressed gratitude for FEPs who understood their needs, considered their interests, and attempted to assign them to worksites that would benefit them; such treatment increased their satisfaction both with the FEP and with the W-2 agency. In contrast, CSJ participants who believed that their FEPs simply assigned them to any work experience without considering their backgrounds or future goals felt that their possibilities for skill-building and self-sufficiency had been limited.

Once CSJ participants have been assigned to work activities, it is important for the W-2 agency to stay informed about their performance and to clearly understand the reasons for any nonparticipation. Many CSJ participants in this study were trying to juggle worksite requirements and other mandated activities at several locations, while also coordinating transportation and child care arrangements and other responsibilities of parenting. It is important that the W-2 agency understand and address any such factors that affect participation. Doing this well requires frequent communication with participants and worksite supervisors, some of whom in this study noted the difficulty of reaching agency staff when problems arose. Anything that makes the staff more accessible — improved telephone and message systems, backup staff, scheduled office hours — is valuable and important.

The Link Between CSJ Participants and Worksite Supervisors

As discussed in Chapter 4, worksite supervisors play a central role in the administration of the CSJ program, navigating between worksite rules and agency requirements, training participants, and shaping the overall work experience. CSJ participants who are attending assigned work activities have a natural opportunity to share information with their supervisors, though contact and communication appear to be more limited at larger worksites. As noted about their relations with FEPs and other agency staff, the participants in this study valued worksite supervisors who were good listeners and who offered constructive guidance on job performance. Participants expressed appreciation for supervisors who treated them with respect, had a positive attitude, and were good communicators and instructors.

Many of Milwaukee County's worksite supervisors took on the role of mentoring CSJ participants on topics unrelated to specific work tasks. Some supervisors assumed this mentoring role because they saw participants daily and came to understand their needs better than W-2 agency staff. Again, however, this varied somewhat by worksite size, as some supervisors at large worksites barely knew the CSJ participants.

Agencies that are implementing work experience programs may want to formalize the mentoring process that developed informally at many smaller CSJ worksites in Milwaukee County. Worksite supervisors may be in an excellent position to provide mentoring, since they may be less intimidating to participants than case managers or employers. After spending time at the worksite, participants may view their supervisor as a trustworthy advisor who wants them to succeed in obtaining economic self-sufficiency.

In seeking to strengthen communication links between CSJ participants and their supervisors, agencies may also want to evaluate the impact of worksite size. This research has revealed, in general, that participants at larger worksites reported weaker communication with

supervisors and less mentoring from them. Large worksites might require special efforts to link participants with someone who can provide ongoing guidance and support.

Lesson 3: Align the characteristics of work experience activities with the program's goals.

CSJ activities can help fulfill various goals in a public assistance program, such as providing a venue to satisfy requirements in order to receive cash grants, strengthening participants' work habits, building a work history to support future job searches, and building participants' academic and vocational skills. It is also possible that a program's goals may change over time as the policy emphasis, economy, or participants' characteristics change. One key finding from this study is that work experience and CSJ activities can be structured in a variety of ways; the range seen in Milwaukee County is probably greater than is often recognized. Because different goals might call for activities that have different characteristics, it is important to align the CSJ and work experience activities with the program's goals. To the extent that CSJs are intended to build an array of skills (beyond general work habits) and/or to position participants to attain specific jobs, the CSJs must be structured to align with the program's objectives.

During this research, Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies developed a variety of worksites in which to place CSJ participants. The available worksites differed across the agencies (and even across FEPs within an agency) in terms of size, industry type, and work activities. Thus, not all CSJ participants were systematically considered for the full range of possible positions. Depending on agency options and the discretion of FEPs, participants were assigned to five categories of activities: (1) thrift store work, (2) office work/customer service, (3) care work (involving children or adults), (4) light industrial/housekeeping, and (5) vocational training.[2] The first four categories (labeled *work-only* in that they emphasize work habits) provided hands-on experience and, possibly, informal training but were without a formal training component. The last category, *vocational training,* provided a combination of hands-on experience and vocational or job skills training whereby participants received some formal certification or verification. Depending on where CSJ participants lived (and thus which W-2 agency was designated to serve their region), they had different likelihoods of obtaining a specific work experience.

Within W-2, participants who enter the CSJ tier can be assigned to other activities in addition to work experience, and these initial assignments evolve over time. Although work experience remained important throughout the period of this study, such activities as orientation

[2]The five categories are based on data collected for this research and are not meant to coincide with the data in Wisconsin's automated records system, CARES (short for "Client Assistance for Re-Employment and Economic Support").

and assessment, employment training, education, and soft skills increased substantially in importance. This evolution reflected changing practices by the Milwaukee County W-2 agencies as they gained experience operating the program. The evolution could also be a result of changes in the characteristics of W-2 applicants and the local economy and of a continuing debate within Wisconsin about the importance of skill-building (beyond the development of general work habits).

Compared with the CSJ participants in this study who had work-only assignments, the participants whose work experience activities included vocational training reported greater improvement in work habits and basic work skills (with the exception of office/clerical work), were given more responsibilities while at the worksite, expected to receive higher wages for future employment, and perceived that their work experience was preparing them for a job that would provide higher wages. However, only about a quarter of the study sample were placed in a work assignment that included vocational training, which suggests both that these assignments were not uniformly available in all W-2 agencies and were provided for CSJ participants who had certain characteristics and that there was the possibility of expanding the use of such placements if more of them could be developed.

The physical and social surroundings of a CSJ worksite setting and the nature of assigned tasks also varied greatly and were of particular importance to the overall work experience. Most participants valued learning new skills and training, engaging in meaningful work, and receiving mentoring and support from worksite supervisors and coworkers. But the aspect of work experience that participants reported receiving and valuing the most depended on their assigned activity. Most of the participants in vocational training valued learning new skills, while those in care work valued their daily tasks (which they found engaging) and those in thrift store work (who, in general, did not find their tasks engaging) valued the people around them.

This variety and the need to align the characteristics of work experience activities with the program's goals have several implications for CSJ administration both within W-2 and more broadly. Administrative procedures need to be flexible enough to allow local agencies to structure work experience in various ways, creatively mixing pure work experience with more formal skill-building, education, and training. There is evidence that skill-building in the context of work or closely linked to employment can be effective for adults who have had previous, unsatisfying experiences with formal education or training; so the effort to merge work and broader skill enhancement should be supported. Welfare agencies can develop CSJ assignments that integrate hands-on experience with more job skills or vocational training, especially ones that give formal verification of skills training and that can lead directly to employment. CSJ work experiences with a skill-building component can be developed for participants both with and without a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. To the extent that the CSJ work experience is seen as a vehicle to support participants' transitions

to specific jobs (rather than improving their work habits and building a work history), agencies should be attentive to selecting worksites that well match participants' backgrounds, interests, and objectives. To achieve this goal, the agencies must have an array of worksite activities from which to choose.

One way to support the development of a diverse pool of worksites would be to design record and tracking systems in ways that more precisely capture the characteristics of the worksite activities. Administrative data could clearly categorize the type of work experience that a client receives, so that administrators and policy evaluators could understand the mix of activities and the investment in skill-building that a client receives.

The variety of possible goals for work experience also calls for more complete monitoring of participants' worksite performance. During the period of this study, the only work habit or "skill" recorded was attendance. Routinely examining a wider array of outcomes related to skill-building would provide useful data. Linking this to more refined information about the nature of the work experience activity would create the potential for administrators to build a useful database on the associations between the types of work experience and participants' performance.

Agencies that implement CSJs could develop a worksite assessment tool that examines more than attendance. Factors to be monitored and evaluated could include the types of skill-building that CSJ worksites offer, the quality of their supervision and training, and, ultimately, the improvement of participants' skills. The features of worksite environments and information about participants' reactions to the worksites could be incorporated as part of the monitoring and evaluation and could be included in the database. The findings from such monitoring could be made available to agency staff who are developing future worksites and to worksite supervisors.

Lesson 4: Acknowledge that attendance in assigned activities is especially important in the context of a time-limited work experience program; monitor attendance carefully, and respond to problems quickly.

Milwaukee County's CSJ program had a substantial issue regarding attendance at worksites. Although the issue was implicitly acknowledged through reports on sanctioning rates (whereby benefits were reduced because participants did not meet program requirements), the extent of the problem became much clearer in this study as researchers attempted to locate CSJ participants at their worksites in order to administer a survey. Monitoring attendance and developing a timely response to problems are especially challenging in this case, given the multiple layers of administration at the W-2 agencies and CSJ worksites, changing caseworkers, and the constant development of new worksites. Time limits — either on specific components of a program, as in W-2, or on the overall use of public assistance — add urgency to the need for close monitoring of attendance and a quick response to underlying problems.

During the period of this study, there were some important shortcomings in attendance-monitoring practices. The various CSJ worksites recorded attendance differently and did not report information to the W-2 agencies consistently or in a timely manner. According to worksite supervisors, the problems arose partly because of different levels of instruction and timesheet assistance from the W-2 agencies. In the agencies that lacked a centralized CSJ department, more coordination was necessary among FEPs, worksite developers, worksite supervisors, and participants — thus increasing the chances of administrative error. The W-2 agencies also faced staffing issues. At times, only a few staff members were responsible for all CSJ participants and worksites, and they were unable to keep contacts and records current. In addition, the general problem of staff turnover meant that crucial expertise could be lost.

In the end, attendance issues were frustrating for all parties — for W-2 agency staff, because of the paperwork required for documentation and tracking; for worksite supervisors, because they could not anticipate attendance on any given day and had to spend additional time notifying W-2 agencies of nonparticipation; and for W-2 participants, because of the paperwork needed to receive a good-cause exemption and avoid sanctions (or the bureaucratic work that resulted if they were mistakenly sanctioned). Having an effective attendance-monitoring system, responding quickly to problems, and encouraging better attendance are essential for a well-run, large-scale work program.

With growing experience, Milwaukee County's W-2 agencies identified practices that they felt were effective in increasing attendance. First, quick follow-up and intervention can be helpful when a participant does not attend a worksite. Second, the worksite assignment itself affects participation; attendance is better at worksites that offer more skills training, especially skills linked to employment. Third, travel time affects participation, and efforts have been made to colocate educational activities, training, and work experience. Finally, for W-2 participants' with unusual family health problems and child care needs, the availability of quality child care and transportation are still major problems, suggesting the efficacy of efforts to provide assistance in transporting participants' children to school and child care facilities.

Efforts like these require an effective communication and feedback system for resolving attendance issues. First, the methods by which CSJ worksite supervisors record attendance need to be a clearly articulated; the W-2 agencies can provide training and information to the worksites regarding attendance. Second, the accuracy of administrative records needs to be monitored. This study found important inaccuracies in administrative records, and there was not a system in place where W-2 agency staff could easily access information on CSJ participants and worksites. Administrative reporting needs to have the capacity to collect more specific worksite information, or another management information system needs to be developed at the agency level, whereby information on CSJ participants and worksites can be accurately recorded, updated, and retrieved. Third, to generate more accurate information and lessen the administrative

burden, agencies need to focus on improving and streamlining how attendance information is collected from the worksites and recorded. Fourth, agencies need ways to access information on CSJ participants and their worksite performance easily, either through the administrative records system of the public assistance program or through a specially created database. Fifth, the procedures for tracking participants, for determining whether their participation has truly ended, and for closing cases when appropriate (but not prematurely) need to be clear and easy to follow. When such procedures are in place, they need to be adhered to, so that families who are not interested in accessing services do not remain in the caseload and unnecessarily use up their months of eligibility as allocated under the program's time limits.

Summary

Implementing a large-scale work experience program is a major effort that hinges on the clear articulation of goals to the administering agency's staff, to CSJ participants, and to worksite supervisors. Building effective and reliable methods of communication among these three groups is important, and so is the development of an effective system to monitor and evaluate not only attendance but also overall worksite performance and changes in participants' skill levels. At their best, CSJs can serve as a meaningful bridge between welfare agencies and regular employment. However, the optimal return from this programmatic strategy depends on a complex set of interactions among agency staff, CSJ participants, and worksite supervisors.

Glossary

CARES. Client Assistance for Re-Employment and Economic Support. Wisconsin's statewide automated record system; used in W-2 to establish eligibility and to record case management activities.

Case management follow-up (CMF). A case management category in the unsubsidized employment tier; includes employed individuals previously assigned to a subsidized employment tier, such as CSJ, trial job, or W-2T. Participants in this category do not receive a cash grant but are eligible for case management services, earned income credits, food stamps, medical assistance, child care, and job access loans.

Case management services (CMS). A case management category in the unsubsidized employment tier; includes individuals who are unemployed but capable of obtaining employment. Participants in this category do not receive a cash grant but are eligible for case management services, earned income credits, food stamps, medical assistance, child care, and job access loans.

Case management unsubsidized employment (CMU). A case management category in the unsubsidized employment tier; includes individuals working in unsubsidized employment. Participants in this category do not receive a cash grant but are eligible for case management services, earned income credits, food stamps, medical assistance, child care, and job access loans.

Community service job (CSJ). A W-2 employment position or tier for individuals who are not job-ready. A CSJ is intended to improve the employability of participants by providing work experience and training in the public and private sectors. Participants in this tier can receive a cash grant of $673 per month.

Custodial parent of an infant (CMC). A category in W-2 that allows the parent of an infant (up to 12 weeks old) to receive a monthly payment of $673 without being subject to any participation requirements.

Department of Workforce Development (DWD). The State of Wisconsin agency responsible for the overall administration of W-2.

Early entrants. Participants who enrolled in W-2 during the period of conversion from AFDC (from October 1997 through March 1998).

Employment Solutions of Milwaukee, Inc. One of five agencies selected to implement W-2 in Milwaukee County. Employment Solutions is a nonprofit organization that is a subsidiary of Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin. Employment Solutions provides W-2 services to participants in Regions 4 and 5.

Financial and employment planner (FEP). A case manager employed or contracted by a W-2 agency who provides eligibility determination, job-readiness screening, employability planning, and ongoing financial and employment case management services.

Late entrants. Participants who enrolled in W-2 during the second year of operations (from November 1998 though October 1999).

Maximus, Inc. One of five agencies selected to implement W-2 in Milwaukee County. Maximus is a private, for-profit firm that provides W-2 services to participants in Region 6.

Middle entrants. Participants who enrolled in W-2 during the remainder of the first year of operations (from April through October 1998).

Opportunities Industrialization Center of Greater Milwaukee, Inc. (OIC). One of five agencies selected to implement W-2 in Milwaukee County. A nonprofit, community-based organization that provides services to participants in Region 3.

Resource specialist. A W-2 agency employee or contracted employee who assesses an applicant's needs, performs initial referrals to service providers, diverts the individual to other resources, and evaluates the need for W-2 services.

Sanction. A financial penalty imposed on a CSJ or W-2T participant for failure to participate in assigned activities, without good cause. Cash benefits are reduced by $5.15 per hour for each hour of nonparticipation.

Supportive services planner (SSP). A county government employee who determines eligibility for W-2 supportive services, such as food stamps, medical assistance, and child care.

Tier. A W-2 employment position; see CSJ, trial job, unsubsidized employment, and W-2T.

Trial job. A W-2 employment position or tier designed to improve the employability of participants by providing work experience and training to assist them in moving to unsubsidized employment. The W-2 subsidy for a trial job is paid directly to the employer.

United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc. (UMOS). One of five agencies selected to implement W-2 in Milwaukee County. UMOS is a nonprofit, community-based organization that provides services to participants in Region 2.

Unsubsidized employment. Employment for which a W-2 agency provides no subsidy to the employer; includes self-employment and entrepreneurship. This highest tier, or rung, of the W-2 program includes three subcategories: CMF, CMS, and CMU.

W-2 Transition (W-2T). A W-2 employment position or tier designed for individuals who are not job-ready but tend to have long-term barriers to employment, such as incapacitation of self or child. This is the lowest rung on the W-2 employment ladder. Participants in this tier can receive a cash grant of $628 per month.

Wisconsin Works (W-2). Wisconsin's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program for families with dependent children.

YW Works. One of five agencies selected to implement W-2 in Milwaukee County. YW Works is a limited-liability, for-profit organization that provides services to participants in Region 1.

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Recent Publications on MDRC Projects

Note: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. With a few exceptions, this list includes reports published by MDRC since 1999. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site (www.mdrc.org), from which copies of MDRC's publications can also be downloaded.

Reforming Welfare and Making Work Pay

Next Generation Project

A collaboration among researchers at MDRC and several other leading research institutions focused on studying the effects of welfare, antipoverty, and employment policies on children and families.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Children: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Pamela Morris, Aletha Huston, Greg Duncan, Danielle Crosby, Johannes Bos.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Employment and Income: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos.

How Welfare and Work Policies for Parents Affect Adolescents: A Synthesis of Research. 2002. Lisa Gennetian, Greg Duncan, Virginia Knox, Wanda Vargas, Elizabeth Clark-Kauffman, Andrew London.

ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A multifaceted effort to assist states and localities in designing and implementing their welfare reform programs. The project includes a series of "how-to" guides, conferences, briefings, and customized, in-depth technical assistance.

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. 1997. Dan Bloom.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Business Partnerships: How to Involve Employers in Welfare Reform. 1998. Amy Brown, Maria Buck, Erik Skinner.

Promoting Participation: How to Increase Involvement in Welfare-to-Work Activities. 1999. Gayle Hamilton, Susan Scrivener.

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Steady Work and Better Jobs: How to Help Low-Income Parents Sustain Employment and Advance in the Workforce. 2000. Julie Strawn, Karin Martinson.

Beyond Work First: How to Help Hard-to-Employ Individuals Get Jobs and Succeed in the Workforce. 2001. Amy Brown.

Project on Devolution and Urban Change

A multiyear study in four major urban counties — Cuyahoga County, Ohio (which includes the city of Cleveland), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia — that examines how welfare reforms are being implemented and affect poor people, their neighborhoods, and the institutions that serve them.

Big Cities and Welfare Reform: Early Implementation and Ethnographic Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change. 1999. Janet Quint, Kathryn Edin, Maria Buck, Barbara Fink, Yolanda Padilla, Olis Simmons-Hewitt, Mary Valmont.

Food Security and Hunger in Poor, Mother-Headed Families in Four U.S. Cities. 2000. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

Assessing the Impact of Welfare Reform on Urban Communities: The Urban Change Project and Methodological Considerations. 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Johannes Bos, Robert Lalonde, Nandita Verma.

Post-TANF Food Stamp and Medicaid Benefits: Factors That Aid or Impede Their Receipt. 2001. Janet Quint, Rebecca Widom.

Social Service Organizations and Welfare Reform. 2001. Barbara Fink, Rebecca Widom.

Monitoring Outcomes for Cuyahoga County's Welfare Leavers: How Are They Faring? 2001. Nandita Verma, Claudia Coulton.

The Health of Poor Urban Women: Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change. 2001. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

Is Work Enough? The Experiences of Current and Former Welfare Mothers Who Work. 2001. Denise Polit, Rebecca Widom, Kathryn Edin, Stan Bowie, Andrew London, Ellen Scott, Abel Valenzuela.

Readying Welfare Recipients for Work: Lessons from Four Big Cities as They Implement Welfare Reform. 2002. Thomas Brock, Laura Nelson, Megan Reiter.

Welfare Reform in Cleveland: Implementation, Effects, and Experiences of Poor Families and Neighborhoods. 2002. Thomas Brock, Claudia Coulton, Andrew London, Denise Polit, Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Ellen Scott, Nandita Verma.

Comparing Outcomes for Los Angeles County's HUD-Assisted and Unassisted CalWORKs Leavers. 2003. Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

Monitoring Outcomes for Los Angeles County's Pre- and Post-CalWORKs Leavers: How Are They Faring? 2003. Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

Wisconsin Works

This study examines how Wisconsin's welfare-to-work program, one of the first to end welfare as an entitlement, is administered in Milwaukee.

Complaint Resolution in the Context of Welfare Reform: How W-2 Settles Disputes. 2001. Suzanne Lynn.

Exceptions to the Rule: The Implementation of 24-Month Time-Limit Extensions in W-2. 2001. Susan Gooden, Fred Doolittle.

Matching Applicants with Services: Initial Assessments in the Milwaukee County W-2 Program. 2001. Susan Gooden, Fred Doolittle, Ben Glispie.

Employment Retention and Advancement Project

Conceived and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), this demonstration project is aimed at testing various ways to help low-income people find, keep, and advance in jobs.

New Strategies to Promote Stable Employment and Career Progression: An Introduction to the Employment Retention and Advancement Project (HHS). 2002. Dan Bloom, Jacquelyn Anderson, Melissa Wavelet, Karen Gardiner, Michael Fishman.

Time Limits

Welfare Time Limits: State Policies, Implementation, and Effects on Families. 2002. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, Barbara Fink.

Leavers, Stayers, and Cyclers: An Analysis of the Welfare Caseload. 2002. Cynthia Miller.

Florida's Family Transition Program

An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Three-Year Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1999. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, James Kemple, Nandita Verma.

The Family Transition Program: Final Report on Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 2000. Dan Bloom, James Kemple, Pamela Morris, Susan Scrivener, Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

Welfare Time Limits: An Interim Report Card. 1999. Dan Bloom.

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

An evaluation of Connecticut's statewide time-limited welfare program, which includes financial work incentives and requirements to participate in employment-related services aimed at rapid job placement. This study provides some of the earliest information on the effects of time limits in major urban areas.

Connecticut Post-Time Limit Tracking Study: Six-Month Survey Results. 1999. Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Dan Bloom.

Jobs First: *Implementation and Early Impacts of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative*. 2000. Dan Bloom, Laura Melton, Charles Michalopoulos, Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

Connecticut's Jobs First Program: An Analysis of Welfare Leavers. 2000. Laura Melton, Dan Bloom.

Final Report on Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 2002. Dan Bloom, Susan Scrivener, Charles Michalopoulos, Pamela Morris, Richard Hendra, Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Johanna Walter.

Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

An evaluation of Vermont's statewide welfare reform program, which includes a work requirement after a certain period of welfare receipt, and financial work incentives.

Forty-Two-Month Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project. 1999. Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

WRP: Key Findings from the Forty-Two-Month Client Survey. 2000. Dan Bloom, Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

WRP: Final Report on Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project. 2002. Susan Scrivener, Richard Hendra, Cindy Redcross, Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter.

Financial Incentives

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's pilot welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000:

Volume 1: Effects on Adults. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Lisa Gennetian, Martey Dodoo, Jo Anna Hunter, Cindy Redcross.
Volume 2: Effects on Children. Lisa Gennetian, Cynthia Miller.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: A Summary of the Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Lisa Gennetian.

Final Report on the Implementation and Impacts of the Minnesota Family Investment Program in Ramsey County. 2000. Patricia Auspos, Cynthia Miller, Jo Anna Hunter.

New Hope Project

A test of a community-based, work-focused antipoverty program and welfare alternative operating in Milwaukee.

New Hope for People with Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1999. Johannes Bos, Aletha Huston, Robert Granger, Greg Duncan, Thomas Brock, Vonnie McLoyd.

Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients. Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

Does SSP Plus Increase Employment? The Effect of Adding Services to the Self-Sufficiency Project's Financial Incentives (SRDC). 1999. Gail Quets, Philip Robins, Elsie Pan, Charles Michalopoulos, David Card.

When Financial Work Incentives Pay for Themselves: Early Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study (SRDC). 1999. Charles Michalopoulos, Philip Robins, David Card.

The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects of a Financial Work Incentive on Employment and Income (SRDC). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, David Card, Lisa Gennetian, Kristen Harknett, Philip K. Robins.

The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects on Children of a Program That Increased Parental Employment and Income (SRDC). 2000. Pamela Morris, Charles Michalopoulos.

When Financial Incentives Pay for Themselves: Interim Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study (SRDC). 2001. Charles Michalopoulos, Tracey Hoy.

SSP Plus at 36 Months: Effects of Adding Employment Services to Financial Work Incentives (SRDC). 2001. Ying Lei, Charles Michalopoulos.

Making Work Pay: Final Report on the Self-Sufficiency Project for Long-Term Welfare Recipients (SRDC). 2002. Charles Michalopoulos, Doug Tattrie, Cynthia Miller, Philip Robins, Pamela Morris, David Gyarmati, Cindy Redcross, Kelly Foley, Reuben Ford.

Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Conceived and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with support from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), this is the largest-scale evaluation ever conducted of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Do Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs Affect the Well-Being of Children? A Synthesis of Child Research Conducted as Part of the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (HHS/ED). 2000. Gayle Hamilton.

Evaluating Alternative Welfare-to-Work Approaches: Two-Year Impacts for Eleven Programs (HHS/ED). 2000. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton, JoAnn Rock, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Amanda Schweder, Laura Storto.

Impacts on Young Children and Their Families Two Years After Enrollment: Findings from the Child Outcomes Study (HHS/ED). 2000. Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Kristin Moore, Suzanne LeMenestrel.

What Works Best for Whom: Impacts of 20 Welfare-to-Work Programs by Subgroup (HHS/ED). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Christine Schwartz.

Evaluating Two Approaches to Case Management: Implementation, Participation Patterns, Costs, and Three-Year Impacts of the Columbus Welfare-to-Work Program (HHS/ED). 2001. Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

How Effective Are Different Welfare-to-Work Approaches? Five-Year Adult and Child Impacts for Eleven Programs – Executive Summary (HHS/ED). 2001. Gayle Hamilton, Stephen Freedman, Lisa Gennetian, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter, Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Anna Gassman-Pines, Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Surjeet Ahluwalia, Jennifer Brooks.

Moving People from Welfare to Work: Lessons from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (HHS/ED). 2002. Gayle Hamilton.

Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program

An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: First-Year Findings on Participation Patterns and Impacts. 1999. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Final Report on a Work First Program in a Major Urban Center. 2000. Stephen Freedman, Jean Knab, Lisa Gennetian, David Navarro.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD). 1998. Robert Granger, Rachel Cytron.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

Center for Employment Training Replication

This study is testing whether the successful results for youth of a training program developed in San Jose can be replicated in 12 other sites around the country.

Evaluation of the Center for Employment Training Replication Sites: Interim Report (Berkeley Policy Associates). 2000. Stephen Walsh, Deana Goldsmith, Yasuyo Abe, Andrea Cann.

Focusing on Fathers

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood (Russell Sage Foundation). 1999. Earl Johnson, Ann Levine, Fred Doolittle.

Parenting and Providing: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Paternal Involvement. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cindy Redcross.

Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment. 2000. John M. Martinez, Cynthia Miller.

The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum. 2000. Eileen Hayes, with Kay Sherwood.

The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share. 2001. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox.

Career Advancement and Wage Progression

Opening Doors to Earning Credentials

An exploration of strategies for increasing low-wage workers' access to and completion of community college programs.

Opening Doors: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Low-Income Workers. 2001. Susan Golonka, Lisa Matus-Grossman.

Welfare Reform and Community Colleges: A Policy and Research Context. 2002. Thomas Brock, Lisa Matus-Grossman, Gayle Hamilton.

Opening Doors: Students' Perspectives on Juggling Work, Family, and College. 2002. Lisa Matus-Grossman, Susan Gooden.

Opening Doors: Supporting CalWORKs Students at California Community Colleges: An Exploratory Focus Group Study. 2002. Laura Nelson, Rogéair Purnell.

Education Reform

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Building Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Through Employer Partnerships. 1999. James Kemple, Susan Poglinco, Jason Snipes.

Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School. 2000. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Initial Transitions to Post-Secondary Education and Employment. 2001. James Kemple.

First Things First

This demonstration and research project looks at First Things First, a whole-school reform that combines a variety of best practices aimed at raising achievement and graduation rates in both urban and rural settings.

Scaling Up First Things First: Site Selection and the Planning Year. 2002. Janet Quint.

Closing Achievement Gaps

Conducted for the Council of the Great City Schools, this study identifies districtwide approaches to urban school reform that appear to raise overall student performance while reducing achievement gaps among racial groups.

Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement. 2002. Jason Snipes, Fred Doolittle, Corinne Herlihy.

Project GRAD

This evaluation examines Project GRAD, an education initiative targeted at urban schools and combining a number of proven or promising reforms.

Building the Foundation for Improved Student Performance: The Pre-Curricular Phase of Project GRAD Newark. 2000. Sandra Ham, Fred Doolittle, Glee Ivory Holton.

Accelerated Schools

This study examines the implementation and impacts on achievement of the Accelerated Schools model, a whole-school reform targeted at at-risk students.

Evaluating the Accelerated Schools Approach: A Look at Early Implementation and Impacts on Student Achievement in Eight Elementary Schools. 2001. Howard Bloom, Sandra Ham, Laura Melton, Julienne O'Brien.

Extended-Service Schools Initiative

Conducted in partnership with Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), this evaluation of after-school programs operated as part of the Extended-Service Schools Initiative examines the programs' implementation, quality, cost, and effects on students.

Multiple Choices After School: Findings from the Extended-Service Schools Initiative (P/PV). 2002. Jean Baldwin Grossman, Marilyn Price, Veronica Fellerath, Linda Jucovy, Lauren Kotloff, Rebecca Raley, Karen Walker.

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

Equity 2000

Equity 2000 is a nationwide initiative sponsored by the College Board to improve low-income students' access to college. The MDRC paper examines the implementation of Equity 2000 in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Getting to the Right Algebra: The Equity 2000 Initiative in Milwaukee Public Schools. 1999. Sandra Ham, Erica Walker.

Employment and Community Initiatives

Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multisite effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

Mobilizing Public Housing Communities for Work: Origins and Early Accomplishments of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. James Riccio.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site: An Early Look at Program Implementation. 2000. Edited by Susan Philipson Bloom with Susan Blank.

Building New Partnerships for Employment: Collaboration Among Agencies and Public Housing Residents in the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 2001. Linda Kato, James Riccio.

Making Work Pay for Public Housing Residents: Financial-Incentive Designs at Six Jobs-Plus Demonstration Sites. 2002. Cynthia Miller, James Riccio.

The Special Challenges of Offering Employment Programs in Culturally Diverse Communities: The Jobs-Plus Experience in Public Housing Developments. 2002. Linda Kato.

The Employment Experiences of Public Housing Residents: Findings from the Jobs-Plus Baseline Survey. 2002. John Martinez.

Children in Public Housing Developments: An Examination of the Children at the Beginning of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 2002. Pamela Morris, Stephanie Jones.

Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site: Key Features of Mature Employment Programs in Seven Public Housing Communities. 2003. Linda Kato.

Staying or Leaving: Lessons from Jobs-Plus About the Mobility of Public Housing Residents and Implications for Place-Based Initiatives. 2003. Nandita Verma.

Neighborhood Jobs Initiative

An initiative to increase employment in a number of low-income communities.

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: An Early Report on the Vision and Challenges of Bringing an Employment Focus to a Community-Building Initiative. 2001. Frieda Molina, Laura Nelson.

Structures of Opportunity: Developing the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative in Fort Worth, Texas. 2002. Tony Proscio.

Final Report on the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: Lessons and Implications for Future Community Employment Initiatives. 2003. Frieda Molina, Craig Howard.

Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

Designing and Administering a Wage-Paying Community Service Employment Program Under TANF: Some Considerations and Choices. 1999. Kay Sherwood.

San Francisco Works: Toward an Employer-Led Approach to Welfare Reform and Workforce Development. 2000. Steven Bliss.

Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of unemployment insurance.

Testing a Re-Employment Incentive for Displaced Workers: The Earnings Supplement Project. 1999. Howard Bloom, Saul Schwartz, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Suk-Won Lee.

MDRC Working Papers on Research Methodology

A series of papers that explore alternative methods of examining the implementation and impacts of programs and policies.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Estimating Program Impacts on Student Achievement Using "Short" Interrupted Time Series. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Using Cluster Random Assignment to Measure Program Impacts: Statistical Implications for the Evaluation of Education Programs. 1999. Howard Bloom, Johannes Bos, Suk-Won Lee.

The Politics of Random Assignment: Implementing Studies and Impacting Policy. 2000. Judith Gueron.

Assessing the Impact of Welfare Reform on Urban Communities: The Urban Change Project and Methodological Considerations. 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Joannes Bos, Robert Lalonde, Nandita Verma.

Measuring the Impacts of Whole School Reforms: Methodological Lessons from an Evaluation of Accelerated Schools. 2001. Howard Bloom.

A Meta-Analysis of Government Sponsored Training Programs. 2001. David Greenberg, Charles Michalopoulos, Philip Robins.

Modeling the Performance of Welfare-to-Work Programs: The Effects of Program Management and Services, Economic Environment, and Client Characteristics. 2001. Howard Bloom, Carolyn Hill, James Riccio.

A Regression-Based Strategy for Defining Subgroups in a Social Experiment. 2001. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

Explaining Variation in the Effects of Welfare-to-Work Programs. 2001. David Greenberg, Robert Meyer, Charles Michalopoulos, Michael Wiseman.

Extending the Reach of Randomized Social Experiments: New Directions in Evaluations of American Welfare-to-Work and Employment Initiatives. 2001. James Riccio, Howard Bloom.

Can Nonexperimental Comparison Group Methods Match the Findings from a Random Assignment Evaluation of Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs? 2002. Howard Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos, Carolyn Hill, Ying Lei.

Using Instrumental Variables Analysis to Learn More from Social Policy Experiments. 2002. Lisa Gennetian, Johannes Bos, Pamela Morris.

Using Place-Based Random Assignment and Comparative Interrupted Time-Series Analysis to Evaluate the Jobs-Plus Employment Program for Public Housing Residents. 2002. Howard Bloom, James Riccio

Intensive Qualitative Research Challenges, Best Uses, and Opportunities. 2003. Alissa Gardenhire, Laura Nelson

About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and Oakland, California.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods to determine a program's effects, including large-scale studies, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.