

**The Employment Retention
and Advancement Project**

Results from the South Carolina ERA Site

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Executive Summary

This report presents evidence on the implementation and effectiveness of a program in South Carolina that aimed to help former recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) obtain jobs, work steadily, and advance in the labor market. The program operated as part of the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) project, which is testing 15 programs across the country. The ERA project was conceived and funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and is also supported by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The project is being conducted by MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, under contract to HHS.

Most of the results presented in this report are based on the year after individuals entered the study; a few are based on two years of follow-up. The results include the program's effect on employment rates and stability, earnings, and advancement in the labor market. These interim results are important but are not the final word on the program, as MDRC will continue to track employment outcomes for the study's participants.

The ERA Project

Although much is known about effective strategies to help welfare recipients and other disadvantaged groups find jobs, little is known about how to help them and other low-wage workers keep jobs or advance in the labor market. Previously studied postemployment programs were not found to improve participants' outcomes. The ERA project was designed to build on past efforts and identify and test innovative programs designed to promote employment stability and wage progression among welfare recipients or other low-income groups. From 2000 to 2003, a total of 15 ERA experiments were implemented in eight states, including South Carolina.

The design of the evaluation is similar in most of the project's sites. Individuals who meet the ERA eligibility criteria, which vary by site, are assigned, at random, to a program group, called the ERA group, or to a control group. Members of the ERA group are recruited for (and, in some sites, are required to participate in) the ERA program, while those in the control group are not eligible for ERA services but can access other services and supports available in the community. MDRC is tracking both research groups over time. The random assignment process ensured that the two groups were comparable when they entered the study; thus, any

differences between them that emerge over time — for example, in employment rates or average earnings — are attributable to the ERA program.¹

South Carolina's ERA Program

South Carolina's ERA program, called "Moving Up," operated between September 2001 and April 2005 and was developed by the state's Department of Social Services (DSS) in response to trends in the state's welfare caseload and low-income working population. As in most states, in South Carolina, the welfare caseload decreased dramatically in the 1990s. This was, in part, a result of the state's short time limit on welfare — most families cannot receive TANF for more than 2 years in a 10-year period — and a tough sanctioning policy in which a family's grant can be closed if the parent does not comply with program requirements. In the late 1990s, South Carolina conducted research showing that, like welfare leavers across the country, some leavers in the state were not working; many were working but not steadily; and others were stuck in low-wage jobs. In an effort to help former recipients succeed in the labor market, state officials decided to reach out to them and offer support and services. They chose to target all welfare leavers, so the program was designed to provide services to those who were not working as well as to those who were working but could use help sustaining work or moving up.

DSS chose to operate the ERA program in the Pee Dee Region, in the northeast part of South Carolina. This largely rural region encompasses six counties: Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marion, and Marlboro. The state chose this area because it is the most economically disadvantaged region in the state and because the DSS county directors there had experience collaborating on prior efforts.

The Moving Up program targeted people who had left the TANF rolls in the Pee Dee Region, for any reason, between October 1997 and December 2000 and who did not return to the rolls. Each month from September 2001 to January 2003, using the state's TANF database, 100 individuals were randomly selected from this eligible group to be in the site's ERA group, and another 100 were randomly selected to serve as the study's control group. Each of the ERA group members was assigned to one of 10 case managers in the counties, who then attempted to locate the individuals and engage them in the program. The control group members were not recruited or eligible for the ERA program, but they could participate in other programs available in the community. The sample analyzed for this report (the "report sample") includes the 2,864

¹For more information on the ERA project, see Bloom, Anderson, Wavelet, Gardiner, and Fishman, *New Strategies to Promote Stable Employment and Career Progression: An Introduction to the Employment Retention and Advancement Project* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). For early results from four sites, including South Carolina, see Bloom, Hendra, Martinson, and Scrivener, *The Employment Retention and Advancement Project: Early Results from Four Sites* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

individuals who were randomly assigned from September 2001 to December 2002. This represents 94 percent of the site's full research sample.²

The sample includes a diverse pool of TANF leavers. The length of time between the point that sample members left welfare and the point that they entered the study ranges from nine months to just over five years; almost three-fourths (72 percent) of the report sample had been off welfare for two and a half years or longer. They left for various reasons: 15 percent did so because they had reached the 24-month time limit; 19 percent had been sanctioned; and 40 percent had begun to earn too much to qualify for benefits. The rest of the sample left for other reasons, including failing to provide necessary information for benefit redetermination. About half of the research sample members were working when they entered the study, and half were not. The vast majority are women, and nearly four out of five are African-American.

Moving Up services varied depending on the participants' needs, but the core of the program was one-on-one case management. Staff, called "career consultants," worked with participants to understand their employment goals and develop an employment plan. Typically, participants who were not working received assistance preparing for and searching for a job, and those who were working received help staying in their job or moving up. Career consultants provided or connected participants with a range of services, including one-on-one job search assistance, job search classes, short-term vocational training, and support services, such as transportation assistance. The program provided modest financial incentives to encourage and reward program engagement and employment achievements.

Program funding varied over time. When the study began, Moving Up was fully funded. Over time, South Carolina's budget situation worsened, leading to funding cuts in many programs, including Moving Up. Career consultants remained on the job, but — for a period from late 2002 through summer 2003 — most counties froze or limited spending on Moving Up's financial incentives, education and training tuition payment, transportation assistance, and some other services.

Key Findings on Program Implementation

This section summarizes the report's findings on how Moving Up was implemented and on sample members' participation in the program and other employment-related services. The findings are based on field research, a "time study" of career consultants, automated pro-

²Sample members who entered the study in January 2003 are not included in this report because less than one year of earnings data were available for them when the analyses for this report were conducted. Some individuals who had returned to the TANF rolls after December 2000 were erroneously selected for the sample; those individuals were dropped from both research groups and are not included in the analysis.

The Employment Retention and Advancement Project

Table ES.1

Summary of the ERA Program's Impacts

South Carolina

Outcome	ERA Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
Ever employed ^a (%)	68.5	67.8	0.6	0.64
Average quarterly employment (%)	55.1	54.2	0.9	0.43
Employed 4 consecutive quarters (%)	40.2	40.2	0.1	0.96
Earnings (\$)	6,532	6,743	-211	0.29
Earned over \$10,000 (%)	28.1	28.8	-0.7	0.58
Ever received TANF (%)	7.6	7.2	0.3	0.74
Amount of TANF received (\$)	62	62	0	0.98
Ever received food stamps (%)	62.6	61.9	0.7	0.58
Amount of food stamps received (\$)	1,856	1,904	-49	0.33
Total measured income ^b (\$)	8,450	8,710	-260	0.18
Sample size (total = 2,864)	1,421	1,443		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from UI, TANF, and food stamps administrative records from the State of South Carolina and UI data from the State of North Carolina.

NOTES: ^aThis table includes only employment and earnings in jobs covered by the North Carolina and South Carolina unemployment insurance (UI) programs. It does not include employment outside North Carolina and South Carolina or in jobs not covered by UI (for example, "off the books" jobs, some agricultural jobs, and federal government jobs.)

^bThis measure represents the sum of UI earnings, TANF, and food stamps.

Estimates were regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics of sample members.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between outcomes for the program and control groups.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: * = 10 percent; ** = 5 percent; and *** = 1 percent.

Dollar averages include zero values for sample members who were not employed or were not receiving TANF or food stamps.

in all four quarters. They earned an average of about \$6,700. This average includes all control group members — both those who worked during the follow-up period and those who did not. Employed control group members earned an average of about \$9,900 during the year (not shown in the table). Just over one-fourth (29 percent) of the control group earned more than \$10,000.

Chapter 1

Introduction

To set the stage for the rest of the report, this chapter first provides an overview of the national Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) project, of which South Carolina's ERA program is a part. It then describes South Carolina's ERA program, including the environment in which it was implemented and the program's target population. The chapter concludes by describing the ERA evaluation in South Carolina and highlighting the contents of the remaining chapters.

Overview of the National ERA Project

For over a decade, policymakers and program operators have struggled to learn what kinds of services, supports, and incentives are best able to help low-income working parents retain steady employment and move up to better jobs. This issue has assumed even greater urgency in the wake of the 1990s welfare reforms, which made long-term welfare receipt much less feasible for families. Despite many efforts, scant evidence exists about effective strategies to promote employment retention and advancement. Previously evaluated programs that were aimed at improving retention or advancement — notably, the Post-Employment Services Demonstration (PESD), a four-site project that tested programs providing follow-up case management to welfare recipients who found jobs — generally failed to improve employment outcomes.

The Employment Retention and Advancement project was designed to improve on past efforts in this area by identifying and testing innovative models designed to promote employment stability and wage progression among welfare recipients and other low-income groups. The project began in 1998, when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued planning grants to 13 states to develop new programs. The following year, HHS selected MDRC to conduct an evaluation of the ERA programs.¹ From 2000 to 2003, MDRC and its subcontractor, The Lewin Group, worked closely with the states that had received planning grants, and with several other states, to mount tests of ERA programs. MDRC, Lewin, and Cygnet Associates also provided extensive technical assistance to some of the states and program operators, since most were starting the project from scratch, with no proven models on which to build.

Ultimately, a total of 15 ERA experiments were implemented in eight states, including South Carolina. Almost all the programs target current or former recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) — the cash welfare program that mainly serves single mothers and their children — but the program models are very diverse. One group of programs targets

¹The U.S. Department of Labor has also provided funding to support the ERA project.

low-wage workers and focuses on advancement. Another group targets individuals who are considered “hard to employ” and primarily aims to place them in stable jobs. Finally, a third group of programs has mixed goals and targets a diverse set of populations, including former TANF recipients, TANF applicants, and low-wage workers in particular firms. Some of these programs initiate services before individuals go to work, while others begin services after employment. Appendix Table A.1 describes each of the ERA programs and identifies its goals and target populations.

The evaluation design is similar in most of the sites. Individuals who meet ERA eligibility criteria (which vary from site to site) are assigned, at random, to the program group — also called the “ERA group” — or to the control group. Members of the ERA group are recruited for the ERA program (and, in some sites, are required to participate in it), whereas members of the control group are not eligible for ERA services. The extent and nature of the services and supports available to the control group vary from site to site. The random assignment process ensures that any differences in outcomes that emerge between the two research groups during the follow-up period can be confidently attributed to the ERA program, rather than to differences in the characteristics of the people in the groups.

The South Carolina ERA Program: Moving Up

Origins and Goals of the South Carolina ERA Program

South Carolina’s ERA program, called “Moving Up,” operated in six largely rural counties in the Pee Dee Region, in the northeastern part of the state. This mixed-goal program operated from September 2001 through April 2005, and it provided both pre- and postemployment services to former TANF recipients; the program included work placement, employment stabilization, and advancement services.²

Moving Up was developed in response to trends in the state’s TANF caseload and working-poor population. As in most states, South Carolina’s TANF caseload decreased dramatically in the 1990s. Between 1993 and 1998, for example, the number of TANF recipients dropped by more than half. The decrease resulted in part from the state’s aggressive welfare reform program, Family Independence. Instituted in 1995, this program imposes a short time limit on benefit receipt and includes tough penalties for noncompliance with program rules. Specifically, most of South Carolina’s TANF recipients are limited to no more than 24 months of assistance in a 10-year period and to no more than 60 months in their lifetime.³ Recipients who do not meet the Family Independence work and training requirements can have their bene-

²The state operated a pilot program for about 250 participants from June through August 2001.

³South Carolina Department of Social Services, Office of Family Assistance, 2000-2001.

fits discontinued, which is called a “full-family sanction.”⁴ Early in the ERA evaluation’s study period, South Carolina had one of the highest sanctioning rates in the country.⁵ Later, sanctioning rates dropped substantially, as the state began to use sanctions as a last resort. The cash grant amount of \$201 for a family of three — one of the lowest grants in the country — is often not a strong enough incentive to motivate individuals who need help to comply with program requirements and “cure” their sanctions.⁶

In the late 1990s, South Carolina conducted research to understand the economic and labor market status of individuals who had left TANF. State policymakers were particularly concerned about those who had left because of time limits or sanctioning. The South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) expected that many current and former TANF clients who did become employed would lose their first jobs, as well as subsequent jobs, as they dealt with barriers to work and started to develop “labor force attachment.”⁷ DSS expected that, whether working or not, most of these long-term TANF leavers were not doing well economically.

As anticipated, it was found that — like TANF leavers across the nation — some leavers in South Carolina were not working; many were working but not steadily; and others were stuck in low-wage jobs. Three years after leaving TANF between October 1998 and March 1999, only 55 percent were employed. Of those who were employed and still not receiving cash assistance after three years, approximately 60 percent earned \$1,250 or less a month — just under the 2002 federal poverty level of \$15,020 per year (or approximately \$1,252 per month) for a family of three.⁸ Earnings varied, however, depending on the reason for leaving TANF. A substantial proportion — about one-third — of those who had left because of sanctions or time limits had monthly earnings of only \$750 or less. Of those who were unemployed and still not receiving cash assistance after three years, only about half (55 percent) had said that they had worked at some point during the past 12 months.⁹

Based on these findings, DSS decided to reach out to former TANF recipients and develop an ERA program to help them succeed in the labor market. The Lewin Group and MDRC provided technical assistance to the state as it developed its program plans. Because of DSS’s interest in targeting all TANF leavers, the program had multiple goals: to provide services to people who were *not* working, in order to help them obtain jobs, and to provide services to people who *were* working, in order to help them sustain work and move up in the labor market.

⁴South Carolina Department of Social Services, Office of Family Assistance, 2000-2001.

⁵Goldberg and Schott, 2000.

⁶Edelhoch, Liu, and Martin, 2000. The state’s TANF grant for a family of three increased to \$241 in October 2004, after the period covered in this report.

⁷Edelhoch, Liu, and Martin, 2000.

⁸Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, 2002.

⁹Richardson, Shoenfeld, LaFever, and Jackson, 2002.

The South Carolina ERA Model

South Carolina's ERA program, Moving Up, was a mixed-goals program, providing both pre- and postemployment services. The program targeted former TANF recipients who had stopped receiving cash assistance between October 1997 and December 2000 for any reason and who had never returned to TANF.¹⁰ Although other programs in the national ERA evaluation have also targeted TANF leavers (see Appendix Table A.1), Moving Up was the only program that focused on long-term leavers. From the pool of eligible TANF leavers in South Carolina, individuals were assigned at random to either the ERA group or the control group. (The random assignment process is described further below.) Those who were assigned to the ERA group were contacted about participating in Moving Up, and they did so on a voluntary basis.

The key feature of Moving Up was individualized, one-on-one case management services provided by a career consultant. Learning from postemployment case management evaluations like PESD, Moving Up did not provide a uniform level of services to all participants but, instead, attempted to target services based on an individual's specific needs. In addition, the program's mixed-goal approach of providing both pre- and postemployment services enabled career consultants to work with all participants and to form relationships immediately, rather than waiting to engage individuals after they found jobs, as PESD case managers did.¹¹ Career consultants provided services themselves and also referred participants to other providers.

Depending on participants' needs, program activities could include counseling on career goals and workforce readiness, job search assistance, short-term education or training, child care and transportation assistance, or mental health and other support services. Because participation in these activities was voluntary, Moving Up offered modest incentives to keep participants engaged in the program; cash rewards or gift certificates were given for such benchmarks as finding a job, holding a job, getting a promotion, or completing an education or training activity. (Chapter 2 provides more detail about the program.)

Characteristics of the South Carolina ERA Site and Its External Environment

Moving Up operated in the six predominantly rural counties that make up South Carolina's Pee Dee Region: Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marion, and Marlboro. The state chose this region for the ERA program because it is the most economically disadvantaged area in the state and because the DSS county directors there had experience collaborating on prior efforts.

¹⁰At intake, ERA group members' income levels were assessed, and very few had income above 250 percent of the federal poverty threshold that was originally set as a criterion for selecting sample members.

¹¹Rangarajan and Novak, 1999.

As illustrated in Table 1.1, the populations in the six counties are relatively small. With about 128,000 inhabitants in 2003, Florence County had a significantly larger population than the others. Unlike its more rural counterparts, Florence County is not as isolated geographically, and it has a small metropolitan center that has benefited from job increases in the health service industry. Even there, however, nearly half the population live in rural areas. Much like the other counties, Florence County is large, and its population is spread out. As a result, it and the neighboring counties are subject to many of the problems that prevent the development of a stronger local economy, such as geographical isolation and the lack of or inadequate public transportation.

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Table 1.1

**Labor Force Characteristics of the Pee Dee Region, by County
South Carolina**

County/State	Population Size		Labor Force Size		Unemployment Rate (%)		Per Capita Income (\$)
	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001
Chesterfield County	43,136	43,251	20,432	22,469	7.8	10.4	19,972
Darlington County	67,656	67,956	30,086	33,847	6.5	8.4	21,880
Dillon County	30,907	31,027	13,380	14,555	10.8	11.0	18,033
Florence County	126,310	128,335	62,592	72,647	5.2	7.2	25,742
Marion County	35,220	35,113	14,619	15,901	15.4	15.9	18,287
Marlboro County	28,707	28,411	11,458	13,517	12.1	16.9	17,418
South Carolina	4,062,125	4,147,152	2,015,600	2,002,520	4.8	6.8	24,840

SOURCE: South Carolina Employment Security Commission, 2004.

NOTE: Unemployment rates are unadjusted.

When Moving Up began in 2001, the United States was in an economic recession. During this time, two of South Carolina's largest industries — manufacturing and trade (in particular, retail trade) — experienced a trend of job losses.¹² The Pee Dee Region had relied heavily on the manufacturing industry for jobs, with 20 percent to 40 percent of the population working

¹²South Carolina Employment Security Commission, 2001.

for manufacturers.¹³ The loss of these jobs had a severe effect on the region's economy, and, throughout the follow-up period for this report, job recovery remained slower than the recovery of the national economy.¹⁴ As a result, the Pee Dee Region was not able to fully meet the needs of its growing labor force, and unemployment rates increased in all six counties, some of which have consistently ranked in the top 10 of South Carolina's 46 counties for having the highest unemployment rates (often led by Marion County) and the lowest per capita income. County-specific characteristics are presented in Table 1.1.

During this same period, jobs that were lost in manufacturing and trade have slowly been offset by employment gains across the state in the industries of government, education and health, and leisure and hospitality (which is often seasonal). Although the Pee Dee Region has seen job development in these growth sectors, many of the largest employers (in order of total employment) in food stores/services, paper and allied products, textile mill products, and transportation equipment continue to lose jobs and are not projected to be growth industries.¹⁵

According to U.S. Bureau of the Census data for 2000 (presented in Table 1.2), the Pee Dee counties have relatively high rates of poverty. In 1999, the county rates ranged from 16 percent to 24 percent, compared with a state rate of 14 percent and a national rate of 12 percent.

The South Carolina ERA Target Population

Table 1.3 shows selected characteristics of ERA program and control group members at the point that they entered the study. As noted previously, the sample members left TANF between October 1997 and December 2000 and did not return to the rolls prior to entering the study. As the table shows, the majority (72 percent) had been off TANF at least two and a half years at the point of random assignment, which, for the sample in this report, occurred between September 2001 and December 2002. As discussed below, each month, 100 ERA group members and 100 control group members were selected. Thus, sample members had left TANF between nine months and just over five years before entering the study. Figure 1.1 illustrates this timing. For example, Client B left TANF in December 2000, the last month of the target period, and was randomly assigned in September 2001, the first month of random assignment; this individual had been off TANF for nine months before entering the study. At the other extreme, Client A left TANF in October 1997, the first month of the study's target period, and did not enter the study until December 2002, the last month of random assignment; this individual had been off TANF for five years and three months before entering the study.

¹³South Carolina Budget and Control Board, Office of Research and Statistics, 2002-2005.

¹⁴DuPlessis, 2004.

¹⁵South Carolina Employment Security Commission, 2004.

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Table 1.2

**Comparison of Percentage of Population Living Below
Federal Poverty Level in 1999**

South Carolina

	Individuals Living Below Poverty Level (%)	Children Under 18 Living Below Poverty Level (%)
United States	12.4	16.6
South Carolina	14.1	18.8
Chesterfield County	20.3	25.0
Darlington County	20.3	27.0
Dillon County	24.2	33.4
Florence County	16.4	22.7
Marion County	23.2	33.6
Marlboro County	21.7	29.4

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2000 census data.

As Table 1.3 shows, sample members left TANF for a variety of reasons. The most common reason — accounting for 40 percent of the sample — was that the recipient began to earn more than the TANF eligibility threshold. Another 19 percent of the sample left the TANF rolls because they did not comply with work or training requirements and were sanctioned, and 15 percent reached the cash assistance time limit. Almost all the sample members in South Carolina are women (not shown in the table) and are black (79 percent), and just under half (45 percent) do not have a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.¹⁶

¹⁶The proportion of sample members who had a high school diploma or GED certificate was estimated using educational attainment data in administrative records. Individuals with 12 or more years of education were assumed to have a high school credential.

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Table 1.3

Selected Characteristics of Sample Members

South Carolina

Characteristic	Full Sample
Average age (years)	31.8
Race/ethnicity (%)	
Hispanic	0.4
Black, non-Hispanic	78.5
White, non-Hispanic	20.4
Other	0.7
Number of children ^a (%)	
0	1.1
1	27.4
2	32.9
3 or more	38.7
Age of youngest child ^a (%)	
2 or under	18.3
3 to 5	33.0
6 or over	48.7
No high school diploma or GED ^{a, b} (%)	44.5
Employed ^c (%)	
In year before random assignment	67.0
In quarter before random assignment	52.4
Received TANF for 2 years or more ^d (%)	27.7
Time off welfare prior to random assignment (%)	
Less than 2 1/2 years	28.2
2 1/2 years or more	71.8
Reason for TANF case closure (%)	
Had earnings above eligibility threshold	40.4
Sanctioned	19.4
Reached time limit	15.3
Moved out of South Carolina	3.4
Did not complete application	6.8
Other ^e	14.7
Sample size	2,864

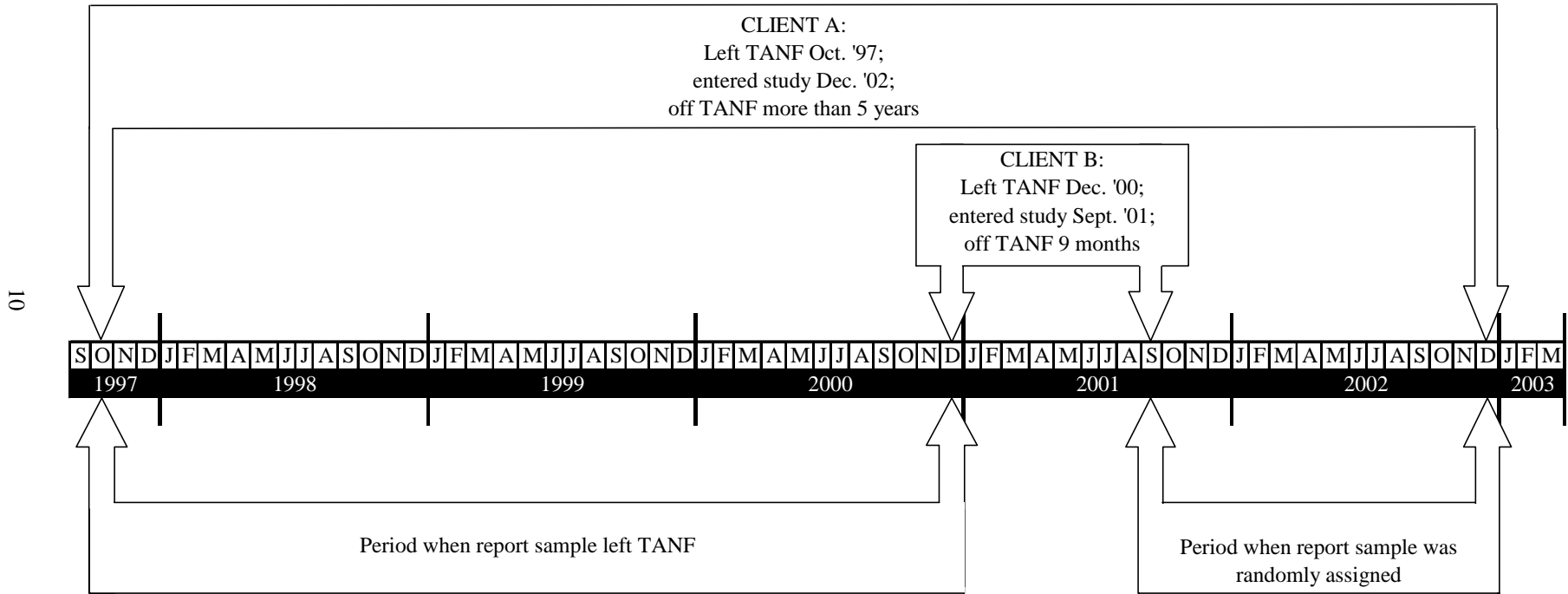
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Figure 1.1

Examples of Duration Off TANF, Report Sample Members

South Carolina



- **Participation.** As a voluntary program, did Moving Up succeed in engaging a substantial proportion of individuals in services? What types of services did people receive? To what extent did the program increase service levels above the levels that would “normally” be received, as represented by the control group’s behavior?
- **Impacts.** Within the follow-up period, did Moving Up increase employment and earnings, provide employment stability and wage growth, and improve job characteristics for the ERA group, relative to the control group?

The Random Assignment Process

As noted above, to produce reliable estimates of the effects of Moving Up, the evaluation used a random assignment research design. Eligible individuals were randomly assigned either to the ERA group, whose members were eligible for Moving Up services, or to the control group, whose members were not eligible for Moving Up services.

The random assignment process began in September 2001 and ended in January 2003, when the pool of sample members who met the target criteria was exhausted. (The sample that is analyzed in this report excludes those who were randomly assigned in January 2003, because they did not have a full year of follow-up data when the analyses were conducted.) South Carolina DSS used a local computer program to randomly select and assign eligible sample members from the pool of individuals who had left TANF between October 1997 and December 2000 and had not returned to the rolls. Each month, DSS first dropped from the pool anyone who had begun to receive TANF benefits in the prior month, and then it randomly selected 100 cases for the ERA group and another 100 cases for the control group. MDRC worked with DSS to ensure that, each month, 10 new ERA group members were assigned for each career consultant and that 10 corresponding control group members were assigned.¹⁷ (Chapter 2 provides more detail on sample intake.)

The Counterfactual: What Is ERA Being Compared With?

Individuals who were randomly assigned to the control group — who represent the *counterfactual* for the study — were not contacted or informed about Moving Up and were treated as though the program did not exist. While other sites in the national ERA evaluation

¹⁷January 2003 was the last month that all six participating counties received 10 ERA group members and 10 control group members. The counties that had not fully depleted their pool of target sample members continued to bring new participants into Moving Up through August 2003, but these individuals are not part of the research sample. Some individuals who had returned to the TANF rolls after December 2000 were erroneously selected for the sample; those individuals were dropped from both research groups and are not included in the analysis.

required control group members to participate in already-existing programs, there were no existing programs for TANF leavers in South Carolina, so the control group was not subject to any particular program as part of the evaluation.¹⁸

Like Moving Up participants, members of the control group were eligible for services in accordance with the rules of programs offering TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, child care, and transitional child care and Medicaid benefits. Either on their own initiative or through referrals other than by Moving Up staff, the control group members could seek out these services as well as nonprogram services that were offered in the community through Workforce Investment Act (WIA) One-Stop Centers, technical colleges, adult schools and other education providers, and employment and training organizations.

Data Sources

The data sources for the analyses presented in the report are described below.

Baseline Data

At the point of random assignment, South Carolina DSS used administrative records to collect demographic, educational, and TANF assistance data on sample members. This information was used to describe the study population (in Table 1.3) and to identify subgroups whose results are analyzed separately.¹⁹

Administrative Records

Effects on employment and earnings were computed using automated unemployment insurance (UI) wage records data, and effects on public assistance were computed using automated TANF and food stamp administrative records. One year of follow-up data were available for all sample members when the analyses for this report were conducted.

Program Participation and Implementation Data

The Employment Retention and Advancement Client Tracking System (ERACTS) — developed by South Carolina DSS — provided information on program operations and participation, such as the quantity and location of contacts between program staff and participants.

¹⁸While developing the ERA program, South Carolina DSS was also considering implementing a post-TANF program for all prior recipients. This program was not implemented, however, because of limited state funds, the possible “contamination” of the control group in the study, and the desire to learn first whether the more intensive ERA program offered a positive return on investment.

¹⁹Baseline data are more limited for South Carolina than for other ERA sites because they were collected from administrative records rather than from a baseline survey or a form designed for the study.

DSS also provided to MDRC information on incentive payments to Moving Up participants. MDRC conducted a “time study” of Moving Up staff, which tracked their activities. Finally, information on program operations was available from interviews with Moving Up staff and from reviews of participants’ case files.

The ERA 12-Month Survey

Information about sample members’ participation in program services and about their employment, income, and other outcomes was gathered by the ERA 12-Month Survey, which was administered to a subset of ERA and control group members approximately 12 months after random assignment.

Sample Sizes

A total of 3,035 people were randomly assigned between September 2001 and January 2003 and are known as the *research sample* for South Carolina. As shown in Table 1.4, this report focuses on people in a subset of the research sample who were randomly assigned through December 2002 and for whom one-year of follow-up data were available; this *report sample* comprises 2,864 individuals — 94 percent of the full research sample. Some analyses in the report rely on an *early cohort* of 752 sample members who were randomly assigned between September and December 2001, for whom two years of follow-up data were available. The *survey sample* — those who completed the ERA 12-Month Survey — is a subset of the sample members who were randomly assigned between February and June 2002. These samples are described further in Chapter 4.

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Table 1.4

Overview of Evaluation Sample Sizes, by Research Group

South Carolina

Research Group	Random Assignment Dates	ERA Group	Control Group	Total	Percentage of Full Evaluation Sample
Report sample	September 2001 to December 2002	1,421	1,443	2,864	94.4
Early cohort	September to December 2001	377	375	752	24.8
Survey sample	February to June 2002	299	295	594	19.5

Roadmap of the Report

As mentioned previously, this report focuses on the ERA program's implementation and impact findings in South Carolina. Chapter 2 further describes the Moving Up program and its implementation. Chapter 3 provides information regarding impacts on service receipt. Chapter 4 covers impacts on employment, earnings, job characteristics, and other outcomes.

Chapter 2

The Implementation of the South Carolina ERA Program

In order to interpret the impacts of South Carolina’s Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) program, Moving Up, it is first important to understand how the program operated and how it was different from what the study’s control group experienced. Drawing from field research, automated program tracking data, and a time study of program staff, this chapter focuses on how Moving Up was implemented. (Chapter 3 discusses participation in employment-related services and activities among both the ERA group and the control group.)

After a brief summary, this chapter describes how Moving Up was put in place and what its structure, staffing, and management were like. It then discusses the program’s services, how program staff spent their time, and some differences in implementation across the six participating counties in the Pee Dee Region.

Key Findings

Outreach and marketing to potential participants were challenging for the Moving Up program. The study’s target group included many individuals who had left TANF years before and whose contact information in the state’s database was outdated, making it time-consuming, if not impossible, to locate them. Then, after staff had located potential participants, they still faced the challenge of marketing the program to individuals who were not required to take part in it and who may not have wanted its assistance.

Moving Up case managers (called “career consultants”) contacted, in person or by phone, about three-fourths of the ERA group within a year of their entry into the study. Staff reported that, among that group, some individuals did not want to participate; they said that they were doing fine or that they were not interested in taking part in a program.¹ Just under half of the ERA group participated in Moving Up within that year — some intensively, some cursorily.

Individualized, one-on-one case management was the core of Moving Up. Career consultants worked with participants to help them prepare for and find a job, to stay in their current job, or to move up. They referred some participants to structured activities, such as job search classes and short-term vocational training, and the program provided modest financial incentives to encourage and reward participation and employment. Because of state budget problems

¹This information is from conversations with the program staff, not quantitative data, so the percentage of ERA group members who were in this category is not known.

between late 2002 and mid-2003, most counties limited or froze spending on some program services, and the intensity of the program diminished.

Based on MDRC's field research, job placement was the strongest component of the program. Delivery of retention and advancement services was strong in some counties but less so in others. South Carolina's Department of Social Services (DSS) and most program staff members had a lot of experience helping people prepare for and find jobs, but they had less experience working with employed clients. This was true for most sites in the ERA project, but the challenge was compounded in South Carolina by the fact that the program targeted a diverse group — some working and some not — and offered all three categories of services: placement, retention, and advancement.

Although the program's design was uniform across the six counties and although the program coordinator encouraged consistent implementation of Moving Up, its services and intensity varied somewhat across the counties. These differences are explored in the following chapters.

The Framework of Moving Up: Structure, Staffing, and Management

Organizational Structure and Program Funding

As discussed in Chapter 1, South Carolina's ERA program was designed by the state's Department of Social Services (DSS) to address the needs of families who had left Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Moving Up operated in the six county DSS offices in the Pee Dee Region, which also housed other programs, including TANF and the Food Stamp Program. The state DSS office allocated TANF funds for ERA and passed them on to the participating counties, each of which had a DSS director who was responsible for the local operation of the ERA program.

When the program was designed, DSS intended to establish a formal linkage between the Moving Up program and the local One-Stop Centers in each county. (The Workforce Investment Act, enacted in 1998, required the establishment of these centers, which provide universal access to a wide range of employment services.) In the largest county in the South Carolina study, Florence, half the Moving Up staff were located in the local One-Stop, where they met with program participants. In all the counties, Moving Up staff sometimes referred participants to the One-Stop for services, but a more formal linkage was never operationalized.² Mov-

²As discussed in an earlier report (Anderson and Martinson, 2003), in most sites in the ERA evaluation, the linkage between the ERA program and the workforce investment system, which includes One-Stop Centers, was based on the linkage that was forged for the TANF system. In the Pee Dee Region, as in some other ERA sites, (continued)

ing Up also had relationships with the local technical schools and other providers, but these arrangements were not formal or contractual.

Program funding varied over time. When the South Carolina study began, in autumn 2001, Moving Up was fully funded. Over time, the state's budget situation worsened, which led to funding reductions in many programs, including Moving Up. These reductions temporarily affected the Pee Dee counties' ability to deliver program services, and, as a result, the program's intensity decreased. Specifically, beginning in late 2002, the counties in the study began to run out of funds for Moving Up. Because of the fiscal crisis, the state did not allocate new monies for the program until summer 2003. Career consultants remained on the job, but most counties froze or limited spending on financial incentives, education and training tuition payments or reimbursement, transportation assistance, and other services.

Staffing and Training

Moving Up services were provided primarily by case managers (career consultants), who were employed by DSS. The largest county in the study had four career consultants; the next-largest county had two; and the other four counties each had one career consultant. (Two of the ten career consultants left their job in 2003 and were replaced within a few months.) These staff members provided individualized case management to participants and connected them with other services as needed. In most counties, the career consultants worked with agencywide workforce consultants, who built relationships with local employers, developed jobs, and shared job listings with the career consultants.

Most of the career consultants had previously worked for DSS in some capacity — many in the state's TANF program — and all had some prior experience in social services. Before Moving Up began operating, the staff received training to learn about its goals, components, and procedures. They also attended a two-day session designed to improve their knowledge of and skills in recruitment and marketing, and they attended training about how to motivate clients while they are negotiating life changes. After the program had been operating for about a year, staff received additional training designed to improve their knowledge of and skills in delivering advancement services and engaging employers.

Management

Moving Up was managed by a full-time program coordinator, who worked in one of the county DSS offices. Working under and with the guidance of a few DSS administrators in

the linkage between the welfare and workforce systems was limited by a variety of factors, including the two systems' different goals and target populations and the absence of a coordinated decision-making process.

the state office and one of the local county DSS directors, he monitored ERA operations in all six counties and reviewed staff performance. He also held monthly staff meetings to review program operations, discuss new procedures, and share ideas about working with clients. Each county's DSS director was responsible for the local operation of the program, and typically the workforce consultant in each office directly supervised the career consultant(s) in that office.

To facilitate case management and monitoring, South Carolina developed an automated client tracking system, called ERACTS (Employment Retention and Advancement Client Tracking System), specifically for Moving Up. Staff recorded information on each participant, including their status in the program, the activities they were involved in, and their employment status. The program coordinator regularly used data from ERACTS to monitor the performance of staff and to provide feedback to them. He focused on several items, including the number of contacts between staff and clients, the number of individuals participating in the program, the number of participants who were placed in jobs, and the number who received a raise or increased their work hours. The program manager encouraged staff to contact at least 75 percent of their cases at least once and to keep at least 35 percent participating in the program at any given time. Generally, staff met these goals. No specific goals were set based on employment outcomes.

Program management developed different statuses to categorize clients and help staff prioritize within their caseloads. "Active" clients were participating in the program and were to be contacted (either in person or by phone) at least once a month. "Passive" clients were not currently participating but were potentially interested in doing so in the future. Staff had to contact passive clients monthly also, but this contact could be by letter. After three months, someone who remained uninterested in the program was placed into "refused service" status and was not contacted regularly. Box 2.1 presents the South Carolina ERA treatment statuses and the corresponding degree of required contact. Based on MDRC's observations, career consultants internalized these statuses and followed the recommended contact guidelines.

The level of day-to-day supervision within the county DSS offices varied; some supervisors were strongly involved in the program and with the staff, while others were not as engaged. Furthermore, although the program coordinator encouraged consistent practices, the implementation of Moving Up varied by county, as discussed below.

The South Carolina ERA Program's Messages and Services

Overview of Intended Program Flow

South Carolina's ERA program targeted a wide range of individuals who had left TANF between nine months and just over five years before. About half were working when

Box 2.1

South Carolina ERA Treatment Statuses

The South Carolina ERA program used different statuses to categorize individuals who were assigned to Moving Up. Following are the statuses and the degree of contact that was required for each.

Pending. The career consultant had begun outreach, but the individual had not yet made a decision regarding participation in the program. Career consultants were required to move individuals from “pending” to another status within 30 days.

Active. The individual agreed to participate in Moving Up, and a Career Enhancement Plan was developed within 10 days. The individual participated in activities outlined in the plan. Career consultants were required to contact active participants at least once a month to follow up on activities and check on progress. If an individual was not participating in activities after two consecutive months, career consultants revised the status to “passive.”

Passive. The individual agreed to participate in Moving Up. A Career Enhancement Plan was developed within 10 days, but, for two consecutive months, the individual was not actively participating in activities outlined in the plan. Or the individual did not refuse services but was not interested in participating in Moving Up at that time. Often, a plan had not been developed for this passive client. Career consultants were required to attempt to contact passive clients once a month to explain the program and remind them of available services. If a client was still uninterested after three consecutive months, career consultants revised the status to “refused service.”

Refused service. The individual declined to participate in Moving Up, or a passive client did not actively participate after three consecutive months. Unless the individual in this status adamantly refused services, career consultants maintained contact twice a year through mailings of program newsletters and promotional materials.

Can’t locate. The individual’s current residence or address could not be determined.

Moved out of service area. The individual lived outside the Pee Dee Region.

Other. The individual was deceased or incarcerated or did not fit into any of the statuses above.

they entered the study, and half were not. The program aimed to help all these individuals with employment: Moving Up was designed to help nonworking clients find a job and to help working clients retain their jobs and/or advance in the labor market.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the typical paths of individuals through Moving Up. After presenting an overview of the paths, the rest of this chapter discusses in detail the services that were provided. (Chapter 3 presents quantitative information on the use of employment-related services by the ERA group and the control group.)

As described in Chapter 1, for the study in South Carolina, each month — using the state’s TANF database — 100 TANF leavers were randomly selected to be in the ERA group and were assigned to one of the career consultants, who attempted to contact each individual and encourage her to participate in Moving Up. (Another 100 individuals were randomly selected each month to serve as the study’s control group.) If an individual agreed to participate, the career consultant would assess her employment situation, goals, and potential barriers and would work with her to develop a Career Enhancement Plan.

Moving Up did not require any specific activities or services; instead, the content of the Career Enhancement Plan was developed through conversations between the individual and the career consultant, and the plan varied according to the individual’s situation and needs. Typically, however, the goal for someone who was not working was to find a job, and so the plan included one or more job preparation or placement activities. The goal for a participant who was working was typically either job retention or advancement in the labor market, and so the plan included one or more postemployment activities. Although the program did not have rigid guidelines, typically someone who had recently begun a job or who had a history of unstable employment would focus on job retention. Someone who had been working steadily would typically focus on moving up in that job or on finding a better job somewhere else.

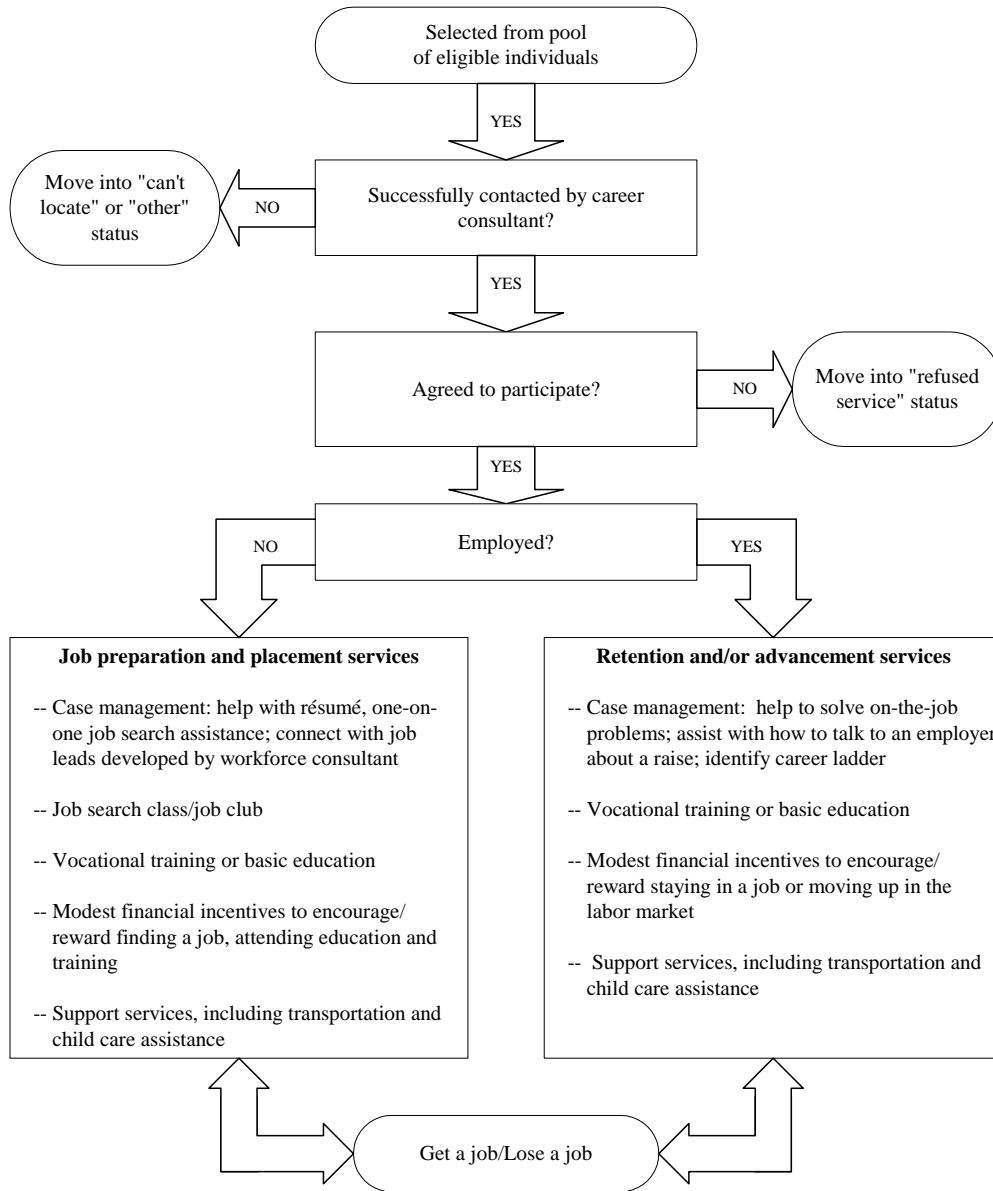
The core of Moving Up was individualized case management. For participants who were seeking a job, this usually consisted of help preparing a résumé, one-on-one assistance with the job search process, and assessment of potential barriers to employment. For individuals who were focused on job retention, career consultants might help solve workplace problems and identify and resolve other issues that might threaten job stability, such as transportation or child care issues. For participants who were trying to advance, career consultants might strategize with the client about how to approach her supervisor for a raise or how to learn about promotion opportunities.

Nonworking participants were sometimes referred to job search classes at the DSS office. (These classes were not exclusively for Moving Up participants.) Both nonworking and

The Employment Retention and Advancement Project

Figure 2.1

Typical Paths of Individuals Through the South Carolina ERA Program



working individuals were sometimes referred to short-term education or training. All participants were eligible for a variety of support services, including transportation assistance and child care assistance.

Throughout the different phases of the program, modest financial incentives were used to encourage and reward desired behaviors. For example, individuals received \$10 for attending an initial meeting with a career consultant, \$50 for completing a job search class, \$50 for keeping a new job for one month, and \$50 for moving from a part-time to a full-time job. Box 2.2 lists the program incentives, which are discussed further below.

Based on payment data from the program, 47 percent of the ERA group received at least one incentive payment within a year after entering the study, and 16 percent received at least one payment of \$50 or more.³ Among individuals who received at least one payment, the average amount received during the year was \$62. Incentives were used in all six counties but were more strongly emphasized in some. (As noted above, the state's budget problems prevented most counties from paying any incentives between late 2002 and mid-2003.)

Based on MDRC's field research, job placement was the strongest component of the Moving Up program. Delivery of retention and advancement services was strong in some counties but less so in others. Most staff members had experience helping people prepare for and find jobs, as did DSS as an agency. As was true for all the sites in the ERA project, however, the staff members and the agency in South Carolina had less experience working with employed clients. As discussed in a previous report from the ERA evaluation, all sites in the study were challenged to develop strong postemployment interventions, to train staff to deliver them, and to engage working clients in program services.⁴ In South Carolina, these challenges were compounded by the fact that Moving Up targeted a diverse group — some working and some not — and offered all three categories of services: placement, retention, and advancement.

Intake, Assessment, and Client Engagement

This section and the next two sections present more detail on the services and processes summarized above. During the intake period for the South Carolina study, each month, 100 individuals who had left TANF between October 1997 and December 2000 and who had not returned to the rolls were randomly selected using the state's TANF database. Ten of these individuals were assigned to each career consultant. (Another 100 individuals were selected each month to serve as the study's control group; they were not invited to participate in Moving Up

³The payment data indicate that 50 percent of the ERA group received at least one incentive payment through September 2004 — slightly higher than the one-year percentage.

⁴Bloom et al., 2002.

Box 2.2

South Carolina ERA Financial Incentives

Modest financial incentives or awards were given to Moving Up participants who met particular program benchmarks and accomplished goals outlined in their Career Enhancement Plan. Incentives or awards were in the form of coupons or cash and were not retroactive (that is, they were not provided for the client's achievements before the plan was developed). Because of funding issues, most counties in the study did not pay incentives from late 2002 through summer 2003.

Initial meeting and development of plan with career consultant

- \$10 First face-to-face meeting
- \$10 Completion Career Enhancement Plan

Assessments and prescribed treatments

- \$10 Completion of special assessments (for example, vocational rehabilitation, mental health)
- \$10 Initial visit for treatment
- \$50 Completion of treatment

Job readiness training/activity

- \$10 Completion of 1 week of activity (for example, job club, visits to One-Stop Center)
- \$50 Completion of training/activity

Education/training

- \$10 Completion of 1 week of activity (for example, adult education, vocational training)
- \$50 Completion of short-term training; incentive paid only after participant received certificate; for individual courses, no more than three \$50 incentives per year
- \$150 Completion of long-term training (for example, 1-, 2-, or 4-year degree or certificate; General Educational Development [GED] certificate); incentive paid only after participant received certificate or degree

Obtained/maintained employment (minimum of 15 hours per week)

- \$50 Kept new job for 1 month
- \$50 Kept new job for 3 months
- \$50 Maintained employment for 6 months
- \$100 Maintained employment for 9 months
- \$150 Maintained employment for 12 months (with no more than 2 voluntary job changes)

Advancement in employment

If a participant advanced in the current job or moved to a new job, only 1 incentive awarded at any time.

- \$50 Moved from part- to full-time work (30 hours or more per week) and maintained it for 30 days
- \$50 Obtained a job with higher wages (an increase of at least 8 percent) and maintained it for 30 days
- \$50 Obtained a job with benefits and maintained it for 30 days

and did not receive its services.)⁵ Information about the individuals — including their last known address and phone number, demographic information, and TANF history — was downloaded into ERACTS. Career consultants attempted to locate the individuals and encourage them to take part in the program. They sent an invitation letter that included a brochure about the program, and they typically followed up with phone calls and additional letters. (Appendix C presents the invitation letter, the brochure, and the planning form for Moving Up.)

It was challenging to locate the selected individuals, and staff did extensive outreach to get potential participants into the program. As noted earlier, the target group for Moving Up included people who had left TANF as early as October 1997 — years before the ERA study began. Although some people had continued to have contact with the DSS office through the Food Stamp Program or Medicaid, much of the contact information in South Carolina's database was outdated. Staff often sought current contact information from multiple sources, including various other state departments (such as the Department of Motor Vehicles) and family members. Some staff even drove to sample members' last known address and spoke with the current residents and former neighbors to get information about individuals' whereabouts.

After contacting potential participants, staff still faced the challenge of marketing the program to individuals who were not required to take part in it and who may not have wanted assistance. They marketed Moving Up by emphasizing its individualized nature — services were tailored to participants' needs, to help each succeed in the labor market — and often by encouraging people to think about their broader goals and hopes for themselves and their families. To promote participation, the program provided a \$10 incentive to each person who had an initial meeting with a career consultant. Management emphasized the importance of effective outreach and marketing, and all the career consultants received training in marketing the program and engaging clients.

It is important to focus on the fact that Moving Up was not a mandatory program. As mentioned, this created a challenge for career consultants in engaging participants. Notably, it also limited the effect that the program could have on the entire eligible population. When a program is mandatory, it can affect even people who do not participate in it. For example, someone receiving TANF benefits may choose to find a job on her own, rather than participate in a mandatory welfare-to-work employment program. In contrast, there is no reason to think that nonparticipants in the South Carolina ERA study would be affected, either positively or negatively, by the program. The only chance that Moving Up had to change peoples' outcomes was by engaging them in the program.

⁵As mentioned in Chapter 1, some individuals who had returned to the TANF rolls after December 2000 were erroneously selected for the sample; those individuals were dropped from both research groups and are not included in the analysis.

At the initial meeting — which often occurred in the potential participant’s home — staff assessed the individual’s employment, educational, and family situation; discussed employment goals and barriers; and worked with the person to develop a Career Enhancement Plan. Moving Up did not use a standard set of assessment tools; nor did it employ skills testing. Instead, career consultants assessed people’s goals, experiences, skills, and barriers more informally, through conversation. The content of the plan varied according to the individual’s situation and needs. (Appendix C presents the plan’s template.) Individuals received another \$10 after completing the plan.

According to program tracking data from ERACTS, 74 percent of the ERA group either met in person with or spoke on the phone with a Moving Up staff member at least once during the year after they entered the study. In other words, staff succeeded in locating and interacting with about three-quarters of the target group for the program. The same tracking data show that just under half the ERA group (45 percent) were ever in the active status during this one-year period, indicating that they were engaged in the program in some way.⁶ Therefore, about a fourth of the ERA group were never successfully contacted by program staff, and another fourth were contacted but never participated in the program. Staff reported that some of the people they spoke with said that they were doing fine and did not need or want help.⁷

It is important to note that the level of activity for clients in the active status varied dramatically. For example, some active participants were working and received a monthly check-in phone call from their career consultant, whereas other active participants were engaged in full-time education or training. To illustrate this point, consider the number of in-person or phone contacts between active participants and staff. According to ERACTS data, among participants who were ever categorized as active during the year after they entered the study, the number of contacts that year ranges from 1 to 52 per person. The average number of contacts for this group is 11 (4 in person and 7 by phone). About one-third of these active participants had 1 to 6 contacts; another third had 7 to 12; and another third had 13 contacts or more. This variation in the intensity of participation should be kept in mind when evaluating the program’s effects on outcomes, such as employment and earnings, presented in Chapter 4.

Another way to gauge intensity of participation is to consider a composite measure that includes the number of contacts and incentive payments. During the year after entering the study, 29 percent of the ERA group were ever in the active status; had at least four contacts with staff, at

⁶ERACTS data show that 49 percent of the ERA group — slightly higher than the one-year percentage — were ever in the active status between the time they entered the study and April 2004.

⁷This information is from conversations with the program staff, not quantitative data, so the percentage of ERA group members in this category is not known.

least two of which were in person; and received at least one incentive payment. This indicates that just under one-third of the ERA group were engaged relatively intensively in Moving Up.

Job Preparation and Placement Services

Placement in a job was usually the goal for program participants who were not working. The specific services that were provided to help clients reach this goal varied, but they included one-on-one job search assistance and help preparing a résumé from a career consultant as well as job club classes at the DSS office. Although staff tended to explore individuals' interests and, when possible, tried to help them find a job that fit their interests, they usually encouraged them to take a job relatively quickly. Some participants were referred to the local One-Stop Center to look for jobs or use assessment tools, such as software that helps identify career interests or skills.

As noted above, workforce consultants in each of the six Pee Dee counties identified job openings at local employers. Although they did this primarily for TANF clients, they often shared job openings with the Moving Up career consultants, who then passed them on to program participants. Typically, workforce consultants did not develop jobs for specific clients. Most career consultants did not develop jobs themselves (but a few did). Similarly, workforce consultants had close connections with local employers, but most career consultants did not.

If a participant did not have a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, staff sometimes recommended that she attend classes to help prepare for the GED exam. Although most staff believed that a GED is useful in the labor market, typically they did not strongly emphasize this as a program activity. Some participants were referred to short-term vocational training to build their skills before (or while) seeking a job.

As noted earlier, Moving Up paid modest incentives to participants for various job preparation and placement activities. For example, the program paid \$50 if a participant completed a job search class or held a new job for one month (see Box 2.2).

The program also provided support services to participants. Public transportation in the Pee Dee Region is limited, so transportation assistance was an important component of the program. Many participants received reimbursement for miles driven in their own cars. If no other option was available, some career consultants even drove participants to and from job interviews or classes.

The designers of Moving Up intended that the program would have funds available for child care. Because of state budget problems, however, the funds were never allocated. Instead, state administrators modified the rules for allocating TANF transitional child care, which is provided to parents who leave the welfare rolls. Rather than providing assistance for two calendar years following exit from TANF, South Carolina now provides care for 24 months —

whether consecutive or not — after exit. (This rule change applies to all eligible parents, not just those who were in Moving Up.) The state also operates the ABC Child Care Program, which provides assistance for parents whose income is below a certain level.

Despite initial concerns about Moving Up’s lack of child care funds, staff reported that few participants raised child care issues. Most parents who entered the program already had care arrangements with family or friends, and those arrangements continued. In some cases, staff connected parents with transitional dollars for child care. (A few parents had exhausted their transitional care, but this was rare.)

Staff referred some Moving Up participants to mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, or services for victims of domestic violence. They also helped some participants get TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, and other work supports. In 2003, the counties in the study began holding monthly “support group” meetings for participants. These were typically held during the evening and were facilitated by a career consultant. The main purpose of the meeting was to allow participants to share their employment-related experiences and their knowledge and coping mechanisms. Sometimes the career consultant also provided information, such as a list of local job openings or a strategy for moving up in a job. According to program management, 10 to 12 participants typically attended a support group meeting.

Employment Retention and Advancement Services

For participants who were working, the goal of Moving Up was either job retention or advancement in the labor market. Generally, the program encouraged clients to remain in a job for a while before trying to move up. To foster job retention, career consultants talked with clients about workplace problems and held periodic check-ins to allow participants to share any work-related concerns that they had. Although, as noted above, most career consultants did not have much contact with employers, a minority checked in with employers about participants’ job performance (but only if a participant agreed).

The goal for participants who had worked steadily for several months was typically to advance in the labor market. Reflecting the participant’s interest, “advancement” could mean getting a raise or additional hours per week at the current workplace or moving to a new job with higher pay, more hours, better benefits, a more convenient schedule or location, or getting a job in a field of interest to the client. Career consultants helped participants strategize about such issues as how to move up in the current workplace and when and how to discuss a raise or promotion. Some working clients were placed in short-term vocational training to prepare them for a higher-paying job or one with a more convenient schedule. In response to local job openings, training to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) was common.

