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A CONCISE LOOK AT THE NEED TO PROMOTE JOB RETENTION

Now more than ever, the path to self-sufficiency for most welfare recipients involves finding and keeping a job. The recently enacted welfare law, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, emphasizes the need for individuals to take personal responsibility in their move toward self-sufficiency. The law underscores the importance of work and requires most able-bodied individuals to find some type of work within two years after they start collecting welfare.

For welfare recipients, the time limits that the new law imposes significantly raise the stakes of not being employed. As the new law is implemented, more individuals who are less job ready will be entering the labor market. Many of these individuals, unused to the world of work, will be in danger of losing their jobs. While time limits may motivate some to hold onto their jobs, many are likely to face situations that make it hard for them to do so. Although welfare recipients must try to deal with these challenges, external assistance and support can help them overcome some of these barriers. States and other local agencies may be able to provide support that makes individuals' transition from welfare to work smoother and more successful.

Underpinnings of the Job Retention Problem

While many welfare recipients who find jobs are able to keep them, a significant minority have a hard time holding onto jobs and lose them fairly quickly. For instance, among more than 1,200 welfare recipients in four cities who found jobs between 1994 and 1995, only 3 out of 5 were employed continuously in some job during the one-year period following job start (with two-thirds of them being employed in the same job for the whole year). In all, nearly 40 percent experienced job turnover within the year; among these, two-thirds moved to a job with higher wages, but nearly one-third experienced no change or a reduction in earnings as they switched jobs. Despite the sound economy during this period, more than 30 percent of those who found a job were not working in any job at the end of a year.

Many welfare recipients' reasons for losing a job are complicated. Most find low-paying jobs but still have to deal with the standard costs associated with work (such as finding affordable child care and transportation). Many must cope with a reduction in other forms of social support (such as housing subsidies and, perhaps, food stamp and medical benefits). Nearly one in three work nonstandard hours (evening, night, or swing shifts), making child care and transportation arrangements more complex. Because they have little prior work experience, many welfare recipients have unrealistic work expectations and walk out of their jobs when these expectations are not met. Many have little in the way of personal or social support and find the transition from welfare to work overwhelming and stressful.

I. PESD--A CASE MANAGEMENT APPROACH TO JOB RETENTION

PESD was initiated by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in 1993. Its purpose was to gain systematic information on employment paths out of welfare and test ways of promoting job retention among welfare recipients. The PESD approach to job retention was based on the following guidelines for service delivery:

- Extended case management for employed welfare recipients who were JOBS participants
- Flexible service delivery approach, with a focus on job retention and reemployment
- Support service payments to deal with one-time, employment-related emergencies

The PESD programs were implemented in four sites. The PESD programs were implemented in (1) Chicago, Illinois; (2) Portland, Oregon; (3) Riverside, California; and (4) San Antonio, Texas. During the period of program operations, the states were fairly diverse in terms of the generosity of the state welfare benefits, the work incentives provided for welfare recipients, and the resources available for newly employed welfare recipients. For instance, in 1995, California had the sixth most generous welfare program in the country (maximum benefits of \$607 for a family of three). In comparison, the maximum grant in Texas of \$184 for a family of three was half the national median. Two sites provided added incentives for all welfare recipients to work by having more generous or extended earnings disregards policies, while the other two sites had standard disregards policies.

The programs targeted newly employed welfare recipients who were JOBS participants. In the four demonstration sites, JOBS and other welfare program staff identified welfare recipients who had participated in the states' JOBS program and found employment during a 12- to 18-month period between March 1994 and December 1995; about 500 clients in each site were assigned at random into the programs, and another 500 were assigned to a control group. The programs focused on clients who were nonexempt and served both clients who worked full-time and those who worked part-time (although a couple of sites focused on clients who worked at least 10 or 15 hours a week). Two programs focused on clients who had participated in some job placement component of the state JOBS program and were somewhat more job ready. The programs enrolled and attempted to serve all identified clients, whether or not they continued to receive welfare after finding a job. Final impact findings about the effectiveness of these programs will be available by late summer 1998.

The PESD programs were extensions of JOBS programs but were run by separate units. The programs operated between 1994 and 1996, and each site hired between three and five *case managers* to serve individuals assigned to the demonstration programs. Although set up by the state

welfare agency as an extension of the JOBS program, the programs were run by staff apart from the main JOBS program. This was done to distance the programs from the welfare bureaucracy and to promote greater service flexibility than was possible under the JOBS program.

Case management was the cornerstone of the PESD programs. All clients identified for program enrollment were assigned to a PESD case manager. These case managers tried to maintain regular contact with all clients, identify emerging problems, and provide services to alleviate problems. Program guidelines specified a broad role for the case managers that included counseling, ensuring access to transitional benefits and other support services, providing referrals, and intervening as necessary with landlords, employers, or other parties. Case managers were also given wide latitude to make support service payments to deal with temporary emergencies that might affect employment.

Case managers took a flexible and less bureaucratic approach to service delivery. The case managers were informal in their approach to providing services and tried to minimize an officious approach. They provided individualized services to clients and stressed personal and informal communications. Case managers attempted to maintain regular contact with clients, sent them cards and newsletters, and were willing to meet at times and locations convenient to the clients. They sometimes worked in the evenings or on weekends so they could more easily reach clients who worked during the day. They remained accessible to clients by carrying beepers or cell phones or by using telephone answering machines.

Case managers delivered a wide range of services to clients. Through extensive contact with clients, case managers identified needs and provided services to address them. Data from the client service tracking system show that these services included counseling and support, job search assistance, resolution of benefit issues, service referrals, and support services payments (Figure 1).

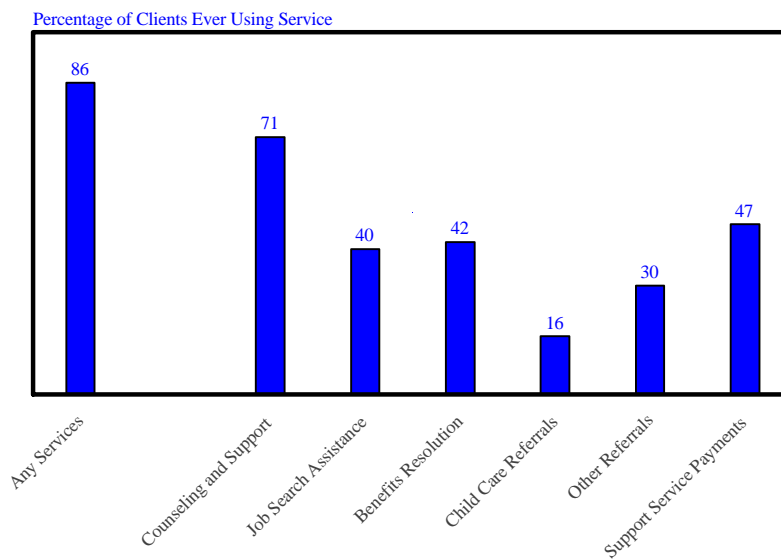
Counseling and Support. The most common service was individual counseling and support; more than 70 percent of clients received some level of it (Figure 1). Case managers counseled clients on such issues as managing and budgeting money, planning for contingencies such as breakdowns in child care/transportation, learning workplace behavior, and dealing with nonsupportive families and friends. Staff members also encouraged clients, provided moral support, and listened while they discussed frustrations and problems.

Job Search Assistance. Case managers and other staff members provided assistance to clients who had lost jobs or wanted better ones. The job search services ranged from individualized job search assistance provided by case managers (including specific job leads and general guidance on job search methods) to more structured job search workshops available through the JOBS program. About 40 percent of all clients enrolled in the programs received some job search assistance within six months after enrollment.

Resolution of Benefit Issues. Case managers helped clients apply for and resolve eligibility or benefit issues for transitional Medicaid and child care, welfare, and food stamps. More than 40 percent of clients received some assistance with benefit issues within six months after program enrollment. Case managers also helped clients access child care funding subsidies and told them how to obtain the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

Figure 1

Service Use Among PESD Clients During the First Six Months After PESD Enrollment



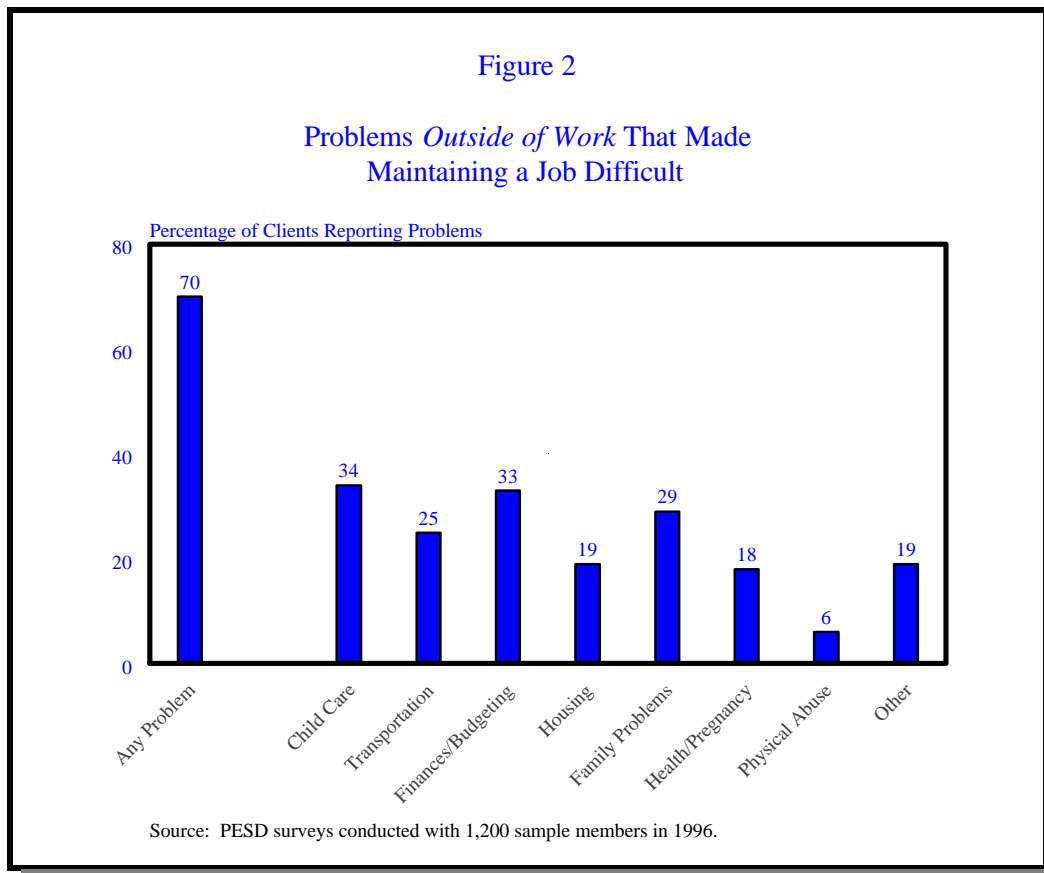
Service Referrals. Case managers helped clients find needed services, including referrals to health care or child care providers, to skills training or education programs, and to legal aid or specialized individual or family counseling. About 16 percent of clients received child care referrals; about 30 percent received referrals to other agencies or individuals.

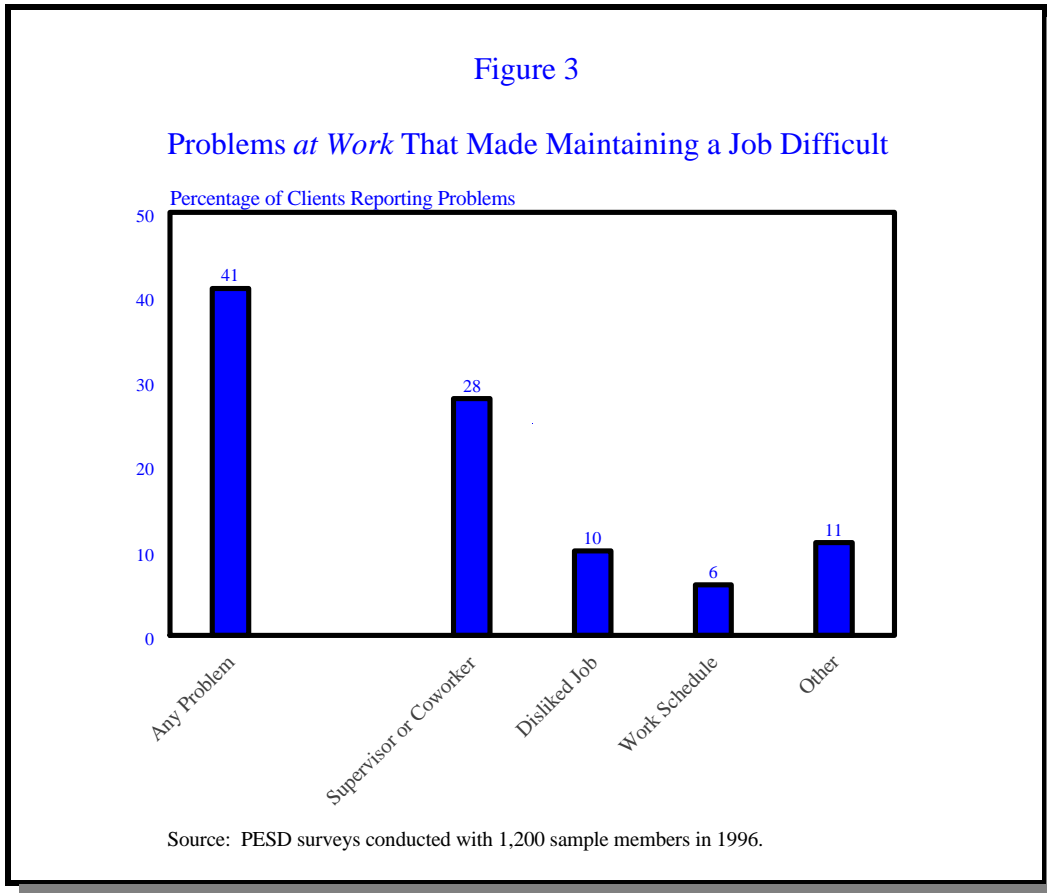
Support Service Payments for Work-Related Expenses. Case managers authorized payments to cover temporary expenses associated with job search, employment, and emergencies that affected employment. This assistance was expected to prevent small emergencies or crises (such as having a car break down or having no money for suitable work clothes) from leading to job loss. Nearly half the clients received some support service payment (other than transitional child care or Medicaid) during the first six months after enrollment.

II. UNDERSTANDING CLIENT NEEDS AND DEVELOPING SERVICES TO MEET THEM

Welfare recipients who are single parents, like other low-income parents who raise their children without a partner, face many challenges to finding and keeping jobs. Focus groups with welfare recipients who have found jobs, discussions with case managers, and surveys conducted with more than 1,200 sample members reveal the breadth of issues that can affect welfare recipients' ability to remain employed. These issues include problems outside of work and in the workplace. Sometimes these problems were present as soon as clients began to work; in other instances, they emerged gradually as the stresses of balancing work and family life increased.

Many individuals face problems *outside of work*. About 70 percent of sample members that we surveyed reported such problems. Problems related to child care, finances/budgeting, family, and transportation were the most commonly reported categories outside of work that made it difficult for welfare recipients who found jobs to hold onto them (Figure 2).





In addition, some welfare recipients face problems *at work* that make it difficult to maintain their jobs. More than 40 percent of sample members experienced a problem at work. About 68 percent of them (28 percent of all sample members) said getting along with their coworkers or supervisor was difficult (Figure 3).

A broad set of factors make the welfare-to-work transition difficult for welfare recipients:

- Few financial rewards, given the high costs of working
- Child care barriers
- Transportation barriers
- Housing barriers
- Budgeting challenges
- Unfamiliarity with the world of work

- Physical health, mental health, and substance abuse problems
- Lack of personal support
- Difficulty finding another job

Some of these challenges are fully or partly related to individual situations and circumstances. Others are intensified by structural or systemic obstacles to a smooth transition from welfare to work. Next, we discuss each type of problem, focusing on how they can affect welfare recipients. We then suggest different services that can alleviate some of these barriers. We highlight services that job retention programs can provide, as well as broader steps that state and local agencies can take to promote job retention and successful welfare-to-work transitions. In providing recommendations for state and local agencies, we also refer to some programs currently being implemented in some states.¹

Notes to Program Operators

First, not all clients will have to deal with all the problems we describe, and clients are likely to vary greatly in their particular obstacles to job retention. We describe a range of barriers to highlight the diverse nature of problems that can affect job retention and to bring attention to the services that can help mitigate these barriers. Different areas or local agencies may have different types of problems, and states and local agencies will best be able to identify the problems most prevalent among their clients.

Second, although many people use the terms “postemployment” and “job retention” synonymously, job retention services need not start after employment. Many job retention services, such as counseling, managing and budgeting money, planning for child care and transportation contingencies, learning workplace behavior, and dealing with nonsupportive families and friends, can be integrated into job clubs and life skills training workshops during the time of job search and placement.

¹We indicate these examples with an asterisk and at the end of this report include a table that provides a brief description of the program and, where available, the phone number of a contact person (Table A). More detailed information on most of these programs is available in Johnson and Meckstroth (forthcoming summer 1998). These examples do not represent a comprehensive list of all programs being implemented by state/local agencies, nor do they necessarily represent only model programs that have been evaluated and proved successful.

LOW WAGES, BUT HIGH COSTS TO WORK: WHAT TO DO

What can job retention programs do?

- Help find child care subsidies or subsidized slots for those who need them
- Provide bus passes/tokens for commuting to work (at least for the first few months after job start)
- Pay initial employment expenses (for necessities such as clothing and tools)
- Provide support service payments for one-time emergencies (such as initial rent deposits, car repairs, or car insurance)
- Help clients plan efficient and inexpensive transportation routes
- Promote use of the advanced pay option of EITC, so low-income earners can have more cash in hand
 - Program staff will need training in order to understand and promote the advanced pay option of EITC.
 - Program directors may want to designate one or two caseworkers (or accountants from the tax office) to provide this help and have them work closely with job retention program staff.
- Help clients obtain available transitional benefits they need

What can state/local agencies do?

- Have state EITC for low-income workers; have more generous disregards policies but be aware that this would lead to quicker exhaustion of time-limited benefits; provide earnings supplements to bring income near or above poverty level (New Hope Demonstration Program, WI*)
- Deduct costs such as child care, transportation, and housing from income for purposes of benefit calculations
- Make full use of available child care block grant or other child care dollars
- Make transitional Medicaid accessible or other public health insurance available
- Put more dollars toward low-income housing
- Collaborate with other agencies such as HUD to interpret their state TANF policies to enable clients to qualify for income exclusion from these other agencies (Families First Program, TN*)

What can job retention programs do?

- Review child care arrangements with clients and help plan alternatives; provide lists of providers, especially those with subsidized slots and convenient locations; maintain hotlines to child care referral services, especially for infant care
- Ensure that welfare recipients make contingency plans and back-up arrangements for child care; help plan for child care arrangements after transitional care ends
- Help identify and access funds/subsidized slots and help with paperwork; remind clients to get paperwork in on time; encourage those who are eligible for and need subsidies to use them
- Establish good interagency communications so retention program staff can help straighten out child care payments in a timely way

What can state/local agencies do?

- Ensure easy and quick access to child care benefits; integrate different funding sources and make eligibility and access rules consistent across eligibility categories; make sure child care payment staff resolve errors quickly
- Enact family leave policies so individuals with sick children can take time off to care for them; promote benefits like paid vacation, to provide flexibility to deal with child care crises
- Increase the number of centers with subsidized care, especially along heavily used transportation routes, so it is more convenient to drop off and pick up children on the way to work; increase supply of care for infants in general and various types of child care in rural areas where supply is low; expand number of facilities that provide care during nonstandard hours (Centerville Cluster Day Care Diversion Project, IA*)
- Create a child care resource and referral system sensitive to the needs of the welfare-to-work population. For example, Child Care Solutions, GA,* provides information, assistance, and training to caregivers and educates parents and the community about the importance of expanding affordable, high-quality child care. Help welfare recipients define their child care needs, make matches with providers, establish back-up care, and follow up to monitor progress.
- Train welfare recipients to become child care workers. School Age Child Care, CT,* provides pre-service and in-service training and places participants with a child care or school-run program on completion. Other examples: Lincoln Action Program, NE*
- Help child care providers address areas of concern. Child Care Support Network, RI,* provides support to child care professionals and encourages collaboration among community agencies, child care providers, and families.

What can job retention programs do?

- Review transportation arrangements, provide bus and train schedules, and help clients figure out the most efficient route to child care and work; teach clients how to plan travel
- Ensure that clients have made contingency plans/back-up arrangements
- Provide temporary assistance to deal with car repairs for those who need assistance

What can state/local agencies do?

- Provide monthly transit passes or other forms of safe, free, and reliable transportation for at least the first few months after job start (WorkPass Program, NJ*)
- Enhance city-suburb transit options; provide subsidized bus/van services from inner-city areas to where the jobs are; encourage or contract for transportation service from existing transit agencies; promote employer transit initiatives; train welfare recipients to become van company owners (AdVANtage Van Service Entrepreneurs Project, MD*)
- Help welfare recipients who find jobs obtain reliable transportation. For instance, provide auto loans, help with down payments on cars, or make available reliable pre-owned cars at low cost or through lease-purchase programs to welfare recipients (Job Opportunity Transportation Program, CA*; Wheels for Work, MD*; Cars Assist Recipients in New Grants (CARING) program, VA*). This assistance can be targeted to those whose only barrier to work is transportation.
- Expand transit service, including route extensions, increased evening and weekend service hours, feeder-shuttle service, evening shared-ride taxi services (Job Ride, WI*)
- Establish a database to serve as a transportation resource and referral system (Community Self-Sufficiency Grant, IA*); create a clearinghouse to improve coordination and provide central dispatch among existing transportation options (Job Ride, WI*); set up resource centers displaying transit time tables, maps, guides, and informational brochures on special services (Work Pass Program, NJ*)

What can job retention programs do?

- Do a household budget to determine the amount available for housing; review fraction of income going toward housing and advise clients of the optimal amount of income to spend on housing; review household arrangement to determine its stability; provide referrals to housing agencies if necessary
- Determine if clients may be eligible for some housing subsidy; if so, refer them to housing agency and follow up if necessary
- Help clients with paperwork or other assistance needed to help them access available housing subsidies

What can states/local agencies do?

- Concentrate availability of services that make it easier to work (such as child care, transportation, and family counseling) around public housing projects and other low-income areas
- Promote transportation linkages between low-income housing areas and suburban employment centers
- Establish closer links between welfare agencies and Housing and Urban Development agencies (more than 60 percent of public housing residents are welfare recipients)
- Temporarily freeze public housing rents or provide more tenant-based assistance and vouchers so that recipients can rent places closer to where the jobs are. The Time Limited Rental Assistance Program, CT,* and Work First New Jersey Housing Assistance Program, NJ,* provides housing subsidies to participants for three years (with a 55 percent subsidy in the first year, decreasing to a 35 percent subsidy by the third year). Other examples: Seattle Jobs Initiative--Housing Program, WA*
- Give priority to the most pressed; emphasize helping those who are spending more than half their income on housing, who are homeless, or who are living in seriously substandard housing
- Provide opportunity for low-income and welfare families to eventually own their own homes (Lease Purchase Program, OH*)

What can retention programs do?

- Increase awareness of workplace culture, requirements, and acceptable behavior through individual counseling and workshops; provide guidance on how to talk to employers, coworkers, and clients
- Ask clients about potential and emerging workplace issues they might be facing
- Conduct workshops and peer group sessions on workplace attitudes and behavior, how to talk to employers and coworkers, how to dress, and other issues of interest to working mothers (with role models and playacting); encourage sharing of experiences and resolution of issues by individuals with similar concerns.
- Attempt employer mediation (with clients' approval). Securing approval will be difficult, however, and mediation may be more acceptable if provided by nonwelfare agents, such as guidance counselors from employment agencies.
- Identify low-skill clients who may need/benefit from skills training; facilitate such training or provide referrals

What can states/local agencies do?

- Make working in temporary jobs more attractive by requiring employers to provide some minimal fringe benefits; enact or enforce state laws to prevent employers from keeping temporary workers for long periods without making them permanent, to avoid paying benefits; encourage employers to provide some minimal fringe benefits for part-time workers
- Encourage employers who hire welfare recipients to provide them with some mentoring in the workplace
- Increase employer involvement in hiring and promoting retention among welfare recipients; promote employer participation by providing employer incentives (such as tax credits) to hire welfare recipients; identify model programs of employer involvement that seem to be effective (such as Marriott, United Airlines, Goodwill Industries); focus greater attention on such programs
- Encourage service providers who are training welfare recipients to also provide life skills and training on workplace attitude, behavior, and expectations.
- Encourage the formation of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) for small businesses that hire welfare recipients and may not be able to afford their own EAP. Encourage the formation of EAPs to serve several small businesses, and for counselors from these EAPs to take a proactive role in helping resolve workplace conflicts.

PHYSICAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE: WHAT TO DO

What can job retention programs do?

- Ensure access to transitional Medicaid or other publicly subsidized health insurance for low-income individuals; help plan for available options after transitional Medicaid expires; help obtain other health insurance or access to an HMO
- Refer clients for mental health services if they exhibit severe anxiety and behavior problems or if their children have problems; maintain ties to professional therapists (located in the program office or easily accessible) who can counsel clients; refer clients with substance abuse symptoms to appropriate treatment and counseling when such services are available

What can states/local agencies do?

- Extend transitional Medicaid to the working poor to provide medical subsidies after transitional benefits end (Maryland, Minnesota, Vermont, Wisconsin); provide subsidized health insurance that phases out gradually as earnings increase; deduct health insurance payments from income for purposes of benefit calculations
- Increase health coverage for children and families; remove bureaucratic and other barriers that restrict access to needed services (Educational Outreach Initiative, SC*)
- Analyze reasons for low take-up rates in transitional Medicaid and promote participation; educate different groups about transitional medical benefits; increase outreach efforts and simplify and expedite the process of determining client eligibility to ensure that Medicaid-eligible people are identified correctly and enrolled
- Provide intensive and specialized case management services to clients with mental health problems or substance abuse problems
- Form close ties with vocational rehabilitation departments; provide appropriate employment and vocational training placement for those with physical and learning disabilities (Supported Employment Program, NJ*; Job Training and Rehabilitation Services Project, OH*)
- Provide advanced training to case managers for identifying, working with, and making appropriate referrals for clients with disabilities, mental illnesses, or substance abuse problems. For instance, Wisconsin Works (W2)* links with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to serve welfare clients; Learning Disabilities Initiative, KS* provides training and assessment tools to welfare case management staff to help them identify service delivery strategies for clients with disabilities. Other examples: Nevada County GAIN Employment Services Program, CA*; Oregon JOBS program, OR*; Family Employment Program, UT*; Substance Abuse Research Demonstration Project, NJ*

What can job retention programs do?

- Provide counseling and morale boosting; serve as a sounding board for clients who have little personal support and want to talk about crises or problems they are facing
- Identify voluntary agencies or groups that have mentoring components and refer clients to these groups; form extensive networks with available resources in the communities and provide referrals to clients
- Provide referrals to shelters or safe houses or to organizations that have such services
- Provide referrals to free legal assistance when clients are suffering from physical abuse or domestic violence
- Assess the social support needs of each client and provide outreach and crisis management support

What can state/local agencies do?

- Train eligibility workers and case managers to identify victims of domestic abuse and on how to address the subject of domestic violence with clients (Domestic Violence Awareness Training and Service Planning, MD*; Domestic Violence Plan, OR*; Options/Opciones Program, IL*); form a team (including job counselors, welfare caseworkers, social workers, and child care workers) to treat the case and take a holistic approach to providing services; provide assistance in accessing temporary shelter or a restraining order (Model Office Project, CO*; Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, MN*)
- Encourage the establishment of community groups that provide mentoring and other social support for low-income individuals and those trying to make the transition from welfare to work; work with employers and focus these efforts at job sites, since working parents might find it difficult to add mentors to their lives; to avoid stigma, establish mentoring for all low-wage workers, not just welfare recipients
- Provide intensive and specialized case management to clients with family crises or legal difficulties by providing crisis counseling, support dealing with stressful situations, and referrals to specialized community resources (Nevada County GAIN, CA*)

What can job retention programs do?

- Make job search assistance a critical component of job retention programs; strengthen links between welfare and employment agencies
- Monitor to detect job loss through periodic employment verification (such as once every 30 days for the first six months) or through the TANF payment system to see if earnings have been deleted from the case benefit calculation
- Contact clients to give them job leads; provide referrals to job placement workers or job clubs and follow up on clients' progress
- Encourage training for individuals who are working part-time or in low-paying jobs, so that they can eventually move on to better jobs
- Encourage clients to share job leads and provide small financial incentives for successful placements (Illinois Department of Human Services)

What can states/local agencies do?

- Improve access to reemployment services for all, regardless of welfare status. Provide job search assistance and resources for recipients who have lost jobs without making them go back on welfare.
- Provide payments for child care and transportation for those seeking jobs or job-upgrading, including current and former TANF recipients
- Form closer ties with DOL and other state employment agency staff
- Provide job banks and one-stop career centers or encourage use of such resources that are already available so that clients can easily access job leads
- Promote the hiring and retention of welfare recipients by employers; provide additional subsidies if necessary; link with chambers of commerce and other representative groups to obtain information or buy-in; use state or federal tax subsidies if necessary
- Set up job creation programs in times of bad/adverse labor market conditions

III. SETTING UP JOB RETENTION PROGRAMS

Some states, recognizing the challenges TANF recipients face in moving from welfare to work, are considering setting up job retention programs. The operational experiences of PESD offer valuable lessons to help guide state and local agencies in such efforts. This chapter focuses on six key questions that state and local agencies must consider as they attempt to provide job retention services to employed welfare recipients:

1. Who to serve?
2. What types of services to provide?
3. How to deliver services?
4. How much to promote services?
5. When to provide services?
6. Who will run the programs?

For all of these questions, agencies will have to make choices. In this chapter, we briefly describe how the PESD programs were set up with respect to each question, suggest key alternatives, and discuss the main features associated with each choice.¹ Where relevant, we also provide operational suggestions for programs considering different choices.

Please keep two considerations in mind while reading the next six sections. First, the goal of these sections is not to provide a comprehensive listing of all possible choices that relate to each issue. Rather, the goal is to focus on some key alternatives and to point out trade-offs that will have to be considered. Clearly, the approach that makes the most sense for any particular agency will depend on local circumstances, the primary goals of the program, and available resources.

Second, these six questions are highly interrelated (Figure 4). The choice for any one of these questions has implications for the feasible or best choice for the others. For instance, a state may decide to set up a job retention program that provides case management services. This then has implications for the target population it can most easily serve. Alternatively, a local agency may decide that it wants to contract for job retention services. This then may have implications for the ease with which participation in the job retention program can be made mandatory, since contractors may find it difficult to enforce participation. Some combinations of choices go better together or can be implemented more easily, and we indicate these throughout the chapter.

¹In most instances, we have a plus or a minus sign in front of each main feature to indicate key advantages and disadvantages associated with the choice. However, each program that is set up will be different; whether a specific program considers a feature a plus or a minus would depend on its goals and resources available to meet the goals.

