

FINDINGS  
FROM IN-DEPTH  
INTERVIEWS  
WITH  
PARTICIPANTS  
IN SUBSIDIZED  
EMPLOYMENT  
PROGRAMS

OPRE Report 2018-120

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# Findings from In-Depth Interviews with Participants in Subsidized Employment Programs

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# Overview

## Introduction

Subsidized employment and transitional jobs programs seek to increase employment and earnings among individuals who have not been able to find employment on their own. First-hand accounts of participants' experiences in these programs can inform efforts to improve long-term employment outcomes for various "hard-to-employ" populations.

This study is part of two federally funded multisite projects — the Department of Labor's Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD) and the Department of Health and Human Services' Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED) — testing various subsidized employment models. These programs targeted a variety of disadvantaged populations, including welfare recipients, people returning to the community from prison, and low-income parents who do not have custody of their children ("noncustodial" parents, usually fathers) and who owe child support. The projects tested programs that enhanced the subsidized job model with case management and other support services, job-readiness training, and job search assistance intended to help participants move into unsubsidized employment.

This report draws on in-depth interviews with over 80 ETJD and STED participants from 11 programs. These interviews provide rich and nuanced information about participants' lives and social support, experiences in the programs, and employment goals and outcomes.

## Primary Research Questions

1. What led participants to take part in the subsidized employment program and what did they hope to get out of it?
2. What were participants' reactions to their subsidized jobs? Did they feel these jobs were leading them toward unsubsidized positions or toward other goals?
3. How did participants try to obtain unsubsidized employment? What role, if any, did the program play in helping them find such positions?

## Purpose

This in-depth study was designed to provide a deeper understanding of participants' experiences in the ETJD and STED programs and specifically to explore how subsidized employment helps participants secure unsubsidized employment. By providing a detailed examination from the participant's perspective of how the programs have helped and what barriers remain, the study can help practitioners and policymakers continue to improve the program models.

## **Key Findings and Highlights**

- Study participants approached the start of these programs with hope; they were eager to be productive and self-reliant, and they were optimistic that the subsidized job would be a stepping-stone to a well-paying unsubsidized job.
- Participants generally saw value in establishing daily work routines and believed that they were gaining job skills and connections that would boost future employment prospects. They also appreciated job search skills training and other support services, when provided.
- There were successes; some participants found jobs through the program that they believed they would not have found on their own. The majority of participants, however, could not turn their subsidized work experiences into unsubsidized jobs, and those who did become employed tended to be working in low-wage jobs without benefits.
- Strategies to improve employment results may include stronger programmatic connections with employers, the reduction of transportation barriers, intensive and tailored job placement, and sustained communication with staff members.

## **Methods**

The in-depth interview study followed individual participants over time to capture their views and attitudes as they moved through the subsidized employment programs. Interviewees were selected to mirror the characteristics of all program participants at each site and to provide insight into the different stages of the program. About half the participants were interviewed three times, about one-quarter completed two interviews, and about one-quarter completed one. A very small number had four interviews. Interviewers were in contact with participants for an average of seven months.

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The Author

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

How to help “hard-to-employ” groups join or rejoin the workforce has been a long-standing concern among policymakers and program operators. Subsidized employment and transitional jobs programs are one approach to increasing employment and earnings among individuals who have not been able to find jobs on their own. These programs provide paid work experience, job-readiness training, and connections to employers — which together are expected to make participants more attractive to employers and improve their labor market outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Two federally funded multisite evaluations, both led by MDRC — the Department of Labor’s Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD) and the Department of Health and Human Services’ Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED) — tested a number of different subsidized employment models. These programs aimed to increase the long-term employment of a variety of disadvantaged populations, including welfare recipients, people returning to the community from prison, and low-income parents who do not have custody of their children (“noncustodial” parents, usually fathers) and who owe child support. The programs also had goals specific to the target populations, such as reducing welfare receipt, reducing recidivism, and increasing child support payments. Enhancements to these models include partnerships with private employers, additional skills training to better prepare people for unsubsidized jobs, and other forms of support designed to address the specific needs of the population being served.

This report draws on in-depth interviews with ETJD and STED participants from 11 programs to explore their experiences in the subsidized jobs programs. The interviews were mostly conducted in late 2013 and throughout 2014.<sup>2</sup> The in-depth study followed individual participants over time to capture their views and attitudes as they moved through these programs. The interviews add to the subsidized employment research by providing rich and nuanced information about participants’ lives and social support, experiences in the programs, and employment goals and outcomes. The sample — over 80 individuals — provides an unusually robust participant perspective that can help program operators and policymakers understand the extent to which these program models meet participants’ needs and in what ways they fall short.

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<sup>1</sup>Subsidized employment programs use public funds to create jobs for people who cannot find employment in the regular labor market. Transitional jobs programs provide time-limited, paid jobs to individuals who have difficulty getting and holding jobs in the regular labor market, with the aim of teaching basic skills or providing an introduction to an employer. This report uses the terms subsidized and transitional jobs interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup>Interviews with participants in Los Angeles and the two San Francisco programs continued into 2015. Interviews with Minnesota participants occurred in 2016.

## ETJD and STED Studies

This in-depth participant study is part of a large-scale, random assignment research effort conducted by MDRC. Through randomized controlled trials, MDRC is testing whether subsidized employment programs across the United States improve participants' long-term success in the labor market.<sup>3</sup> The programs being tested in the two federal evaluations — ETJD and STED — provided temporary paid jobs to individuals with serious barriers to employment, in the hope that subsidized employment would improve long-term labor market outcomes for “hard-to-employ” groups. These jobs, along with case management and other support, job-readiness training, and job search assistance, were intended to help participants obtain unsubsidized employment when the subsidized job ended.

The target groups included in the ETJD and STED studies include — depending on the program site — individuals recently released from prison, unemployed noncustodial parents behind in child support payments, recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) who had failed to find work, and young people who were neither in school nor working (sometimes referred to as “disconnected youth”).<sup>4</sup> The programs used subsidies to give participants opportunities to learn employment skills while working in supportive settings, or to help them get a foot in the door with employers. Brief descriptions of the target populations and subsidized job models are provided in Table 1.1.<sup>5</sup>

Early findings from the ETJD and STED studies indicated that although programs had varied success in placing participants in subsidized employment, most programs increased participants' employment early on relative to a control group, largely due to the subsidized jobs. As subsidized jobs ended, these employment gains grew smaller, but impacts persisted in some subsidized jobs programs throughout the follow-up period.

## In-Depth Study Research Questions

The in-depth study was designed to provide a deeper understanding of participants' experiences in the programs and specifically to explore how subsidized employment helps participants secure unsubsidized employment. In addition to learning about participants' program experiences, the

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<sup>3</sup>In these randomized controlled trials, individuals who were eligible for and expressed interest in the subsidized jobs program were assigned, through a random selection process, to a program group that had access to program services or a control group that did not. This process created two groups that were comparable at the start of the study in both measurable and unmeasurable ways. Thus, statistically significant differences in the groups' outcomes that emerge over time — for example, differences in employment rates — can be attributed to the program rather than to preexisting differences between the groups.

<sup>4</sup>The program for young adults included high school dropouts, participants who had earned a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, and some who had some college experience.

<sup>5</sup>More detailed descriptions of the program models are found in Appendix A and in Barden et al. (2018); Bloom (2015); Cummings, Farrell, and Skemer (2018); Glosser, Barden, and Williams (2016); Redcross et al. (2016); Skemer, Sherman, Williams, and Cummings (2017); and Walter, Navarro, Anderson, and Tso (2017).

**Table 1.1**

**The ETJD and STED Program Sites**

<b>Program Name, Operator, and Location</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Subsidized Job Model</b>
<b>Good Transitions</b> Goodwill of North Georgia <i>Atlanta, GA</i>	Noncustodial parents	Participants worked at a Goodwill store for one month, then moved into a less supported subsidized position with a private employer for about three months.
<b>Next STEP</b> Workforce Solutions of Tarrant County <i>Fort Worth, TX</i>	Formerly incarcerated people	After a two-week job-readiness “boot camp,” participants were placed in jobs with private employers. The program paid 100 percent of the wages for the first eight weeks and 50 percent for the following eight weeks.
<b>RecycleForce</b> RecycleForce, Inc. <i>Indianapolis, IN</i>	Formerly incarcerated people	Participants were placed at one of three social enterprises, including an electronics recycling plant staffed by formerly incarcerated workers who trained and supervised participants.
<b>Transitional Subsidized Employment: On-the-Job Training and Paid Work Experience</b> L.A. County Dept. of Public Social Services with South Bay Workforce Investment Board <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>	TANF recipients	On-the-Job Training participants were placed in private-sector positions. Participants’ wages were subsidized up to minimum wage for two months, and then employers received a subsidy roughly equal to 50 percent of minimum wage. Paid Work Experience participants were placed in minimum-wage employment with public agencies or nonprofit organizations.
<b>Supporting Families Through Work</b> YWCA of Southeast Wisconsin <i>Milwaukee, WI</i>	Noncustodial parents	Participants were placed in subsidized jobs, mostly with private-sector employers. The program supplemented wages to bring them up to \$10 an hour for six months.
<b>Ready, Willing and Able Pathways2Work</b> The Doe Fund <i>New York, NY</i>	Formerly incarcerated people	Most participants worked on street-cleaning crews for six weeks, then moved into subsidized internships for eight weeks. If an internship did not transition to unsubsidized employment, the program paid the participant to search for jobs for up to nine weeks.
<b>Young Adult Internship Program</b> NYC Dept. of Youth and Community Development with community-based organizations <i>New York, NY</i>	Disconnected youth	Cohorts of about 30 participants began with a paid orientation lasting two to four weeks. Participants were then placed individually or in small groups into internships in a variety of sectors.
<b>MSTED</b> County human service agencies, with employment service providers <i>Ramsey, Dakota, and Hennepin Counties, MN</i>	TANF recipients	Participants considered “more job-ready” were placed in private-sector jobs, which were subsidized up to \$15/hour for two months, then 50 percent for the next two months. Less job-ready participants were placed in nonprofit or public-sector jobs, subsidized at \$9/hour for two months.
<b>Jobs Now STEP Forward</b> San Francisco County Human Services Administration <i>San Francisco, CA</i>	Various low-income groups	The program held weekly group interviews attended by multiple participants and employers. Jobs lasted five months and were subsidized up to \$1,000 per month, though some were unsubsidized.
<b>TransitionsSF</b> Goodwill Industries, with San Francisco Dept. of Child Support Services <i>San Francisco, CA</i>	Noncustodial parents	Participants were placed into one of three subsidized job tiers depending on their job readiness: (1) nonprofit jobs; (2) public-sector jobs; or (3) for-profit, private-sector jobs.
<b>Parent Success Initiative</b> Center for Community Alternatives <i>Syracuse, NY</i>	Noncustodial parents	Participants were placed in work crews with the local public housing authority, a business improvement district, or a nonprofit organization.

SOURCE: The information in this table was collected in interviews with program staff members and administrators.

NOTE: TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

study explores issues in their lives outside of the program (for example, a move, a change in household composition, or health problems) and how these issues affected the ability to participate in the subsidized jobs program.

The in-depth study seeks to address the following questions:

1. What led participants to take part in the subsidized employment program and what were they hoping to get out of it?
2. How did participants' interactions with systems such as welfare, child support enforcement, or criminal justice inform their interest in the program?
3. What were participants' reactions to their subsidized jobs? Did they feel these jobs were leading them toward unsubsidized positions or toward other goals?
4. How did participants try to obtain unsubsidized employment? What role, if any, did the program play in helping them find such positions? Did the program connect them to the jobs, and if so, could the participants have obtained unsubsidized jobs otherwise?
5. What problems did individuals face in participating in the program, in their subsidized employment, and in finding unsubsidized employment? How did the program address or not address these barriers?
6. How did the program fit into participants' lives? What other sources of support (financial and nonfinancial) facilitated or hindered participation in the program? Were participants investing hope and effort into the program, or were they just going through the motions?
7. Over the course of the study period, how much progress did participants make toward the goals they expressed when they enrolled?

## **Study Methodology**

On-site interviewers, including faculty members and graduate students at local universities, were hired specifically for this study. Interviewers were trained on the purpose of the study and on the interview protocol. At two sites, the interviewer left and was replaced midway through the study.

Interviewees were not selected randomly; rather, they were selected to mirror the characteristics of the program participants at each site and to inform researchers about the different stages of the program, as described below in more detail.

Each participant was interviewed up to three times.<sup>6</sup> Interviewers were in contact with participants for an average of seven months. Between interviews, interviewers were expected to

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<sup>6</sup>Three participants had four interviews.

maintain contact with participants through check-in calls, texts, and/or emails. In addition to confirming and updating contact information, check-in calls with participants were opportunities to catch up on any changes that had occurred in participants' lives since the last formal interview.

Most interviews were conducted in person and held in public spaces convenient to participants and accessible via public transportation (for example, coffee shops, restaurants, and public libraries). Others were held at the program sites, and a few occurred in participants' homes. They typically lasted one hour.<sup>7</sup> Participants received a \$25 gift card for each interview in appreciation of their time. The interviews were recorded for later transcription.

A couple of features of this methodology are notable. First, the longitudinal nature of the data for this report allowed this study to capture changes in participants' impressions in real time at different stages of the program. This differs from typical interview or focus-group research in which participants are asked to reflect back on their experiences. In this study, for instance, most participants' reasons for joining the program were reported soon after they enrolled in the program, and their experiences in the subsidized job were captured while they were working or soon after. Second, the program-related information and descriptions in this report came from participant interviews and views of how the programs worked.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the report, brief vignettes showcase individuals' experiences and highlight the report's themes and findings. Selected quotes use participants' voices to provide additional detail. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms are used to refer to all participants and employers' names and other identifiers have been omitted.

Typical topics covered included the following (see Appendix B for the complete interview guide):

- Participants' backgrounds and attitudes
- Previous experiences with service providers or public agencies (primarily public assistance, criminal justice agencies, and child support)
- Work history
- Participation in the program, including experiences in the subsidized job
- Aspects of life outside of the program (for example, living situation)
- Employment goals

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<sup>7</sup>The shortest interview lasted 13 minutes; the longest, 3 hours and 40 minutes.

<sup>8</sup>For a comprehensive picture of how these programs operated (drawing on information from program staff members as well as participants), see Barden et al. (2018); Bloom (2015); Cummings, Farrell, and Skemer (2018); Glosser, Barden, and Williams (2016); Redcross et al. (2016); Skemer, Sherman, Williams, and Cummings (2017); and Walter, Navarro, Anderson, and Tso (2017).

- The job search
- Employment following the subsidized job

## **Selecting Participants for the In-Depth Study**

In-depth study participant selection aimed to achieve a sample of eight participants from each of 11 ETJD and STED sites. Participants were selected with the intent to mirror the demographics (age, gender, and race) at each site. Among the eight participants, the goal was to include five participants newly enrolled in the program (who may not have started working in a subsidized job) and three already in the subsidized employment phase of the program. Thus, the timing of the first interview varied, even within sites, relative to when individuals enrolled in the programs.

Sometimes program staff members recommended participants based on enrollment status (for example, those who had just enrolled in the program). Staff members were instructed to recommend applicants who were not considered the best or most highly motivated but were more average or typical participants. At other sites, the in-depth study interviewers handled selection and recruitment.

Interviewers explained the study and told participants there would be multiple interviews and that they would receive a gift card after each interview. Interviewers made sure the participants understood that participation in this study was voluntary and they would not be penalized if they decided they did not want to be interviewed. If more people volunteered than were needed, the interviewer selected the participants. Sometimes interviewers chose randomly, other times on the basis of age, race, and/or ethnicity so that the group more closely mirrored the characteristics of the site's total participant sample.

As Table 1.2 indicates, participant recruitment for the in-depth study came close to the target of eight participants at each of the 11 sites, except for the Minnesota and Milwaukee sites, which each had five participants. Study participants represented a broad cross section of demographics and backgrounds. Given the relatively small sample and nonrandom selection, however, the findings are not representative of all program participants. (Appendix C provides demographic and other characteristics of the in-depth study sample.)

About half the participants (51 percent) completed three interviews, about a quarter completed two, and another quarter completed just one. In general, there were difficulties reaching participants for follow-up interviews (especially those no longer in the program).

**Table 1.2**  
**Number of Study Participants and Interviews Conducted, by Site**

Program	In-Depth Study Participants	Total Number of Interviews	Participants with One Interview	Partipants with Two Interviews	Participants with Three or More Interviews
<b>Good Transitions</b> <i>Atlanta, GA</i>	8	22	0	2	6
<b>Next STEP</b> <i>Fort Worth, TX</i>	8	18	2	2	4
<b>RecycleForce</b> <i>Indianapolis, IN</i>	8	24	0	1	7
<b>Transitional Subsidized Employment: On-the-Job Training and Paid Work Experience</b> <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>	8	17	2	3	3
<b>Supporting Families Through Work</b> <i>Milwaukee, WI</i>	5	11	3	0	2
<b>Ready Willing and Able Pathways2Work</b> <i>New York, NY</i>	8	18	1	4	3
<b>Young Adult Internship Program</b> <i>New York, NY</i>	7	21	0	0	7
<b>MSTED</b> <i>Ramsey, Dakota, and Hennepin Counties, MN</i>	5	9	2	2	1
<b>Jobs Now STEP Forward</b> <i>San Francisco, CA</i>	9	23	1	2	6
<b>TransitionsSF</b> <i>San Francisco, CA</i>	8	13	4	3	1
<b>Parent Success Initiative</b> <i>Syracuse, NY</i>	8	13	5	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>42</b>

SOURCE: Interview data collected by MDRC for the In-Depth Participant Study.

The remaining chapters of this report cover the following topics:

- Chapter 2 discusses why participants joined subsidized jobs programs.
- Chapter 3 provides details about participants' experiences in subsidized jobs.
- Chapter 4 describes other support services provided by the programs intended to help participants overcome barriers to employment.
- Chapter 5 describes how the subsidized jobs and the programs helped participants make the transition to unsubsidized employment.
- Chapter 6 presents a summary of the findings and some implications for the programs.

## Chapter 2

# Motivations for Joining a Subsidized Employment Program

Participants wanted permanent jobs. For most, this was the main reason for enrolling in a subsidized jobs program. An immediate need for income motivated some, especially those returning from prison. Dealing with debt was also a critical concern, especially among noncustodial parents. Young people and younger recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) were more likely than older recipients and those who were not receiving TANF to incorporate education as part of their strategy for achieving employment goals. These motivations and reasons for joining the programs are discussed in this chapter.

## Achieving Financial Independence

*“The difference . . . is that [this program] puts you to work immediately. You can have money in your pocket so you don’t have to be stressing about getting money, having money in your pockets and you don’t go out there and do some of the dumb things that we tend to do sometimes.”* — New York City Pathways participant

For many interviewees, a job was essential to getting out of debt, supporting themselves and their families, and living on their own. Participants expected that they would have a better shot at getting a job after participating in the program or that they would find a better-paying, more interesting job through the program.

Jordan had been out of work for three months. His only income at the time he enrolled in the program was \$186 per month in food stamps (and a few odd jobs here and there). He said he had been “technically homeless” for the past two years. He was not living on the street or in a shelter but had been doubling up with various friends. His driver’s license had been suspended for six years, but he continued to get traffic tickets, which he was unable to pay. He owed \$436 per month for child support. Jordan had a criminal history, which included several felonies.<sup>1</sup>

Some focused on the short-term prospects for income from the subsidized jobs. A sizable proportion reported that they had no income at the time they were first interviewed. This was especially common among participants recently released from prison. Participants coming out of prison often owed restitution and other fees, adding to the need for a job.

At the time they enrolled, participants commonly relied on family, partners, or friends for a place to live, transportation, and help paying for a mobile phone and other bills. Obtaining

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<sup>1</sup>Vignettes are adapted from interview summaries written by interviewers; names have been changed.

sufficient resources to live on their own was an explicit goal for many. One participant commented that the only thing keeping him from being homeless was the fact that he lived with his girlfriend, who had a steady job and was able to pay most of the bills. Many reported difficulties paying rent. Even those fortunate enough to pay only a few hundred dollars a month in rent were spending a very high proportion of their income on housing.

Over one-fourth of the interviewees explicitly mentioned that their current housing situations were temporary or indicated that they hoped they were (including those living in halfway houses and homeless shelters). Living with others made financial sense, but it could involve crowded conditions and a lack of privacy, and a few participants mentioned that there was no room for their children to come to visit or live. In some cases, the relationships with those they lived with were described as stressful or in flux, and it appeared that the housing situation might change as a result. Even in cases where everyone got along, participants expressed the desire to move out once they could afford to live on their own.

Dwight was fortunate to have a considerable amount of emotional and financial support from his parents and several siblings. When Dwight joined the program he was in his mid-40s and living with his youngest sister. While she was happy to have him stay there permanently, Dwight hoped it was temporary. He appreciated the help his family provided, but he was looking forward to the time when he no longer had to be a burden on anyone.

For Darryl, living in a homeless shelter was a source of shame and distress. When asked about his perceived barriers to finding employment and achieving his long-term goals, he said, “Getting out of this place. Getting out of this predicament I’m in.” Darryl reported that he missed having the freedom to live the way he wanted to live, and that this affected other aspects of his life.

## **Overcoming Past Criminal Justice Experiences and Rebuilding Lives**

*“I don’t have nothing. I want better for myself. I refuse to accept less than what I know I can have. I’d rather be a productive member in society than a bullshitter in jail. I’d rather wake up to see my kid’s face every day instead of waking up to some other guy’s face.”* — San Francisco TransitionsSF participant

Two-thirds of the in-depth study sample had a criminal justice background and 44 percent had been convicted of a violent crime (including convictions for murder and manslaughter). (See Appendix C.) Having served time in prison, especially for those with a felony conviction, contributed to the difficulty of finding work. Gaps on their résumés added to the reemployment challenges facing many formerly incarcerated participants. Participants in this study acknowledged these difficulties and joined the programs in search of extra help finding a job.

Gail decided to show up for the program because she knew she would need help getting a job due to her felony convictions, and because she had been out of the job market for years. She hoped to use the money she would make from working to handle basic bills and the surcharges she had to pay for her driver's license, to catch up on her parole fees, and to take care of her children.

Jamaal, who lived in Atlanta and had past criminal justice experience, said that in order to pay his bills he would need a job paying \$13 to \$15 per hour, but he said, "I would even take, right now just because I wanna get to working, I would accept about \$10 an hour."

Among the individuals recently released from prison, many were referred by parole or probation officers, or they learned about available reentry programs during presentations by organizations at parole check-ins. A few mentioned hearing about the program from friends or residents at their halfway or transitional living houses. Hearing others' success stories motivated participants to follow through on the referral.

Eugene first heard about the program years ago, from a friend with whom he "used to run the streets." His friend completed the program and then acquired a job and his own place and was no longer on "the streets doing wrong stuff." Eugene decided he wanted the same for himself.

Many who came to the program soon after being released from prison saw the program as the means to leave criminal behaviors behind and start a new life. Several formerly incarcerated individuals described themselves as determined to change their lives for the better. They saw the program as helping them make better decisions and learn to manage their behavior and anger.

Participants experiencing housing crises, facing crumbling marriages, or struggling to recover from drug abuse or illness similarly viewed the program as a chance to rebuild and gain stability and independence.

Tristan described this program as his best chance at turning his life around, getting a job, and staying sober and out of prison.

Christina had been out of work for several years when she was referred to the Atlanta program by a child support worker who told her the program might be able to help her find a job. She said, "I felt like, why not try out for this program? I wanted to change my life. My life was going in the wrong direction, and I wanted my kids back, so I said I would try this program out to see what it's about." Her goals when she started were to get full-time work, save some money, find a place to live, and go to court to regain custody of her children, who had been removed by the child welfare system.

Providing for their children and proving to family members that they had changed for the better strongly motivated some participants.

Melissa, a single mother raising her 3-year-old son, was motivated to find a job in order to provide for him. She had some community college credit, and her goal was to obtain a four-year college degree. After breaking up with her boyfriend and moving out on her own, Melissa was desperate for a job; after she signed up for TANF benefits, she heard about the program.

Rasheem seemed encouraged that the program would be able to help him get skills and find work. He talked about wanting to break away from his old life, be recognized for doing something well, and do things with his kids he had not been able to afford.

## Getting Help with Child Support Debt

*“She also just explained to me the benefits of [the program] as well as how they would assist you with work. You could find gainful employment, and basically the main three things that they were about was about getting the job, keeping the job, and making sure that I’m able to pay my child support. Those are the primary things that I need as of now. So it was perfect, [a] perfect opportunity for me.”* — Atlanta GoodTransitions participant

Noncustodial parents in this study often owed child support, and many had accrued significant debt. Some of the programs offered assistance with child support orders. Among in-depth study participants from sites targeting noncustodial parents, roughly 40 percent signed up for the programs specifically to get help reducing their child support orders or arrears. Participants’ child support orders ranged from under \$100 per month to \$740 per month, and arrears ranged from several thousand to tens of thousands of dollars. Child support orders took away a large share of income: One participant reported that 50 percent of his unemployment insurance check was taken out for child support.

Devin’s primary motivation for joining the program was the promise of help in getting his child support debt paid down. The amount he owed, he said, was “too damn much,” totaling over \$30,000. He hoped that the program could help him pay down his debt or get his payments reduced. Devin also hoped the program could help him get his driver’s license reinstated. But because of his criminal justice history he was not sure which state had the hold on his license and did not know how to find out.

Eddie was very clear that the only reason he joined the program was to get his child support debt taken care of. He said this was a bigger motivation than getting a job, something he felt confident he could do on his own if he could get back on his feet and out of debt.

Some participants were unsure of the details surrounding their child support situations. For instance, one participant told the interviewer he was unsure how many active child support orders he had, saying it could be anywhere between two and four. He also was not sure how much money he owed in arrears. He knew that when he was working in his last job payments were taken directly out of his paycheck, but he was not sure how much they amounted to. Another said he did not know whether his payments went to the state for public assistance payments or to his daughter’s mother.

## Upgrading Skills and Education

Some participants saw themselves as needing only a boost to get an unsubsidized job. They expected that with a program connection, or after they had updated their job search skills and filled the gap on their résumés, they would be able to find a job on their own.

Jordan thought just being connected to the program would improve his chances of getting a job. He said he had been looking for a job and filling out applications, but he expected employers would be more likely to give his application a second look with a program connection: “The possibilities are endless now because I have a backing. I have some — people see me now saying, Well, you work with [program] — they may be more liable to take a chance on me now as opposed to me just coming from the street and trying to present myself.”

Nadine had not held a full-time job in a long time. She decided to participate because she knew she would get a job through the program and saw that as a way of getting her foot in the door. Her goal was to get some experience that she could use to get a job on her own. She did not expect the program job to continue long-term. In fact, when asked if she would try to establish a good relationship with her employer, she responded: “In a way yeah, but then they say they’re not going to keep you afterwards, they fire you, so I’d rather just be neutral with them.”

Ray’s gap in employment had made it difficult for him to get back into the job market, and before he enrolled in the program his confidence was low. He hoped that he would gain skills and knowledge about new technology, up-to-date marketing skills, and job experience that would help him get back into the job market. Ray looked at the program as temporary, and hoped that within six months to a year he would be done and working in a “meaningful” job.

Many participants cited a need to learn how to use computers and connect to the internet to look for a job. One participant, who lacked a high school diploma or equivalent, mentioned being computer illiterate and unable to complete online job applications as a big barrier: “I don’t know anything about computers. And trying to fill out applications: I can’t do it on my own. I’ve been trying to tell them that. I cannot fill out an application by myself, ’cause comprehending — there’s certain things I cannot comprehend. It may seem like I’m smart. I know I’m a smart, intelligent person, but it’s things I don’t understand. I can speak all day, but looking at something, I’m not comprehending what it’s saying.”

Participants at a few sites saw the opportunity to earn credentials and licenses through the program as a means to secure a better job than they could get on their own. Several programs offered General Educational Development (GED) classes and others provided short-term training in addition to subsidized employment. For instance, the Fort Worth program offered training, typically lasting 4 to 10 weeks, for participants to gain commercial driver’s licenses or learn welding. In addition to formal credentials and licenses, participants’ interest in the program stemmed partly from the opportunity to acquire or strengthen computer skills, to update their job search and interviewing skills, to develop a résumé, and to understand how to market themselves to employers.

Brandon showed up for the program orientation because he had heard that people had gotten jobs with the program in the past. He wanted to get an air conditioning and heating certificate while in the program, which, combined with his work experience in that area, he hoped would land him an unsubsidized job by the end of the program.

Chad recalled that his parole officer, who referred him to the program, said it would help him get job training. Chad was interested in getting a commercial driver's license and thought the program would help him do so, as well as helping him write a résumé and search for a job.

Jeremy was looking for a career, not just a job, and hoped that by getting some training he could work in welding or with a forklift.

Two groups of participants were interested in education as well as employment — participants in the New York City Young Adult Internship Program and some TANF recipients in Los Angeles. Participants saw a GED certificate as essential for obtaining a good job, and some wanted to pursue further education and get a college degree. Several of these participants described plans to combine work and education, though at the time they entered the program these plans were vague, and TANF participants tended to be only partially knowledgeable about the rules around TANF receipt and participation in employment and educational programs.

Briana heard about the program from her TANF worker, and it sounded appealing because it would get her work experience. Briana was 22 years old, and her employment experience consisted of some babysitting in high school and volunteer work. Briana had a baking and pastry certificate and hoped to advance her career goals by going to school for an associate's degree in baking and becoming a pastry chef. The TANF program told her that unless she was attending school for at least 35 hours a week, she also had to get a job. She was hoping to get a job through the subsidized jobs program and attend school simultaneously. Although not sure how this would play out, she decided to figure it out as she went along.

For younger participants with educational aspirations and help from their parents or other family members, the program did not appear to be as central in their lives as it did for those returning from long stays in prison or experiencing crises.

Briana, the TANF recipient introduced above, commented: "It's important but not that important, because [the subsidized jobs program is] only six months and I will have to look anyway, but it helps . . . anything helps, so if they can help me find work, whether it be office work or anything, it doesn't matter, as long as I have something."

A few had previously participated in the same or another employment-related program. One participant said he went to the program upon being released from prison because that is what he does every time he is released from prison. A San Francisco STEP Forward participant described earlier experiences in the program:

Dwayne has been in and out of the STEP Forward program ever since he moved to San Francisco in 2005. He initially heard about the program through the General Assistance office, where he was looking for GED classes. His wife got involved

in the program first and was able to get a job, so he decided to try it also. Dwayne has been in and out of the program depending on his employment status, but he most recently returned after he got into a fight with his coworker and was laid off. He wanted a custodial job at a hospital. His main goal was simply to get another full-time unsubsidized job as soon as possible.

Almost all participants described their participation in the program as voluntary. There were two exceptions. One formerly incarcerated individual said he thought his participation was mandatory as a condition of his parole, and one TANF recipient felt coerced into enrolling, saying she had been “tricked into signing papers,” believing she had to sign to receive her TANF benefits.<sup>2</sup>

## Summary

The promise of a job drove most participants into the subsidized jobs program. The subsidized job itself and its immediate earnings enticed some individuals with no income — many of whom had recently been released from prison — to sign up. For others, the promise of a well-paying unsubsidized job at the end of the program sparked their interest. Participants were hoping this program would reduce their financial reliance on others — with many wanting to move and live on their own. Specific concerns influenced various participants. A sizable number of noncustodial parents who owed child support that they were unable to pay joined specifically because of the programs’ offer to help reduce their child support debt. Parents — both those who lived with their children and those whose children lived elsewhere — expected that by the end of the program they would be better able to provide for their children.

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<sup>2</sup>As a reminder, this study reports only participants’ views and perspectives.

## Chapter 3

# Types of Subsidized Jobs and Participants' Reactions to Them

This chapter describes interviewees' subsidized job placements, reflections on the work they did, and whether they thought it was leading them toward a permanent job.<sup>1</sup>

Some programs placed participants in subsidized jobs designed to teach basic work behaviors and skills, provide work experience to add to résumés, and provide an opportunity to gain references. The assumption in these situations was that, at the point of enrollment, participants were not ready to succeed in a regular, unsubsidized job and needed time in a more forgiving work environment. For example, some San Francisco TransitionsSF participants worked in the program provider's warehouse. In contrast, other programs placed participants in jobs that were closer to unsubsidized jobs, with some placements expected to “roll over” into unsubsidized jobs.

Two programs — Atlanta's Good Transitions and New York City's Ready Willing and Able Pathways2Work (Pathways) — provided two subsidized jobs to each participant as they moved through the program. Participants started in subsidized positions working for the program provider and then moved to subsidized positions with private employers that were closer to “real” jobs.<sup>2</sup>

## Types of Subsidized Jobs

Interviewees' subsidized jobs included physically demanding warehouse jobs and maintenance and janitorial work, as well as some office, retail, preschool, and food service positions.

**Warehouse jobs.** In Indianapolis, the transitional job employer was the program provider, which ran an electronics recycling business as a social enterprise.<sup>3</sup> Interviewees worked in the warehouse sorting and disassembling electronics (such as televisions and computers) for recycling, and loading and unloading trucks. Some participants were selected for “special assignments” outside of the warehouse. For example, one participant described working for over two weeks on the south side of the city collecting large quantities of electronics to bring back to the warehouse. In San Francisco's TransitionsSF program, run by Goodwill Industries, some study participants were placed in jobs sorting donated merchandise at Goodwill's warehouse.

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter discusses subsidized job placements only for in-depth study participants. For a more complete description of the types of placements offered for the full STED and ETJD samples, see Bloom (2015) and Redcross et al. (2016).

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix A for details on the length of the subsidized jobs and other program features that applied to all program participants at each of the sites.

<sup>3</sup>Social enterprises are organizations or businesses that address social problems or needs through a commercial approach.

**Maintenance, landscaping, painting, and street cleaning.** In Syracuse, study participants were assigned to maintenance or janitorial, painting, or clerical work at a housing authority. Interviewees from New York City’s Pathways program worked three days a week on street-cleaning crews made up of other “trainees.” The job entailed emptying garbage cans and sweeping streets in Manhattan. After completing the street cleaning assignment, some study participants were placed in subsidized “internships” at private sector and nonprofit organizations doing maintenance and small repairs at various residential facilities. Tasks in these jobs included cleaning, changing garbage bags, doing small repairs, painting, and keeping the outdoor area clean. Some TransitionsSF interviewees were placed in transitional jobs with the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department doing landscaping and custodial or maintenance work.

**Clerical and office-based jobs.** Several Los Angeles study participants were placed in clerical jobs — assistant at a medical center, office assistant at a courthouse, and receptionist at a one-stop employment center. Two San Francisco STEP Forward participants obtained office-based subsidized jobs: One worked in sales for a new, small private company and the other was hired as the manager of development and communications for a small nonprofit. New York City’s Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) participants had subsidized jobs (referred to as internships) at nonprofit, public, and private sector sites, such as an Educational Opportunity Center, a district attorney’s office, a councilman’s office, and the mail room of a publishing company. Some programs provided in-house office-based jobs. One Milwaukee participant worked as a program assistant for the program operator, YWCA, performing general office tasks such as greeting people at the front desk, filing, presenting information to potential participants, making copies, and assisting other participants by finding them appropriate donated interview attire.

**Retail jobs.** The Atlanta program placed several study participants with large, big-box retailers. Participants helped in the shipping and receiving departments with tasks such as unloading trucks, stocking shelves, and performing custodial work. One participant reported that even though his duties did not formally involve waiting on customers, they sometimes asked him questions and he would assist them. One New York City YAIP interviewee worked in a flower shop assisting with arrangements and deliveries.

**Preschool jobs.** Several Los Angeles study participants were placed in preschools. They described their roles as teachers’ aides helping out in the classrooms, but some also performed janitorial or custodial work and some cooking.

**Food service.** New York City’s Pathways program placed a few interviewees in culinary training (instead of street cleaning), first in jobs preparing meals and then in internships at restaurants. One Fort Worth participant obtained a subsidized job as a server at a restaurant.

## **Choice in Work Placements**

Most interviewees said they had limited choice in selecting a subsidized position; they were assigned to their specific subsidized jobs by the program. All Indianapolis interviewees worked for RecycleForce, the program provider. New York City’s Pathways participants were offered

subsidized positions in maintenance or culinary work for their first subsidized job. One Pathways participant claimed to have been given five options for his internship (the second subsidized job) and said he was asked to list his top three choices. Yet other interviewees from Pathways complained about not being given more than one option for their internships. An interviewee from the TransitionsSF program, who was placed as a custodian at a nonprofit housing agency, expressed disappointment with the limited variety of jobs available through the program. He felt overqualified for many of the jobs and was disappointed that they were heavily concentrated around a few specific areas, such as custodial and construction work. He wanted to use his education and did not want to start over at ground level.

Some programs did not assign participants to their subsidized jobs. Fort Worth participants, with the help of the program staff, searched and interviewed for their subsidized jobs. San Francisco STEP Forward brought employers on-site, where they interviewed multiple participants. STEP Forward participants were critical of the list of subsidized jobs offered by these employers, describing them as entry level, unskilled, and low paying.

## **Placements with Private Employers**

Rather than placing participants into temporary transitional jobs, several programs attempted to place them directly into permanent positions, usually with private employers, with the goal that the employers would hire the participants at the end of the subsidy period. An employer would receive a temporary subsidy covering all or part of the employee's wages and in return was expected to move the individual into a regular, unsubsidized job if things went well during the subsidy period. Interviewees from Fort Worth, one of the sites where the program focused on placements with private employers, worked in various types of jobs:

- restaurant server
- truck driver (after attending driving school and earning a commercial driver's license)
- carpenter (doing tasks involved with remodeling homes)
- painter
- warehouse worker at a local food bank

## **Hours and Pay of Subsidized Jobs**

Participants worked full time or part time in their subsidized jobs, depending on the site and program model. Fort Worth and Indianapolis interviewees said they worked close to full time, and Indianapolis participants with extra assignments said they got overtime if they worked on the weekend. Indianapolis participants noted that working full time limited their ability to complete personal tasks (such as getting a driver's license) or actively search for a job.

Atlanta study participants started in full-time subsidized positions, but as they neared the end of their allotted time they were moved to different, part-time subsidized positions. New York City's Pathways jobs were three days a week, leaving two days for workshops and job-readiness activities.

Participants earned little in the subsidized jobs (especially when paychecks were garnished for child support or participants were docked for absenteeism). For instance, Atlanta jobs paid \$7.25 per hour, participants in Indianapolis received \$9 per hour, and New York City Pathways participants reported receiving a stipend of \$155 to \$175 per week.<sup>4</sup>

Income from these jobs was often reported to be insufficient to cover living expenses. Several participants (not all from the same site) had been under the impression that the program would be providing full-time employment or provide a specific wage. They were frustrated and felt their subsidized jobs paid less and provided fewer hours than advertised. One Milwaukee participant expected to make more:

Martin said they had been told they would make \$10 an hour on the job but they weren't making that. He said, "I feel that this program needs to make a change. It has to hold up to its part of the deal. Like when they say the wage is going to be \$10 an hour, it should be \$10 an hour."<sup>5</sup> Martin said, "I'm not ashamed. I take home \$85 a week. Who can survive on that? You can't even get a room for that much . . . I smile with it. It bothers me, but I smile with it."<sup>6</sup>

While most subsidized jobs paid near minimum wage, a few participants worked in well-paying subsidized jobs. After losing his first subsidized job, one Fort Worth participant found a second subsidized job in the same field that paid \$3.50 more per hour than his first job, and a San Francisco STEP Forward participant was hired in a management position at a very small non-profit, earning roughly \$24 per hour.<sup>7</sup>

Study participants had different attitudes about the low wages they earned in the subsidized jobs. One participant from Syracuse was very vocal about the wages and felt he should be earning more: He noted that it wasn't "worth it" to work and make such a small amount of money, but he knew he needed to be in the program because it made him look good for his probation officer. Another Syracuse participant was happy for the income he earned:

Willie enjoyed his job, and with his disposable income he took his kids to Burger King, which made him feel like he was being a good dad. He also purchased

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<sup>4</sup>At the time that participants were in these jobs, the federal minimum wage was \$7.25 per hour. Some states set higher minimums — such as California (which went from \$8 per hour to \$9 per hour on July 1, 2014.)

<sup>5</sup>The reason for this discrepancy between the pay rate the participant received and the expected \$10 per hour is unknown. As indicated earlier, this report presents the program operations as they were understood and experienced by participants.

<sup>6</sup>Vignettes are adapted from interview summaries written by interviewers; names have been changed.

<sup>7</sup>This was an unusually high-paying job within the programs. The participant noted that the nonprofit was struggling financially. The participant voluntarily left the position toward the end of the subsidy period, and it is unclear whether the company would have had the funding to continue paying the participant after the subsidy ended.

other small treats for his kids. He said it gave him a sense of independence that he valued.

A few formerly incarcerated participants remarked that they had earned significantly more from prior illegal activities than from their subsidized jobs. Some had adjusted to this change, but a couple of participants reported they were still making ends meet via illegal activities, and others admitted that they thought about how “easy” the money was and how much more they could afford with their income from illegal activities.

## **Subsidized Job Supervision**

Some subsidized jobs provided close supervision and employers were more tolerant of participants’ behavior and absences than would be expected in regular unsubsidized jobs. The following examples indicate ways in which workplace norms were relaxed in these more supportive subsidized jobs.

Keisha was originally placed in a Goodwill store, but she “clashed” with her supervisor and their conflicts were ongoing. Eventually she told her case manager she was unhappy, and her case manager arranged for Keisha to work at a different Goodwill location.

Daniel spoke of the understanding and respect shown to him by his employer (the program provider) after health challenges caused him to miss an entire week of work: “No other job would understand my health.”

Devante reported that he became very frustrated by an incident that occurred outside of work and, knowing that when he became frustrated he would take it out on other people, he decided to take a week off from work to get his thoughts together and refocus. Devante confided in a staff member, who referred him to an anger management program. Other than losing his week’s worth of wages, Devante reported no work-related consequences of his absence.

Martin spoke about his relationship with a woman who, with her children, lived with him and his son. Martin said their relationship was a source of great stress for him. He had lost weight, stopped doing activities he enjoyed (such as going to church and bowling), and missed several days of work because he couldn’t get himself out of bed. He said he had discussed his relationship problems with his supervisor, who was a good source of support.

Many interviewees reported positive relationships with their supervisors. Participants enjoyed receiving positive feedback and were sometimes rewarded with increased responsibilities.

Kenton found his subsidized job as a painter interesting and felt that his employer trusted him to get the job done. When he first began he was paired with another employee, but after a time his employer trusted him to work alone. He reported having a good relationship with his supervisor and said he had had no incidents and had not missed a day of work since he started.

Alisha worked in a clinic for HIV patients. “I know you can tell, I’m a people person, I love talking! And I just love, love that job!” The receptionist she worked

with and one of the doctors gave her positive feedback, which really motivated Alisha to keep up her good work.

Not all participants had good relationships with their subsidized job supervisors. One participant felt underutilized, and after missing work for various reasons — such as going to a doctor’s appointment without contacting his employer (he said he did not have the phone number) — he was let go from the subsidized job. Another complaint was about feeling singled out and treated differently from other participants.

Nicole said participants were supposed to arrive at 8 a.m. to be driven to their work site, but often they didn’t leave until closer to 9 a.m. Between the hours of 8 a.m. and 9 a.m., she said, participants signed in, talked with each other, texted, went across the street to Burger King. She was upset that she was sent home for arriving at 8:15 one morning. She said the male participants regularly arrived after 8 a.m. and were allowed to stay and go to their subsidized work site, but she was sent home.

Several participants complained that they were not treated like “real” employees or valued as such.

Antwan did custodial work for the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department. He reported that he felt that the transitional employees were treated as “subs” for the permanent employees, and when he started the job his boss did not take the time to teach the transitional employees how to use the machinery.

## **Pathways Toward Permanent Jobs**

*“I feel like I have some type of purpose. It feel — it actually feel good to work for something and know that I didn’t go out there or — break in nobody house, or rob somebody. It feels good knowing that everything I got, I got it ’cause I worked for it. And — I mean, that’s really the major impact that I’ve had since I’ve been out.”* — Indianapolis RecycleForce participant

Subsidized jobs provided immediate benefits to participants. The jobs provided a paycheck, which helped with living expenses (even though as previously described, many were disappointed with the low wages). Jobs also provided a sense of purpose and structure. Participants liked the routine of going to work, doing something productive with their time. Many felt valued and took pride in their work. While they were working, participants typically viewed their subsidized jobs positively, especially when they had hope that these jobs would be stepping-stones to unsubsidized employment.

**Developing a work routine.** For some, working in the subsidized job built work habits. Participants enjoyed having something positive to fill their days, and being productive felt good.

Eugene described the first weeks of street cleaning as a productive experience for someone like him who had not held a job for a long period of time, because it forced him “back into the work habits. . . . I’m going out there to change some garbage cans. It’s a real dirty, nasty job sometimes, but what it does is it breaks me down. It lets me put my ego aside because I’m getting paid to do this.” Eugene also said he cherished the money he made because he knew he had to work hard for it, as opposed to when he was running the streets and would just “spend it with no care at all.”

**New connections and references.** Participants felt their subsidized jobs were a way to show future employers they were capable of being gainfully employed. Some participants reported that they hoped to get, or had already received, a reference or recommendation from their supervisors. For some, the job provided networking opportunities, connections that they thought could help secure future employment. Having recent, real-world work experience was thought to send an important message to future employers, especially for participants who had not worked before, or when there had been a long employment gap or a criminal history.

Several participants spoke about making a real effort to impress others at work. These participants understood how the impressions made at the subsidized job could potentially help in the long run. Participants spoke with pride about receiving letters of recommendation.

Antwan said that eventually he and his boss ended up having a very positive working relationship. His boss offered to be a reference for him. Antwan was surprised by the relationships he built with his coworkers during his time on the job. He admitted that he had some biases regarding Asian people and did not initially think he would get along with his Asian coworkers, let alone form relationships with them. But they ended up being very helpful to him, and one man even offered to be a reference for him after he left. He felt the networking and connections he made with other people turned out to be one of the most beneficial aspects of his transitional job.

Alyssa’s most helpful coworker was the clerk she worked with most often, whom she called her “other mom.” In addition to helping Alyssa when she had personal problems, the clerk helped her prepare for tests and told her what she would need to do to become a clerk. She told Alyssa she would pass along information about job openings.

**New skills.** Participants gained skills that they anticipated would help them get and keep jobs. These skills were as varied as the jobs. Several participants who worked in a warehouse especially valued skills and practice in forklift driving. Painting techniques, sandblasting, and using specialized machinery were mentioned. Desk and office jobs (particularly for participants who had primarily worked manual labor jobs in the past) provided participants the opportunity to improve their computer skills and gain clerical skills such as using copy machines.

Communication and customer service were also important in many jobs, and some participants mentioned this experience in describing benefits they gained from their jobs.

Mark felt that after being out of the work environment for a couple of years he had enhanced his communication, customer relations, computer, and troubleshooting skills while working at his subsidized job at a Goodwill store.

Briana thought that working in the preschool helped with her communication skills, as she found she had to communicate with both parents and children.

Not all participants said they had learned new skills. Several said the entry-level jobs were too basic to impart meaningful skills. A Fort Worth participant said he had been doing construction work most of his life, and at times his coworkers turned to him for advice. Several Syracuse painting crew members said they received no training and little oversight or guidance.

**Career direction.** Some participants gained clarity about the type of work environments they were (or were not) suited to. Participants also gained confidence working in professional settings. A few participants had a positive experience from a placement in a field they had not previously considered or a foot in the door to jobs they had not been able to get on their own.

Working at the courthouse raised Alyssa's expectations about what she could do. Before, she thought she was only able to get a job at a place like McDonald's or a clothing store. "I felt like because I didn't have my GED maybe I wasn't mentally equipped to deal with all the paperwork and everything. And doing it . . . it wasn't that hard, makes me want to do it more."

For some, subsidized jobs raised the importance of getting more schooling. Participants realized that in order to get a similar permanent job they would need a GED certificate, and this, they said, was motivating them to go back to school. For others, working in subsidized jobs led them to put education on the back burner.

Briana had originally planned to go to school for a degree in baking in order to become a pastry chef. After working in her subsidized job at a preschool, her goals shifted, and she talked about baking more as a hobby than a career.

## **Views on Getting Hired by the Subsidized Job Employer**

Participants had mixed views on whether the subsidized job would become an unsubsidized job. Some knew that the job would be temporary.

Alyssa was aware that her job would end after six months; her employer had made it clear that they wouldn't be able to turn her position into a full-time unsubsidized job.

A sizable group expected or hoped the subsidized job would turn into an unsubsidized job. In some cases participants expected this based on positive feedback they received from their supervisors. Some participants were hopeful they would be hired after receiving positive feedback on their work performance even when they had been told the job was temporary.

Devin's immediate supervisor was very encouraging about keeping him on, so he thought he would be able to keep his job after the transitional period ended even

though the program had initially told him not to count on that. Unexpectedly, in his view, he was let go.

Kyle was optimistic about being hired after completing his internship with Volunteers of America, even though he seemed aware that, as a policy, they did not hire. He spoke about the praise he received for his good work.

## **Summary**

Subsidized jobs varied in the types of work participants performed and in the extent to which the employers treated participants as they treated nonsubsidized workers (in terms of the duties assigned, attendance expectations, and type of monitoring provided). Across all types of subsidized jobs, participants generally saw value in establishing daily work routines and believed that they were gaining job skills and employment-related connections that would boost future employment prospects. Complaints focused mainly on low pay rates and less-than-expected earnings from their jobs. Participants were mixed on whether they thought they would be able to stay on in their jobs after the end of the subsidy, but many were hopeful.

## Chapter 4

# Program Services and Other Forms of Support

Most participants' main interest and their primary focus during participation was the subsidized job. For many, though, other program services and support were welcome and important aspects of their pathways toward hoped-for unsubsidized employment.

## Job Search Skills

*“Well, when I initially exited prison I wasn't prepared for all of the new technology; back when I went off to prison you could walk inside of a warehouse and pretty much just ask to talk to a manager and you could find work. I tried that same strategy once I was released and I was really surprised to discover that it's not the same.”* — Fort Worth Next STEP participant

Participants appreciated job-readiness classes and assistance in creating résumés, learning how to look for jobs on the computer, and completing online job applications. Participants said they improved their interviewing skills by learning how to present themselves to employers in a professional manner: shaking hands, making eye contact, dressing appropriately, and responding to questions. Some participants also mentioned that they learned how to discuss their criminal histories at interviews.

Antoine said the program provided him with the tools he needed for interviewing. For example, he said the program really helped him learn how to talk to employers about what he had done wrong. He believed he could now communicate that although he had made mistakes in the past, he had changed.<sup>1</sup>

## Training and Certifications

*“So for right now I'm just gonna try to get a good job in another warehouse, and use these certifications that I got from here — 'cause that's the most easiest thing I can do right now.”* — Indianapolis RecycleForce participant

The Atlanta and Indianapolis programs routinely provided short-term occupational skills training and certifications. In Atlanta, for instance, the program offered training for certifications in forklift

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<sup>1</sup>Vignettes are adapted from interview summaries written by interviewers; names have been changed.

operation, flagging, floor tech (cleaning and refinishing floors), and truck driving. Participants believed that the certifications would be attractive to employers.

A couple of participants received help from the subsidized jobs program to get training from another external provider.

Dwight said that when he began the program, participants received a list of potential careers and were told to choose what they would like to do. He decided he wanted to pursue a commercial driver's license (CDL) because he liked driving, believed he could make good money driving trucks, and thought truck drivers were in high demand. The program contacted the trucking school and handled all aspects of getting him enrolled. Dwight attended the four-week truck driving course from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. five days a week and eventually earned his CDL.

Participants who had received training did not necessarily receive opportunities to use or demonstrate these new skills as part of their subsidized jobs. This was the case for an Atlanta participant:

Christina was admitted to the floor tech program where she received training and a certificate in stripping, polishing, buffing, and cleaning floors. This training concluded with a graduation ceremony at Goodwill. She said her mother, aunt, uncle, and other relatives attended the ceremony. Christina applied for cleaning jobs without success. Owning her own cleaning business was her goal, which she put on hold when she started her subsidized job in a different field.

## **Child Support Modifications**

As discussed in Chapter 2, many noncustodial parents saw the program as a means to reduce the amount of child support they owed. Child support situations were often complicated and required sustained attention and sometimes a court appearance to resolve. Several Milwaukee participants received assistance from a lawyer to help modify child support orders.

Although Gerald's enthusiasm for the program waned over time, he found working with the lawyer to reduce his child support payments to be the most helpful part of the experience. He said, "That was an outstanding help. I really needed something like that at the time."

Martin worked with a lawyer to reduce his child support payments. According to Martin, he and his lawyer were in regular weekly communication. Initially, his ex-wife did not agree to reduce the child support payments. Martin continued working with the lawyer, who continued discussions with the ex-wife, and eventually his payments were reduced.

San Francisco TransitionsSF participants did not work with lawyers, but they received help from their program case managers and staff members from the child support agency.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>As part of the TransitionsSF model, the Department of Child Support Services regularly provided incentives to promote program participation, including driver's license release and child support order modification.

Emmett got his child support payments reduced and said that program staff members were helpful during the process, even appearing in court on his behalf. Emmett said his child support worker and his program case manager were in contact with each other, which he felt helped his case. He was happy that this was working out, because help with his child support situation was a big motivation for joining the program.

Antwan made it clear that his number one reason for participating in the program was to get help with his child support payments. He used to pay \$350 per month through direct deductions from his check toward his child support. After the modifications he paid close to \$50 per month. His partner agreed to this arrangement as long as he continued to work and they stayed together. Antwan felt that she would fight him for more money if he “screwed up” again.

While some participants lauded the child support help they received, confusion and uncertainty about child support processes and payments continued for many.

Christina had four child support cases. She did not know how much she owed for one of the children, nor did she know her total monthly payment or whether it was taken directly out of her paycheck. Christina said the child support program was the weakest part of the subsidized jobs program. She spoke of not knowing what was going on with her case. When she called the child support office, she said, she never reached anyone. Christina said she had no idea what her status was with child support and she had not paid anything on her order for several months.

Devin had hoped the program would help him lower his child support debt. But after being in the program for over nine months, Devin said that he felt like he got “the runaround” from the child support office and could not really tell whether anyone from the program was helping him or not. Eventually he just “left it alone” because it was too stressful and frustrating to try to figure it out.

## **Help with Other Barriers to Employment**

Programs provided tangible assistance with basic needs such as clothing, eyeglasses, dental care, and identification cards.

Transportation was a big issue for participants. An Atlanta participant was appreciative when a staff member drove him to a job interview. Participants were glad to receive bus passes and gas cards. Fort Worth participants trying to regain their driver’s licenses welcomed help with completing the paperwork and paying surcharges. The program helped one participant pay her first month of car insurance. An Indianapolis participant noted that the program had helped him get the child-support hold on his driver’s license lifted.

Two Fort Worth participants spoke about different kinds of assistance they received:

Richard was truly impressed with the help he got from the program to get eyeglasses and dentures. The program gave him a Walmart gift card so that he could buy himself some clothes and provided money orders to pay surcharges so that he could recover his driver’s license. He was proud of the fact that he now had a driver’s license.

Antoine attended anger management classes as a condition of his parole. The program paid for these classes as well as for his Texas identification card and helped him pay down his surcharges in an effort to get his driver's license back.

## **Summary**

Though the job remained the primary motivation for participation, programs offered a range of other benefits. Participants knew that their job search skills were outdated, and they appreciated receiving help creating résumés and learning to search for jobs online and feedback on their interview techniques, including how to answer tough questions about criminal histories. Some programs addressed other challenges facing participants, such as child support obligations and other financial management problems, as well as a lack of transportation. Participants who received help with these issues areas appreciated it — but such services were far from universal, even for those in need. In the case of transportation, some programs provided short-term help, such as providing bus passes and gas cards to promote participation; others took a longer-term approach by helping participants get their driver's licenses reinstated.

## Chapter 5

# The Transition to Unsubsidized Jobs

Participants entered the program with the hope of finding stable, long-lasting unsubsidized jobs. Most remained hopeful until their subsidized jobs ended. Fewer than half the participants in the in-depth interview sample found an unsubsidized job during the period they were in contact with the interviewers. This chapter describes the assistance programs provided in participants' transitions from subsidized to unsubsidized employment and identifies reasons participants failed to secure unsubsidized employment.<sup>1</sup>

### A Few Seamless Transitions

*“What I like most? The communication between the coworkers up there. It’s like I was a missing part of the family or something like that, I fit in right when I got there. Everybody got along. I mean, I have fun with the people I’m working with.”* — Fort Worth Next STEP participant

Direct, seamless transitions from subsidized to unsubsidized jobs occurred for at least eight participants when their subsidized employers kept them on after the subsidies ended.<sup>2</sup> Employers had the opportunity to evaluate participants' abilities during the subsidized period — eliminating the need for participants to interview and compete with other applicants.

Briana had few complaints about the program. It gave her a foot in the door as a teacher's aide in a preschool, an opportunity that she would not have come upon had she tried to find a job on her own. Briana developed friendships with some of her coworkers and had started hanging out with them outside of work. These bonds helped her manage stresses that she had begun feeling at work. She felt she was part of a team.<sup>3</sup>

Two employers used the program as a source for new employees more than once, hiring multiple participants who had started in subsidized jobs. One was the preschool that hired Briana and two other participants as teachers' aides. A Fort Worth restaurant hired one participant and had reportedly hired others from the subsidized jobs program in the past.

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<sup>1</sup>It is unclear to what extent the participants in this in-depth study eventually would have found unsubsidized jobs on their own, that is, if they had not been in the subsidized programs. The strong research designs embedded in the full ETJD and STED evaluations will yield such information.

<sup>2</sup>This count does not include Indianapolis participants who were still working for the program but had not been told whether they would be hired permanently at the time of their last interview.

<sup>3</sup>Vignettes are adapted from interview summaries written by interviewers; names have been changed.

After Gail had participated in the program for about two months, a program staff member set up an interview for her for a subsidized job at a restaurant. She was successful in the work and was subsequently hired as a full-time server. She felt like a valued employee. The restaurant held an event to encourage other employers to hire program participants.

Several Indianapolis participants received extensions from the program and were still working in their subsidized jobs at the time of their last interviews. The Indianapolis program model involved promoting some participants to unsubsidized status. However, at the time of the last interviews for this study, participants had not been told whether they had been hired as permanent employees. In this limbo period, some were still looking for other jobs while others, hoping they would be hired, put their job searches on hold.

Joseph thought the only negative aspect of the program was “that it may end. I dread thinking of that, I like it here and I’d be saddened [to leave].” He expressed some frustration about not knowing his standing with the organization. He saw it as unfair that program kept workers on while it needed them to handle increased production but did not communicate with them about their futures.

Successful transitions to unsubsidized employment, however, did not necessarily keep participants employed in the long term. The following examples, of participants who moved directly from subsidized to unsubsidized jobs at the same employer, point to various reasons that these jobs ended or might in the future.

Christina reported that she had been at home getting ready to go to work when she passed out. Her cousin found her and called an ambulance, and she spent two weeks in the hospital. When she recovered, she called her employer to try and go back to work and was eventually told that although she was a good worker, and everyone liked her, due to company policy she could not return to work. Christina had worked for six months but had not earned any sick leave; it appeared that a year’s employment was required to earn sick leave.

Reggie’s subsidized job at a big-box store turned into an unsubsidized position. When business suffered a decline, his employers cut his scheduled work hours. Reggie was not earning enough to cover his bills and was looking for new employment. When he decided to break up with his girlfriend, with whom he had been living, he planned to move into his cousin’s home in a different county — 45 miles away. Reggie’s car was not in good enough condition for a commute of that distance, and the commute combined with the limited earnings from the job were not enough to make it worthwhile to stay.

Some participants who were not hired by their subsidized employer came to believe that employers were using the subsidy to cut their own labor costs. They were disappointed at being let go at the end of the subsidy and did not believe the financial explanations provided for not hiring them permanently.

Russell felt that his previous employer was taking advantage of the free labor he provided since the program was paying 100 percent of his salary through the subsidy. Russell said, “As soon as the full-pay subsidy runs out, he said that he

was going to have to lay me off. Because there wasn't enough work. But I knew there was."

## Seeking Jobs

Most participants ended their subsidized jobs without another job lined up. Some had been looking for a job throughout their time in the program, while others waited until the subsidized job ended before embarking on a serious job search. A few participants said they had thought the program would find jobs for them.

According to Damion, participants were given the impression that after their subsidized jobs were over, the program would partner them with companies that were hiring, and only later did he realize that this was not true. Damion said the staff used the "future employment promise" as "bait to fish for participants."

One way programs helped participants obtain jobs was by facilitating connections between employers and participants. In Atlanta, a job coach put in a good word for a participant at one of the program's Goodwill stores and he was hired. A Fort Worth participant attributed his hiring largely to the program's persuading the company to give him a chance:

Dwight recounted how a trucking company had initially expressed an interest in him despite his lack of experience, but just as they were getting ready to hire him, the discussion of his criminal history came up and the company backtracked. He called the program and told them what had happened. A staff member from the program then called the trucking company and advocated on his behalf. They also explained the subsidy payments to the company, advising the trucking company that they would pay his salary of \$10 per hour for the first 90 days. He was hired.

Program staff members also helped participants get jobs by providing job leads.

Jamaal had been applying for numerous jobs every week. When the program informed him about a truck driving job that included training, he filled out the online application and called the company the same day. Jamaal had a phone interview, and he was hired and began training and work soon after.

Job clubs — weekly gatherings of job-seeking participants, facilitated by program staff members — provided opportunities to practice interviews, work on résumés, network with others, and in some cases learn about available positions. Several participants indicated that they went to these sessions because they were paid to attend (and stopped attending when they reached the limit and would no longer be paid). Atlanta provided participants with either a public transportation pass or a \$25 gas card if they showed up well dressed, on time, and with five job leads. New York City Pathways participants who completed their second subsidized positions without finding other employment were paid a stipend for a certain number of weeks if they came to the program and searched for a job.

Marisa was attending workshops and doing paid job searching during the day, while working in the Bronx from 4 p.m. until 1 a.m. Although she already had a position, she continued job searching at the program because she needed the weekly stipend and hoped to find a better opportunity.

## Finding Jobs

Most participants who searched on their own looked for entry-level jobs using online sites such as indeed.com and monster.com. Some participants found jobs with the help of temporary staffing agencies and others through connections with family members or friends. Most of the jobs were entry level, paying minimum wage or slightly above.

Nina worked in a retail store. She was initially hired for seasonal work during the holiday shopping period, but they kept her on afterward. She worked 21 to 26 hours per week, making \$7.25 per hour.

Damion found a job at Starbucks, with the assistance of an old acquaintance. He earned \$9.25 per hour, working from 36 to 38 hours per week.

Gerald worked as a full-time employee at a retail store, where he earned \$8.80 per hour.

Deja was hired as a senior counselor at an after-school program, assisting with recreational activities. She worked 20 hours a week and was paid \$9 per hour.

Mark worked full time in an unsubsidized job. After five months he still made \$7.50 per hour. He felt the employer could afford to pay more: “For me it’s like working on a doggone plantation.”

There were exceptions, and some participants landed jobs that paid more than minimum wage. Several of these were San Francisco STEP Forward participants who came into the program with more education and stronger work histories.

Pam found a temporary job working at a gift shop. They offered her a full-time, year-round position with benefits. Pam accepted the job but did not feel she was using her education or professional skills.

Melanie worked in a series of temporary jobs. One job with a property management company, where she worked as a concierge in an upscale apartment building, turned into a full-time position. She earned \$18 per hour and received benefits. She planned to start paying off the \$12,000 in school debt she had taken on while earning a BA in public policy.

Some jobs did not last long for various reasons.

Gabriel got a job working on an assembly line at a warehouse, through a friend who worked there. He was employed there for only three or four weeks. The position was part time but paid \$16 per hour, a considerable increase from the \$9.50 per hour at the program’s subsidized position, and Gabriel reported that the income would have been enough to meet his needs had it lasted. But Gabriel rode to work with his friend, and when his friend stopped going to work, Gabriel had no way to get there and was fired.

Joseph got a part-time seasonal position at a local warehouse, but it lasted only three weeks during the holidays.

## Reasons for Not Getting a Job

The majority of participants did not find an unsubsidized job. Interviews with participants suggest possible reasons they struggled to find employment.

Participants described their connection to the program loosening at the same time their subsidized employment was ending. Contact with job developers (staff members who worked with employers to generate job leads) and case managers tapered off. Often there were staff changes, and the new staff members and participants didn't know each other and didn't have a strong connection.

Reggie reported mixed feelings about the program staff. He praised two staff members who were helpful with interview preparation and drove him to interviews. He said of one: "He will go out of his way to help you." He was critical of his job specialist, however: Reggie reported that while he was helpful at first, it then became difficult to get his attention. Reggie and the job specialist were supposed to go to a job fair together, but it was canceled due to snow, and Reggie never heard back from him. Reggie said, "He always gives me the runaround" and "he never followed through on what he said."

Layla said that her first impression of the program staff was that they were friendly and helpful, but she said they were not currently helping her as her subsidized job was ending.

Paul found his case manager helpful, but mostly in terms of keeping him motivated rather than providing him with job leads or improving any skill set. He said that she had reviewed his résumé and given him some general advice, such as making sure to tailor each cover letter, but he had never met with her individually, and she had not provided him any specific feedback or individual assistance.

Darryl described a negative experience that helped shape his view of the program. Darryl's case manager had scheduled a job interview but provided him with the wrong directions to the job site. Darryl arrived late to the interview and did not receive a job offer. From Darryl's perspective, it was not his fault that he missed the interview. Darryl wanted the program to explain the situation to the employer, but the program was not willing to do that. This experience angered Darryl and caused him to lose faith in the program.

The programs did not eliminate all employment barriers. Participants gained new job search and computer skills, résumés, and recent job experiences, but they still faced barriers such as a lack of transportation, felony convictions, and instability in their personal lives.

Joseph said that he and his friend were offered janitorial positions. When the company learned that neither of them had his own transportation and they would have to rely on the public bus, the company recanted its offer — saying public transportation was not reliable enough.

Participants told of submitting applications and interviewing with employers who recruited from the program, without ever hearing back. Participants did not get feedback on why they were not considered or hired.

After Kyle concluded his internship he spent approximately two weeks searching for a job while being paid by the program. During these two weeks, none of the companies to which he applied responded to his inquiries.

Some participants were not putting effort into their job search. Many wanted to get hired by their subsidized employer and were not seeking employment elsewhere.

Devin thought he would be able to keep his job after the transitional period ended because his immediate supervisor was very encouraging about keeping him on. He said that his supervisor consistently told him that he wanted to keep him on full time and not to worry about looking for another job.

Nicole did not think she had any obstacles keeping her from being employed, but she waited until after she was finished with her subsidized job to look for unsubsidized work. She admitted that she needed to be more self-motivated and regretted that she didn't apply for jobs while on the work crew, but she got overwhelmed, and rather than do things in pieces she did nothing.

For others, instability in other aspects of their life precluded an active job search.

Ella acknowledged spending very little time looking for a job because of the time consumed by taking care of her ex-boyfriend, who had cancer.

After Kyle learned that a woman with whom he'd had a long tumultuous romantic relationship had suffered a violent death, he reported using drugs frequently, losing support from his family, and reconnecting with friends with whom he used to conduct criminal activities. Feeling that his life was spiraling out of control, Kyle dropped out of the subsidized jobs program and voluntarily joined an inpatient drug program.

Marisa was living with her boyfriend's cousin. She did not state her exact location because she was there in violation of a condition of her parole. She was 14 weeks into an unplanned pregnancy and often felt physical discomfort.

The workforce office where Jana worked in a subsidized job was helping fill positions at a new shopping plaza, and Jana applied to work at a few of the stores. She had two interviews with the general manager of the plaza, where she was told she was perfect for the job. She was ecstatic. However, when she never heard back from the employer, and found out that everyone else at the workforce office who applied had been called back, she became discouraged and upset. The rejection made Jana feel insecure and "not good enough." After this experience, she wasn't sure if she was going to look for other work, and it appeared that she didn't feel confident enough even to try.

## **Summary**

The early hope and promise of subsidized jobs programs diminished as participants completed their subsidized jobs and most found themselves unemployed once again. Fewer than half the participants in the in-depth sample found employment, and many of the jobs did not pay enough or provide enough hours to meet the financial goals participants had initially set. Job searching often began in earnest only as the subsidized job ended. Some participants took advantage of help through job clubs, on-site interviews, and leads provided by program staff members, while others searched for jobs on their own. Obstacles to employment continued to make it difficult for many participants to make the transition to unsubsidized jobs.

## Chapter 6

# Conclusion

### Overall Findings

The 82 interviewees who participated in this study joined subsidized jobs programs hoping to improve their financial situations with jobs that paid enough to live on. Study participants approached the start of these programs with hope; they were eager to be productive and self-reliant, and optimistic that the subsidized job would be a stepping-stone to a better life. They expected that by the end of the program they would be working.

Study participants generally came away from these programs satisfied with what they saw as their increased employability through résumé-building efforts, experience in the subsidized job itself, and new employment connections and references. Participants were often surprised at how much they learned from job-readiness classes and pleased to have a completed résumé, and they had newfound confidence that they could use computers to look for and apply for jobs.

Experiences in the subsidized positions were mixed, but most participants valued some aspects of the job. Even when they did not enjoy the work itself, they were happy to have the structure and the income and remained hopeful that they were on a path to something better.

Participants expected that the subsidized jobs would lead to unsubsidized jobs, and the failure of this to happen was interviewees' main source of frustration. Some of the frustrations reflect a communications challenge. Programs faced a delicate balance between recruiting and touting the potential benefits of the program, on the one hand, and giving participants reasonable expectations, on the other. Some participants expected that a job would be available at the end of the program, and they did not necessarily heed messages about the temporary nature of subsidized placements or the advice to start searching for unsubsidized jobs. Some participants expressed surprise at being let go from their subsidized jobs, which may indicate that employers' praise and positive feedback (and even statements that they wanted to hire the participant) were misunderstood, or promises about future employment were not kept. As noted in the introduction, this report is based only on interviews with participants, and it is not certain what program staff members and employers said or tried to communicate.

Encouragement and positive feedback were important in helping participants develop confidence. Yet in some cases, encouragement from supervisors contributed to participants' expectations that they would be hired and to their disappointment when that did not happen. For some, not getting hired at their subsidized job (and not having a job at the end of the program) changed their early positive views of the program to more negative ones.

Some participants did not find jobs because they were not looking — counting instead on their subsidized jobs turning permanent. Others expected the programs to find the jobs for them.

Overall, interviews indicated that participants believed the programs did not change their access to good jobs. There were isolated cases in which program staff members connected participants with specific employers who were hiring. This happened infrequently. While subsidized employment provided a job to put on a résumé or a reference, most participants could not convert these experiences into better jobs. Participants did not receive training that appreciably changed their skill levels, so even after completing the program, participants applied for entry-level, low-skill jobs. For many, a lack of reliable transportation and the difficulty of commuting via public transportation impeded their chances of securing and keeping jobs. The jobs that participants did obtain typically paid little and offered no benefits. Without health insurance and vacation or sick leave in these entry-level jobs, participants found it difficult to stay employed when illness or family trouble emerged.

Participants appreciated receiving legal help with child support orders and help obtaining IDs and getting driver's licenses reinstated, but few received this kind of help. For many, challenges in their lives made unsubsidized employment difficult.

## **Implications for Increasing Programs' Success**

Participants' ultimate views of the programs reflect the mixed record of job placement success. Participants appreciated the opportunity to work in subsidized jobs and the ancillary services provided by the programs. On the other hand, participants who did not find unsubsidized jobs or who were unable to keep the jobs they found expressed frustration at the lack of a match between their goals and expectations and the results of their participation in the programs.

For many participants, the programs did not address key barriers to getting and holding a permanent job: inadequate transportation, health issues, and family crises. These findings indicate that challenges remain in meeting participants' needs and helping them find unsubsidized employment. Several strategies might improve results:

- **Stronger relationships with employers that are hiring.** Participants found limited success applying to employers on a general job list. Participants attributed some successes to a staff person connecting them to an employer directly or making a call to vouch for them.
- **Improved access to transportation.** Many participants lacked cars, and some jobs were far away or not accessible by public transportation. Bus passes and gas cards were sometimes provided so that participants could get to their subsidized jobs, but this support stopped when the subsidy ended. More help in reducing transportation barriers could improve job prospects.
- **More intensive and tailored job placement and training.** Participants wanted referrals and connections to a wider selection of fields and occupations. Even when participants succeeded in finding jobs, they did not always match their employment goals. Several interviewees mentioned that they received training or certifications that were not relevant to their subsidized jobs. This

indicates there is room to improve the alignment between the training and certifications offered and the fields of the subsidized (and unsubsidized) jobs.

- **Sustained attention by program staff members.** For many, connections to the program grew weaker at the critical juncture when the subsidized job was over. Participants said they had developed positive relationships with specific staff members, but these connections often stemmed from initial job-readiness training, and the staff members might have left or were no longer assigned to work with the participant.

Subsidized employment was intended to make participants more attractive to employers and improve their employment outcomes. Participants reported that they gained job search skills, and they were hopeful when they started subsidized jobs and got back into the routine of working. There were successes. Some participants found jobs through the program that they believed they would not have found on their own. The changes in their lives, however, fell short of the transformations they hoped for at the start. Those who did become employed tended to be working in low-wage jobs without benefits. And the majority of participants interviewed in this study could not turn their subsidized work experiences into unsubsidized jobs.

**Appendix A**

**Characteristics of STED and ETJD Programs**

**Appendix Table A.1**

**STED and ETJD Program Characteristics**

<b>Program Name, Operator, and Location</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Target Group and Number in In-Depth Sample</b>	<b>Duration of Subsidized Job</b>	<b>Program Model Overview</b>
<b>Good Transitions</b> Goodwill of North Georgia <i>Atlanta, GA</i>	ETJD and STED	Noncustodial parents  Total sample: 996	4 months; 20-40 hours per week	Participants start with a two-day assessment process, after which they are assigned a case manager and a Goodwill location to begin the first of two transitional jobs. Participants work at a Goodwill store for approximately one month while receiving support and feedback from an on-site job coach. Participants then move into a less supported subsidized position with a private employer in the community for about three months. The program offers case management, job-development services, life-skills workshops, and certifications in fields such as commercial driving and forklift operation.
<b>Jobs Now STEP Forward</b> San Francisco County Human Services Administration <i>San Francisco, CA</i>	STED	Various low-income groups  Total sample: 811	5 months; hours not specified	Each participant begins by meeting with a case manager for an intake interview. Depending on the participant's job readiness and interest level, the participant either proceeds with job-readiness activities or may be immediately scheduled for a weekly group interview, attended by multiple participants and employers. The jobs last five months and are typically subsidized up to \$1,000 per month, though some are unsubsidized. When participants obtain unsubsidized employment, they may continue to work with their case managers and may return to the program if they lose their jobs.
<b>MSTED</b> County human service agencies, with employment service providers <i>Ramsey, Dakota, and Hennepin Counties, MN</i>	STED	TANF recipients  Total sample: 799	4 months; 24-36 hours per week	All participants receive job-readiness training, either individually or in a two-week workshop. Participants who are more job-ready are placed into private-sector jobs with wages subsidized up to \$15/hour for the first two months and at 50 percent for the next two months. Less job-ready participants are placed into nonprofit or public-sector jobs with wages subsidized at \$9/hour for two months. Participants transition between subsidy types according to their individual needs. The program provides case management and job search assistance, and participants continue to receive support services through the TANF program.

(continued)

**Appendix Table A.1 (continued)**

<b>Program Name, Operator, and Location</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Target Group and Number in In-Depth Sample</b>	<b>Duration of Subsidized Job</b>	<b>Program Model Overview</b>
<b>Next STEP</b> Workforce Solutions of Tarrant County <i>Fort Worth, TX</i>	ETJD	Formerly incarcerated people  Total sample: 999	4 months; full-time	Participants begin with a two-week “boot camp” that includes assessments and job-readiness training. They are then placed in jobs with private employers. The program pays 100 percent of wages for the first eight weeks and 50 percent for the following eight weeks. Employers are expected to retain participants who are performing well after the subsidized period. Other services include case management, monthly group meetings, GED classes, and for some participants, mental health services provided by a partner agency.
<b>Parent Success Initiative</b> Center for Community Alternatives <i>Syracuse, NY</i>	ETJD	Noncustodial parents  Total sample: 1,004	4 months; 24 hours per week	Cohorts of 15-20 participants begin the program with a two-week job-readiness course. Participants are then placed in work crews with the local public housing authority, a business improvement district, or a nonprofit organization. The program offers family life-skills workshops, job-readiness and retention workshops, case management, civic restoration, legal services related to child support, and job search and placement assistance. Participants also receive peer support through job-retention clubs.
<b>Ready Willing and Able Pathways2Work</b> The Doe Fund <i>New York, NY</i>	ETJD	Formerly incarcerated people  Total sample: 1,005	3.5 months; 21 hours per week	Participants move through the program in cohorts. After a one-week orientation, most participants work on the program’s street-cleaning crews for six weeks. Participants are then placed into subsidized internships for eight weeks. If the internship does not transition to unsubsidized employment, the program will pay participants to search for jobs for up to nine weeks. Additional services include case management, job-readiness programs, opportunities for occupational training and certification, parenting and computer classes, child support assistance, and employment planning and counseling.

(continued)

**Appendix Table A.1 (continued)**

<b>Program Name, Operator, and Location</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Target Group and Number in In-Depth Sample</b>	<b>Duration of Subsidized Job</b>	<b>Program Model Overview</b>
<b>RecycleForce</b> RecycleForce Inc. <i>Indianapolis, IN</i>	ETJD	Formerly incarcerated people  Total sample: 998	4 months; 35 hours per week	Participants are placed at the social enterprise, an electronics recycling plant staffed by formerly incarcerated workers. Participants are trained and supervised by “peer mentors” — other formerly incarcerated people who have been promoted. The business excuses workers for five hours of development time that may be used to search for jobs and address barriers to employment, especially those regarding criminal-supervision compliance. The program also offers industry certifications, case management, job development, work-related support, and child support-related assistance. Participants may later be hired as unsubsidized employees.
<b>Supporting Families Through Work</b> YWCA of Southeast Wisconsin <i>Milwaukee, WI</i>	ETJD	Noncustodial parent  Total sample: 1,003	4-6 months; 30 hours per week	Participants start in a three- to five-day job-readiness workshop. They are then placed individually in transitional jobs, mostly with private-sector employers. Support during the transitional job includes case management, job-development assistance, and weekly group meetings. The program supplements wages in unsubsidized employment to bring them up to \$10 an hour for six months. The program also provides child support-related assistance.
<b>Transitional Subsidized Employment</b> L.A. County Dept. of Public Social Services with South Bay Workforce Investment Board <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>	STED	TANF recipients  Total sample: 2,622	6 months; hours per week vary	<b>On-the-Job Training:</b> Participants are placed individually in private-sector positions. Participants’ wages are subsidized up to minimum wage for the first two months, and for the remainder of the placement employers receive a subsidy roughly equal to 50 percent of minimum wage. All participants receive case management and assistance searching for unsubsidized jobs through Worksource Centers, along with support services through the TANF program.
			6 months; 32 hours per week	<b>Paid Work Experience:</b> Participants are placed individually in minimum-wage employment with public agencies or nonprofit organizations. Participants’ wages are fully subsidized for the duration of the placement. All participants receive case management and assistance searching for unsubsidized jobs through Worksource Centers, along with support services through the TANF program.

(continued)

**Appendix Table A.1 (continued)**

<b>Program Name, Operator, and Location</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Target Group and Number in In-Depth Sample</b>	<b>Duration of Subsidized Job</b>	<b>Program Model Overview</b>
<b>TransitionsSF</b> Goodwill Industries, with the San Francisco Dept. of Child Support Services <i>San Francisco, CA</i>	ETJD and STED	Noncustodial parents  Total sample: 995	5 months; 24-30 hours per week	Participants are enrolled in cohorts of about 25. They begin with one week of assessments followed by two weeks of job-readiness training. Then they are placed into one of three tiers of jobs depending on their job readiness: (1) nonprofit, private-sector jobs (mainly at Goodwill), (2) public-sector jobs, or (3) for-profit, private-sector jobs. Participants continue to meet with their case managers, attend GED or digital literacy classes, and search for jobs. They may receive modest financial incentives for participation milestones and child support-related assistance.
<b>Young Adult Internship Program</b> NYC Dept. of Youth and Community Development with community-based organizations <i>New York, NY</i>	STED	Disconnected youth  Total sample: 2,678	3 months; 25 hours per week	Cohorts of about 30 young people begin the program with a paid orientation lasting two to four weeks. Participants are then placed individually or in small groups into internships in a variety of sectors. During the internships, participants attend weekly workshops on development, work readiness, and life skills. They receive case management, job search assistance, and other forms of support during their internships and for nine months afterward.

SOURCE: Data based on interviews with program staff members and administrators in the STED and ETJD studies.

NOTES: GED = General Educational Development; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

**Appendix B**

**Interview Topic Guide**

## **Topics for first meeting, as close as possible to participant's program enrollment date**

### **Program questions**

- How did you hear about the program?
- What made you decide to show up to the program?
- What are your first impressions of the program and the staff?
- Have you ever been to a program like this before?
- What do you hope to accomplish by participating in the program? Have you tried to accomplish this in the past?
- What expenses will the wages you earn at the program help you cover?
- How long do you expect to be in the program?
  - When you exit the program, do you expect you'll have found a permanent job?
  - Is there a chance that the program will hire you?

### **Employment questions**

- Have you ever had job, on or off the books? What did you do?
  - Do you feel like the pay was enough? Why or why not?
  - In your last job, did you get any benefits such as paid time off or health care?
  - What did you like and dislike about your last job?
  - Why did you leave your last job?
- What kind of job do you hope to get? Does it require any kind of special experience or training? Do you have that experience or training?
  - If it requires training, do you have any thoughts about how to get the training? What are the obstacles?
- Do you have any income now to help support you and your family? From where? What is your current source of income?
- Since getting out of prison, have you been looking for a job?
  - How did you go about your job search before coming to the program?

- Did you go on any interviews?
- Did you get any job offers?
- If you have a family or child to support, how did they support themselves when you were locked up?

### **Criminal justice questions**

- What life choices or circumstances led to your first interaction with the criminal justice system?
  - How old were you when you were first arrested? What were you charged with?
  - How many times have you been arrested since? How many times have you been incarcerated? How did these subsequent events differ from the first?
- Have you ever been convicted of a felony? Walk me through the process that led up to your most recent incarceration. How did you come to the attention of the police? What were you charged with? Did you post bail? Did your case go to trial or did you take a plea? Was it your choice?
- What did your typical day in prison look like? Did you learn anything that might be useful once you got out?
- Did you participate in any kind of programs or education while you were in prison?
- How did you prepare for release from prison? Did you have particular goals for yourself? Did you have a plan for achieving them? Are they the same now?
- What supports did you have in place when you got out of prison? What obstacles did you face?
- What are the conditions of your supervision? Do you think the conditions are reasonable for you? If not, which ones are unreasonable and why?
- Do you think you'll be able to honor them? Do you think anything will get in the way of obeying the rules?
- What do you think about your parole or probation officer? Do you think they understand your circumstances? Do you think they are fair?
- Is there anyone you've met either in prison or afterward that you think is helpful to you and offers you good advice about things? Who?
- Are you currently in the midst of any legal proceedings?

### **Child support questions**

- Are you ordered to pay child support through the child support system? For how many kids? How old are they?
  - Have you been able to make the payments?
  - What happened to your child support while you were incarcerated?
  - Who takes care of your child? What is your relationship like with this person? With your child?
  - Do you provide for the child apart from your court-ordered payments? Do you give money or other things directly to the child's mom (or care-giver)?
  - What happens to your order if you get a job? Do you think it will go up? Is that an issue for you?
  - Has owing child support affected your ability to support yourself? Has it affected the kinds of jobs you take? Do they garnish your paycheck?
  - Do you visit your kid(s)? How often? What kinds of activities do you do together?
  - Does your visitation depend on whether you have the money to pay child support?

### **Social support questions**

- Who do you live with?
  - Is this a temporary living arrangement?
  - Do you pay rent?
- Do you have someone you can go to for advice?
- Do you have someone you can ask to borrow money?
- Do you still associate with the people you committed crimes with?
- Have you told any of these people that you signed up for the program? What did they say about it?

## Topics for second meeting, when participant is about two months into the program job

### Transitional job questions

- How long have you been working at the program?
- Do you think about other aspects of the program (that is, the supportive services other than the job) separately from the transitional job?
  - Which part of the program do you think is the most helpful? The least?
- Have you made any meaningful connections with staff or fellow participants since starting the program?
- How has your experience at the program matched or not matched your initial expectations?
- What are your responsibilities? Do you feel like a valued employee?
- Have your responsibilities changed at all since you started? Do you have any opportunity to take on more responsibilities?
- What skills have you acquired while on the job or through working with program staff?
- Who supervises you? How would you describe your relationship?
- What kinds of interactions do you have with your coworkers?
  - While you're at work?
  - Do you see them socially, too?
  - Did you know any of them before coming to the program?
- Have you ever had a work-related conflict while at the program?
- Have you had any conflicts outside of the program that interfered with your work at the program?
- Have you noticed any changes in your life since becoming involved in the program?
  - How you spend your free time?
  - How you spend your money?
  - How other people treat you?
  - Your relationships with friends or family? New relationships?

- How do other people, like friends or family, view your participation in the program/subsidized job?
- Have you missed more than a day or two of work since starting the transitional job?
  - Were there any consequences at the program?

### **Job search questions**

- Are you looking for a permanent job?
  - What would be the best job you could realistically get right now?
  - Is anyone helping you to find this job? What are you and they doing?
  - Do you think the program could be doing more to help you?
  - What is the biggest obstacle to you finding a job right now?

### **Criminal justice questions**

- What has your interaction with your parole/probation officer been like since you started the program? Has it changed at all?
- Does your PO really know what you're doing at the program?
- How often do you report to your PO?
  - In person or by phone?
  - Do they have you fill out any paperwork?
  - What is your conversation like?
  - Have you been sanctioned at all since being in the program?
- Do you ever feel like you need to err outside the law to meet your needs?
  - Do you have triggers or is it something you always think about?
  - What prevents you from following that path?
- Are you currently in the midst of any legal proceedings?

### **Child support questions**

- Has anything changed with your child support order since the last time we spoke?
- Does your case manager know that you have been working in a program?

## Topics for third meeting, after participant exits the program

### Program questions

- Why are you no longer at the program?
- Do you think you would have benefited from more time in the program?
- Do you still speak to anyone you met at the program, staff or other participants?
- Have you been back to the program offices or your old work site since you exited the program?
- What do you wish the program could have helped you with but didn't? Were you able to get this assistance elsewhere?

### Employment questions

- Are you working right now?
  - How did you find the job? Why do you think you were hired?
  - What are your hours?
  - Do you earn enough to support yourself and your family? Do you get any benefits such as paid time off or health care? Is child support taken out of your wages?
  - Do you feel like the work you are doing is worthwhile?
  - Do you work alone most of the time, or with other people?
  - Do you have possibilities for advancement at this job?
  - Did you work any other jobs since leaving the program? How did you get from there to your current job?
  - Have you noticed any changes in your life since becoming involved in the program?
    - How you spend your free time?
    - How you spend your money?
    - How other people treat you?
    - Your relationships with friends or family? New relationships?
  - **If not**, have you been looking for a job?
    - Have you worked at all since leaving the program?

- What actions have you taken to find employment?
- Have you been on any interviews?
- Have you had any job offers?
- What has been the biggest barrier to finding employment?
- What is your main source of income right now?
- Do you support anyone, like a child or parent?

### **Criminal justice questions**

- Have there been any changes to your criminal justice supervision?
- Are you involved in any new legal proceedings?

### **Child support questions**

- Has anything changed with your child support order since the last time we spoke?

### **Social support questions**

- Who do you live with?
  - Is this a temporary living arrangement?
  - Do you pay rent?
- Do you have someone you can go to for advice?
- Do you have someone you can ask to borrow money?
- Do you associate with the people you committed crimes with?
- Have you formed any new relationships — within or outside of the program — since you started the program? How did you meet this person? How would you describe your relationship?

**Appendix C**

**Characteristics of In-Depth Study Sample Members**

## Appendix Table C.1

### Characteristics of In-Depth Study Sample Members at Baseline

Characteristic	Total
Gender (%)	
Female	35.4
Male	64.6
Age (%)	
17-24	22.0
25-34	19.5
35-44	32.9
45-54	17.1
55+	8.5
Median age	38.0
Race/ethnicity (%)	
Hispanic	17.1
Black, non-Hispanic	68.3
White, non-Hispanic	11.0
Other (includes multiracial)	3.7
Marital status <sup>a</sup> (%)	
Never married	73.7
Currently married	2.6
Separated, divorced, or widowed	23.7
Number of children under 19 years <sup>a</sup> (%)	
0	23.7
1	32.9
2	22.4
3 or more	21.1
Number of children living with sample member <sup>b</sup> (%)	
0	65.3
1	21.3
2	10.7
3 or more	2.7
Ever employed (%)	87.8
Average hourly wage in most recent job <sup>c</sup> (\$)	10.35

(continued)

**Appendix Table C.1 (continued)**

Characteristic	Total
Highest education level (%)	
No degree	28.1
High school diploma or equivalency degree	62.2
Associate's degree or higher	9.8
Criminal justice involvement <sup>d</sup>	
Ever convicted (%)	64.6
Ever convicted of a violent crime (%)	44.2
Ever incarcerated (%)	50.0
Average years incarcerated	6.3
Among those ever incarcerated, most recently released from... <sup>e</sup> (%)	
State prison	93.1
Federal prison	6.9
Sample size	82

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on baseline survey data and ETJD management information system data.

NOTES: <sup>a</sup>Not collected in Minnesota; missing for one sample member in the Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP).

<sup>b</sup>Not collected in Minnesota; missing for one sample member in YAIP and one in STEP Forward.

<sup>c</sup>Missing for six individuals who indicated they had worked.

<sup>d</sup>Some criminal justice measures were not available for all sites. "Ever convicted of a violent crime" was collected at ETJD sites targeting formerly incarcerated individuals but was available for only 19 of those 23 individuals. "Ever incarcerated" was not available for the YAIP or Minnesota sites. "Average years incarcerated" was available for 45 individuals (from ETJD sites, with the exception of the San Francisco site). For those randomly assigned at sites targeting formerly incarcerated individuals, the number includes days in state prison or county jail. For those randomly assigned at sites targeting noncustodial parents, the number includes days in state prison. (Measures do not include time in federal prisons or in prison in another state.)

<sup>e</sup>Available for the 53 individuals from ETJD sites but not specified at other sites.

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