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Teaching Self-Sufficiency: An Impact and Benefit-Cost Analysis of a Home Visitation and Life Skills Education Program

Findings from the Rural Welfare-to-Work Strategies Demonstration Evaluation

Final Report

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BNF IMPACTS FOR HARD-TO-EMPLOY WELFARE RECIPIENTS: KEY FINDINGS

The Rural Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Strategies Demonstration Evaluation rigorously assessed the effectiveness of innovative programs for the rural poor. This final report presents 30-month impact and benefit-cost analysis findings for Building Nebraska Families (BNF), an intensive home visitation and life skills education program for hard-to-employ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients in rural Nebraska. The findings point to the effectiveness of BNF in increasing employment and earnings and reducing poverty among a subgroup of very hard-to-employ ("more disadvantaged") TANF clients who faced substantial obstacles and skill deficiencies.

BNF took an indirect approach to helping low-income people move from welfare to work and self-sufficiency. Offered in addition to Nebraska's regular TANF program, BNF provided individualized education, mentoring, and service coordination support with the goal of improving TANF clients' basic life skills, family functioning, and overall well-being. During interactive, home-based teaching sessions, master's-level educators used research-based curricula to enhance clients' life skills and family management practices. Low caseloads of between 12 and 18 clients allowed for intensive, individualized services.

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) and its subcontractor, Decision Information Resources, Inc., conducted the evaluation with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Using a random assignment experiment, people eligible for limited program slots were assigned to a program group (which was offered BNF) or a control group (which was not offered BNF, but which could access all other available services). Given the use of random assignment, the evaluation's key findings—highlighted below—provide rigorous evidence of BNF's effectiveness.

KEY FINDINGS

Program Implementation

- BNF was implemented in close conformance with its model. It benefited from a long pilot-testing period and active program leadership. The curriculum, the educators' skills, and coordination between educators and TANF case managers all improved over time.

- The average BNF client participated extensively, receiving BNF education and services two or three times a month for eight months. More disadvantaged clients received services for a month and a half longer, on average, than less disadvantaged clients.

- The program group was significantly more likely than the control group to receive education and skill-building services, mentoring, and service coordination support.

Full Sample Impacts on Employment, Self-Sufficiency, and Well-Being

- BNF improved employment near the end of the 30-month followup. The program group was also significantly more likely to retain employment and advance in their jobs.
- Overall, there were not significant impacts on sample members' earnings or public assistance receipt, but BNF significantly improved family income and reduced poverty.

Subgroup Impacts for More Disadvantaged TANF Clients with Multiple Obstacles

- More disadvantaged program group members worked significantly more months and hours than more disadvantaged control group members. More disadvantaged program group members were also significantly more likely to work in higher-paying jobs with better benefits, to retain employment, and to move to a better job.
- BNF led to significant, robust impacts on earnings, with the magnitude of the impacts growing over time. In the last six months of the 30-month followup, the program group earned 56 percent more than the control group, about $200 more per month.
- BNF improved family income and reduced poverty. At followup, the program group's average family income was 35 percent greater than that of the control group.
- At 30 months, the program group was less likely than the control group to report having had health-related hardships, and more likely to be living with their minor children and to have received more child support income. However, the program group was also more likely to have experienced housing- and food-related hardships.

Benefits and Costs of BNF

- BNF cost an estimated total of $7,383 to serve the average participant during her time in the program, and a total of $8,306 for the average more disadvantaged participant.
- BNF's measured benefits to society did not outweigh its costs during the 30-month followup. For more disadvantaged clients, however, we estimated that positive net benefits to society will result if average earnings impacts in the last six months of the followup persist for an additional 1.7 years.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

- The magnitude of BNF's earnings impacts for more disadvantaged TANF clients is comparable to findings from other evaluations of successful welfare-to-work programs.
- Given the strong impacts for the more disadvantaged subgroup, any future BNF efforts should target services to particularly disadvantaged and low-functioning TANF clients.
- Although BNF was tested in rural Nebraska, it may transfer well to other rural states, as well as urban areas.
- Several implementation practices were useful for BNF: a partnership with a university's statewide cooperative extension service, a program contract tied to client enrollment, and active use of performance management tools.
- Future welfare-to-work evaluations might focus greater attention on measuring personal and family functioning and the costs of working.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For hard-to-employ welfare recipients who face many disadvantages and skill deficiencies, the distinct economic and geographic conditions in rural areas can create additional hurdles that make it profoundly challenging to achieve sustained employment and self-sufficiency. Families in rural areas are more likely than those in nonrural areas to be poor, and they are more likely to be poor longer (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2004). Jobs are often more scarce and scattered in rural labor markets than in urban ones, and available jobs more often involve low wages or part-time work (Lichter and Jensen 2000). Education and training opportunities, as well as specialized services, also can be more difficult to obtain. In addition, a lack of public transportation can make access to existing jobs and services problematic (Weber and Duncan 2001; Friedman 2003). Moreover, tight-knit social networks can make jobs difficult to obtain for long-term residents with poor personal or family reputations (Findeis et al. 2001). Conversely, for people with few local ties, a lack of local connections can hamper employment efforts.

The Rural Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Strategies Demonstration Evaluation rigorously assessed the effectiveness of innovative programs that address challenges facing the rural poor as they strive toward work and self-sufficiency. The evaluation studied two distinct programs—Building Nebraska Families (BNF) and Illinois Future Steps. Random assignment experiments were used to assess whether these programs improved employment, earnings, and well-being. For each program, more than 600 people eligible for limited program slots were randomly assigned to either a treatment group (which was offered a program's services) or a control group (which was not offered a program's services, but which could access all other available services). To determine each program's net impact, the behaviors and outcomes of the treatment and control groups were compared over a 30-month follow-up period using both survey and administrative records data. Given the use of random assignment, the evaluation's findings provide rigorous evidence of each program's effectiveness. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) and its subcontractor, Decision Information Resources, Inc., conducted the evaluation with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

This final report focuses on the BNF demonstration program. BNF was an intensive home visitation and life skills education program for hard-to-employ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients in rural Nebraska. Offered in addition to the TANF program's existing employment and supportive services, BNF provided individualized life

skills education, mentoring, and service coordination support through home visits. This final report examines and draws conclusions about (1) program implementation, participation, and costs; (2) 30-month impacts on employment, earnings, welfare dependence, and well-being; and (3) the program's benefits in relation to its costs.

Overall, the findings point to the effectiveness of BNF in increasing employment and earnings and reducing poverty among a subgroup of very hard-to-employ ("more disadvantaged") TANF clients who faced substantial obstacles and skill deficiencies. The implementation study found that BNF was implemented in close conformance with its model and provided substantial services to clients over an extended period. Although BNF operated in a relatively service-rich environment in which many control group members received services outside of BNF, significantly more program group members received skill-building services, mentoring, and service coordination support. For the full sample, these services translated into improved employment toward the end of the 30-month follow-up period, though there was no impact on earnings for the full sample. For the more disadvantaged BNF subgroup, however, we observed large impacts on employment and earnings during the 30-month follow-up period after random assignment. The impacts on earnings grew during much of the follow-up period and were particularly robust during its last six months. The more disadvantaged program group members, compared to the more disadvantaged control group members, also had substantially higher family income and were less likely to be living in poverty at the time of the 30-month followup.

BNF's benefits to society did not outweigh its costs during the 30-month follow-up period. Still, for the more disadvantaged subgroup, our projections indicate that if average earnings impacts in the last six months of the follow-up period persist, BNF will pay for itself—that is, positive net benefits will result—in less than two additional years after the 30-month follow-up period.

WELFARE-TO-WORK IN RURAL NEBRASKA: BUILDING NEBRASKA FAMILIES

BNF combined two strategies that may be of particular value for hard-to-employ TANF clients: (1) an emphasis on life skills education and (2) service delivery through home visitation. Life skills education may improve the capacity of clients—especially those considered very disadvantaged—to manage their lives, make sound decisions, and solve problems independently. This type of education has become a common feature of many TANF programs, yet previous studies have not provided experimental evidence of its impacts. The second strategy—home visiting—offers a potentially valuable mode of service delivery, in part because it creates the opportunity for an intensive, individualized intervention. Moreover, home visiting may have particular value in rural areas, where clients often live in relatively isolated areas with limited transportation. In general, the evaluation literature shows some degree of promise for this method of delivering social services, particularly when better-qualified home visitors are employed (Olds et al. 2004). This evaluation of BNF helps fill a research gap by investigating the impacts on employment and earnings of a life skills education and home visitation program with parental self-sufficiency as its primary goal.

Through home visitation, BNF provided intensive, individualized life skills education, mentoring, and other services with the goal of improving TANF recipients' basic life skills,

family functioning, and well-being. It was offered as a supportive service in addition to Nebraska's already strong TANF employment program. BNF served TANF recipients who were required to participate in work activities and who faced serious obstacles and skill deficiencies, providing intensive home-based services weekly or every two weeks over an average period of eight months. This time often spanned the periods before and after clients became employed. Clients could participate in BNF for up to six months after they left TANF.

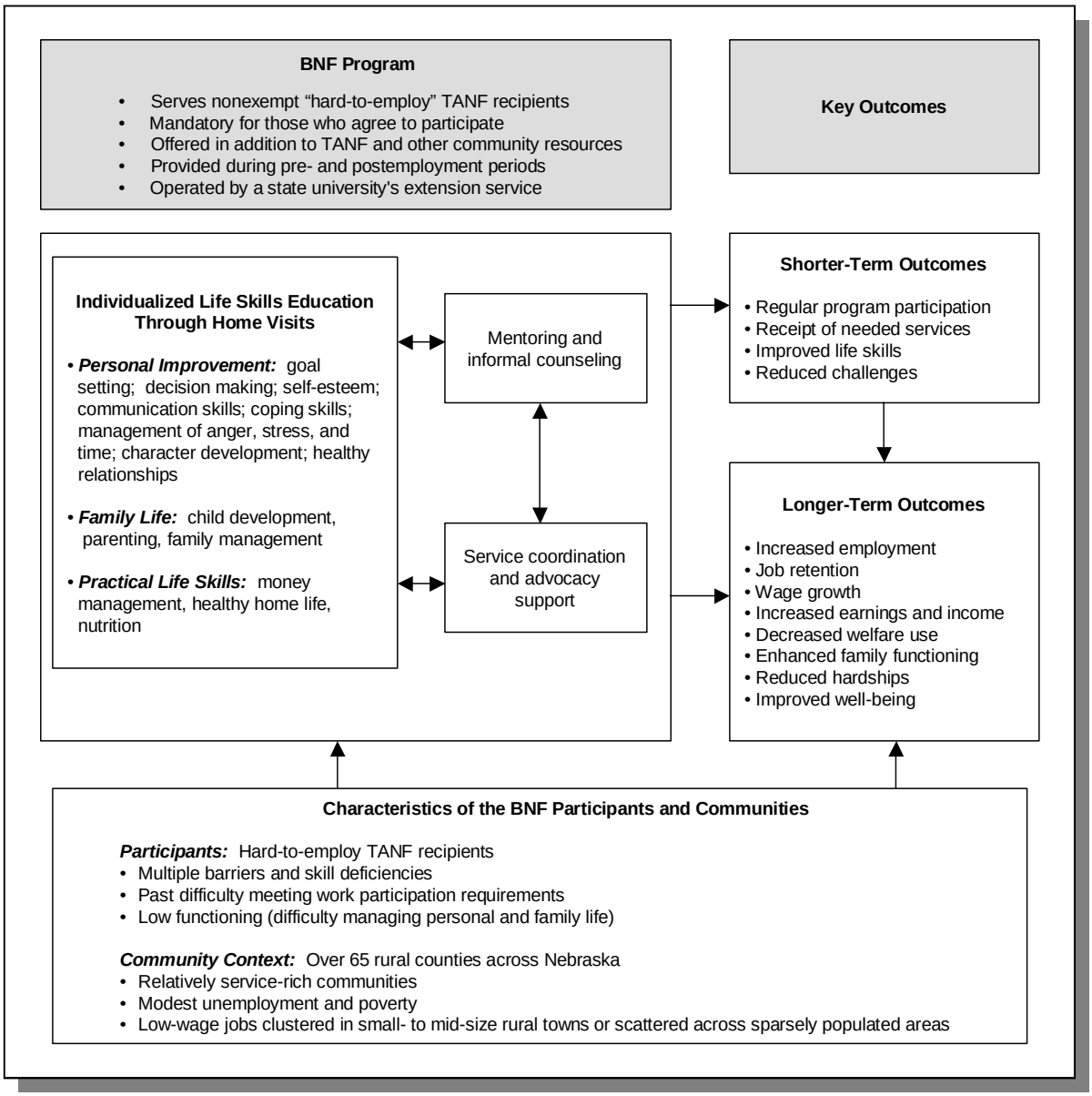
BNF took an indirect approach to helping low-income people move from welfare to work and self-sufficiency. It recognized that many TANF clients face multiple obstacles and that specialized services to address obstacles often are limited or difficult to access, especially in rural areas. The program model posited that, through improved life skills and functioning, clients would not only be better equipped to address obstacles and participate in employment activities, but also would improve their ability to be successful at home and in the labor market. Figure 1 illustrates the key elements of the BNF program. These elements were interconnected, working together to help clients enhance skills, address challenges, and progress toward work and self-sufficiency. Through home visits with clients, BNF educators not only provided life skills education, but also mentored clients and helped facilitate service referrals and contacts with other organizations.

Master's-level educators delivered BNF's home-based education and support to clients. During individualized and interactive teaching sessions in clients' homes, educators used research-based lessons and guidance to enhance life skills and family management practices. The regular lessons focused on the client, but sometimes also involved other family members. Various topics were covered, as needed, from household management, budgeting, and parenting to decision making, self-esteem, and communication skills.[1] To promote skill-building and reinforce the lessons, clients completed short assignments between meetings. When possible, educators linked the lessons to clients' job preparation and workplace efforts. In addition to teaching clients, educators provided mentoring and informal counseling on personal and work-related issues. They modeled positive behavior and coached clients in how to address complications in their lives and complete practical tasks. Educators also provided service coordination and advocacy support by helping clients access services and resources, resolve problems, and interact with agencies and employers.

BNF operated as a partnership between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension (UNCE) and the Nebraska Health and Human Services System (NHHSS). The program served 358 clients over a 28-month enrollment period from March 2002 through June 2004. Key staff included a full-time program coordinator, a part-time program evaluator, and 11 full-time UNCE educators located in UNCE's county-based offices around the state. The BNF educators carried small caseloads of between 12 and 18 active clients.

[1] The BNF curriculum, on which the lessons were based (*Survive, Strive, Thrive: Keys to Healthy Family Living),* is publicly available (Fox et al. 2007). For information on ordering the curriculum, see the reference list at the back of the report.

Figure 1. The BNF Program Model for Developing Stronger and More Self-Sufficient Families



TANF case managers identified for BNF TANF clients who were disadvantaged and subject to work requirements. To be eligible, a person had to be an active TANF recipient (or in sanction status). TANF clients deemed appropriate for BNF were those with serious obstacles and skill deficiencies and low personal functioning. After eligible clients agreed to participate in BNF and the evaluation, they were randomly assigned into the program group (which was then enrolled in BNF) or the control group (which was not). As TANF recipients, both program and control group members were subject to TANF work requirements, sanctions, and a two-year time limit on spells of cash assistance. Likewise, all could access the full range of services available through Nebraska's relatively service-rich

TANF program and communities. The difference between the two groups lay only in their access to the BNF program.

Participation in BNF was required for clients once they agreed to enroll. Because of the potential encroachment of home visits into clients' privacy, clients' initial decision to enroll in BNF was voluntary. After they agreed to enroll, however, they were expected to participate and could be sanctioned if they did not. Even though clients' enrollment was voluntary, the BNF educators and TANF case managers reported that clients typically perceived BNF as a mandatory activity because they were actively recruited for it, strongly encouraged to enroll in it by their TANF case managers, and required to participate after they did enroll.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND COSTS

We assessed the implementation of BNF and the experiences of program participants. In so doing, we documented BNF's operation, gained an understanding of how it achieved observed results, and identified important service delivery challenges. We concluded that BNF was a well-implemented, albeit costly, program.

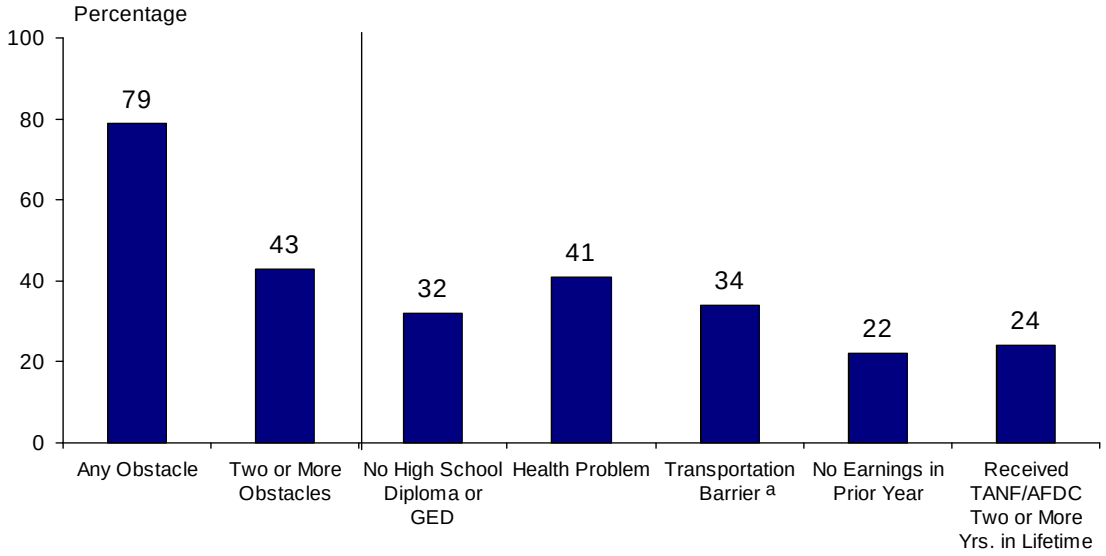
- ***On the whole, BNF was successful at enrolling disadvantaged TANF clients. More than two-fifths could be considered very hard-to-employ clients who faced multiple, serious obstacles.***

Nebraska was largely successful at enrolling disadvantaged TANF clients in BNF. The sample members we characterized as very hard-to-employ, or "more disadvantaged," were those who, based on self-reported baseline data, met at least two of five criteria: (1) lack of a high school education, (2) a reported health condition that limited activity, (3) a transportation barrier, (4) lack of earnings in the prior year, and (5) a TANF/AFDC history lasting two or more years. These criteria typically reflect serious obstacles to work among the TANF population. More than two-fifths of the BNF sample was considered more disadvantaged, facing at least two key obstacles, while nearly four-fifths faced at least one (Figure 2).

- ***BNF was implemented in close conformance with its program model. Its implementation benefited from a long pilot testing phase, staff professionalism, and active guidance from the program coordinator.***

By and large, BNF educators were very successful in delivering intended services to clients and in monitoring and supporting clients' progress toward achieving their individual goals. Data from the BNF Information System (BNFIS) suggest that the average client received a substantial amount of assistance and support from BNF over an extended period, in a manner closely conforming to the expectations of the program and NHHSS. In addition, BNF's brand of life skills education and mentoring was a unique service in rural Nebraska; its use of home visits, a wide-ranging life skills curriculum, and very small caseloads distinguished it from other programs available.

Figure 2. Prevalence of Key Obstacles to Employment Among BNF Sample Members



Source: Rural Welfare to Work baseline information form, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: Based on a sample size of 600 (358 program group members and 242 control group members).

[a]About 20 percent of sample members did not own or have access to a vehicle, while about 30 percent did not have a driver's license.

Several factors contributed to BNF's successful implementation. First, a history of collaboration between UNCE and NHHSS and a pilot phase for BNF before the evaluation began provided a solid foundation for the two organizations' partnership in operating BNF at the state and local levels. Second, BNF staff members were well-trained professionals. They exhibited strong communication skills and creativity in developing and conducting educational sessions with clients, motivating clients to do their best, and modeling for clients how to apply life skills lessons to their lives. They also were able to function independently in locations dispersed throughout the state, exercising substantial discretion and independent judgment in their daily work. Third, the educators' small caseloads allowed them to provide appropriately intense and individualized services to their clients. Finally, the BNF program coordinator was an active leader, providing educators with initial and ongoing training and technical assistance, and overseeing their work through regular communication and the use of performance management tools.

- ***Key elements of the program, including its curriculum, improved over time.***

During the evaluation period, BNF demonstrated improvement in three key areas. First, BNF further developed and refined its curriculum. At the outset, the core curriculum represented a compilation of lessons and teaching materials on a range of topics. The individual educators adapted and improved existing materials, as appropriate, to make them more responsive to the specific needs and situations of the at-risk TANF population served by the program. Second, the BNF educators developed in their roles, appearing to become

more effective teachers, mentors, and advocates for their BNF clients. Educators fine-tuned their skills through ongoing training and guidance, particularly on specific types of challenges faced by at-risk welfare families, as well as on techniques for working with them on developing personal life skills. Mentoring relationships between more and less experienced educators also helped in sharing information and expertise across staff. Third, collaboration between the BNF educators and the TANF case managers improved, enhancing the overall package of services delivered to clients. As staff developed rapport, as well as mutual trust and respect, it was easier for educators and case managers to work together to ensure that clients' needs were met and to meet the challenge of recruiting new clients into BNF.

- ***The average client met frequently with her BNF educator for more than eight months, participating in two or three teaching sessions each month and receiving service coordination support.***

Most clients were well connected with their educator and the services offered through BNF. During the average client's time in the program, she had 22 contacts with her educator. Most of these focused on interactive educational lessons ("teaching contacts"), and a few involved assistance with service needs or referrals ("service coordination contacts"). Overall, total contact time between clients and educators was substantial. Among the 95 percent of clients who had at least one program contact, participation time totaled 25 hours, on average. About 70 percent of this time involved teaching lessons, more than 20 percent involved time clients spent on BNF assignments, and less than 10 percent involved service coordination contacts. The average client participated in BNF for more than eight months, with an average of two or three contacts per month between clients and educators. The period of participation ranged from 2 to 18 months and often spanned the time both before and after clients became employed.

One in five BNF clients were considered program completers, or "graduates." At a minimum, program completion typically implied that clients actively participated in BNF, got and maintained employment, and left TANF. The average graduate received more services than the average BNF client, participating for 12 months and receiving 36 contacts (32 teaching and 4 service coordination). The relatively low rate of graduation was consistent with program expectations. Indeed, BNF's emphasis on graduation declined over time, as educators came to believe there were benefits to continuing BNF services for the maximum period of six months after clients leave TANF.

While most clients received a substantial number of contacts, some were harder to engage. Indeed, 23 percent of clients received fewer than five contacts, 15 percent were placed in BNF "noncooperation status" by their educator, and 9 percent had their TANF grant sanctioned during the time they were enrolled in BNF.

- ***In focus groups, participants expressed very favorable opinions of the program.***

Many BNF clients who participated in focus groups shared that their involvement with BNF had helped them improve personal skills, overcome serious challenges, and better their family's situation. Although focus group participants were not representative of all program

group members, their insights offer a useful perspective. Most said that they were referred to BNF at a time when they were having difficulty managing their lives, and that support from their educator helped them develop motivation to be successful at home, school, and work. Overall, focus group participants were enthusiastic about BNF, and many wished BNF services could continue for longer than six months after they left TANF.

- ***More disadvantaged TANF clients received BNF services for a longer time than their less disadvantaged counterparts.***

We anticipated that BNF educators would provide different levels of service, depending on clients' needs and obstacles. Therefore, we examined the services received among clients who were considered more and less disadvantaged (as defined above).

According to BNFIS data, BNF educators provided more services to sample members who faced greater needs and obstacles. Overall, the more disadvantaged clients received services for a month and a half longer than their less disadvantaged counterparts (9.3 versus 7.7 months). In addition, certain types of educational lessons were provided more frequently to the more disadvantaged clients. For example, compared to the less disadvantaged group, a higher fraction of more disadvantaged clients received at least one lesson related to character development and personal functioning (71 versus 64 percent) and household management (19 versus 14 percent). BNF educators also provided more service coordination support to the more disadvantaged clients.

- ***BNF was a relatively expensive program. The average total cost of serving a BNF participant was $7,383.***

The market value of all resources used to operate BNF during a one-year, steady-state period of operations was estimated as $994,554. This translated into a total cost of $7,383 to serve each BNF participant during their time in the program, which averaged close to nine months for those who enrolled during the cost period. Given the longer average duration of participation among the more disadvantaged sample members, the average total cost of serving this group was higher, $8,306 per participant.

Compared to other welfare-to-work initiatives that have been rigorously evaluated, BNF was expensive on a per-participant basis. Costs for BNF were much higher than those of the Rural WtW Evaluation's Future Steps program ($3,046 per participant) and were also higher than 16 programs studied under the Evaluation of Department of Labor Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Grants (among which the highest cost was $7,285 per participant) (Perez-Johnson et al. 2002).[2] BNF's comparatively high per-participant cost appears related to (1) the intensity of services (which required a large number of staff), (2) the advanced qualifications of staff (who were compensated relatively well), and (3) the administrative costs of the statewide partner organizations involved in operating the program.

[2] The estimates from the WtW Evaluation's cost study were converted from 2000 dollars into 2004 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

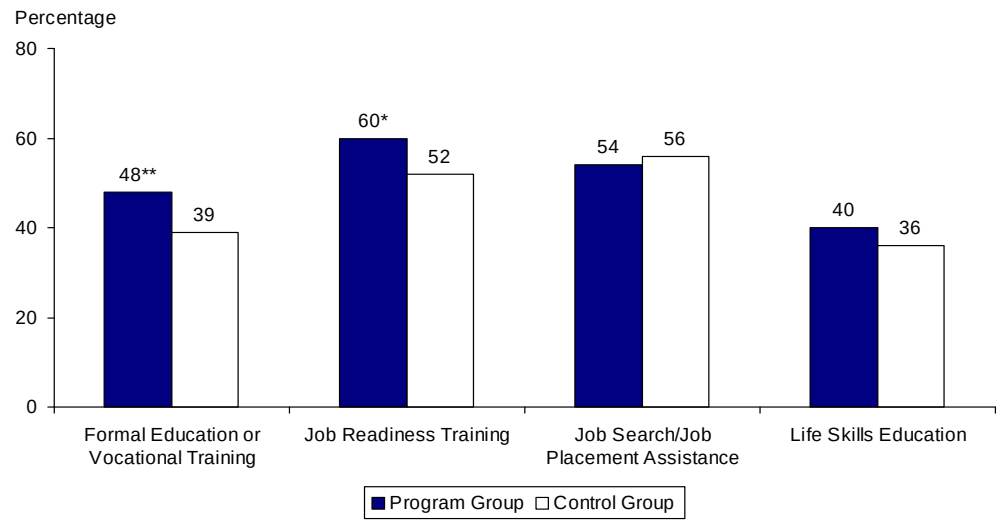
IMPACTS ON SERVICE USE

BNF had the potential to enhance program group members' access to various services through educators' coordination and advocacy on clients' behalf. Positive impacts on service receipt among BNF participants also could result from the life skills education that educators offered, as participants became more resourceful in identifying and securing the services they needed. We assess impacts on service receipt, drawing mainly on detailed data collected from the 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members.

- ***BNF increased sample members' likelihood of receiving formal education and job readiness services. However, there was no difference in the fraction of program and control group members who reported receiving life skills education.***

Program group members were significantly more likely than their control group counterparts to receive some form of education or training in the 18 months after random assignment. Forty-eight percent of program group members, compared to 39 percent of the control group, reported that they had worked toward the completion of an adult basic education certificate, pursued a high school degree or GED, or received vocational education or training (Figure 3). During the period between the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys, there was no difference in the fraction of program and control group members who reported participating in some type of education or training (not shown).

Figure 3. Receipt of Education and Other Skill-Building Services During the 18-Months After Random Assignment



Source: Rural Welfare to Work 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 525 (313 program group members and 212 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of analytic methods.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

BNF also had a positive and significant impact on the likelihood that sample members would receive training to help them prepare for working. Sixty percent of program group members, compared to 52 percent of control group members, reported receiving job readiness training or classes, which addressed such topics as dressing for work, getting along with fellow workers, and sticking to a work schedule (Figure 3). However, there were no differences in the receipt of job search or job placement assistance between the two groups. This was not unexpected given that both groups received such services through Nebraska's TANF employment contractors.

Life skills education was a major component of the BNF curriculum, yet program group members were not significantly more likely than control group members to report receiving such training. About two-fifths of sample members—40 percent of program group members and 36 percent of control group members—reported having attended life skills classes or training sessions on how to manage their lives while working (Figure 3). However, control group members were exposed to life skills classes through sessions provided by BNF educators as part of their recruitment efforts, as well as through short-term life skills classes offered by private TANF employment contractors. As a result, the comparison of program and control group members' reported life skills education is limited in value. It was the case, however, that the BNF program was distinct from the other life skills offerings in the intensity of the training offered, the comprehensiveness of the instruction, and the home-visiting mode of delivery.

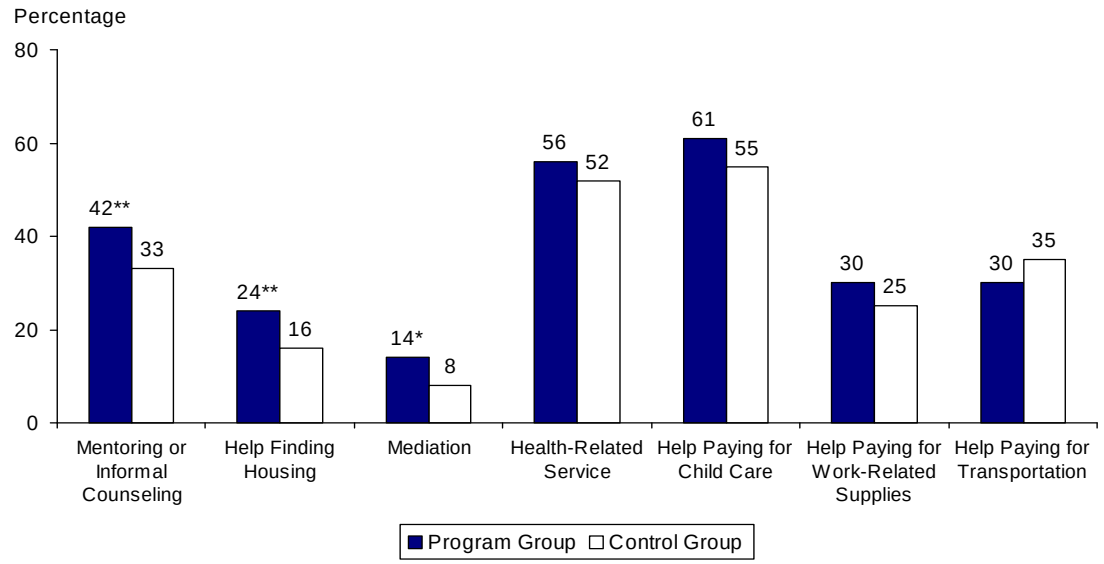
The overall pattern of service use among the more disadvantaged clients was similar to the pattern for the full sample. In addition, there was limited evidence of greater participation in basic education activities among the more disadvantaged clients (not shown).

- ***Program group members were more likely to receive mentoring and advocacy services. However, BNF did not increase the receipt of logistical support services, such as child care and transportation.***

BNF's explicit focus on mentoring is reflected in the program's positive impact on receipt of personal and work-related counseling and encouragement. BNF participants were significantly more likely than members of the control group to receive this kind of mentoring (42 versus 33 percent) (Figure 4). The program also increased sample members' likelihood of receiving general advocacy services, such as mediation with employers or agencies or help finding housing. However, there was not a significant difference in the proportion of sample members who received any type of health-related service.

We did not find evidence that BNF had a positive effect on the receipt of logistical assistance related to child care, transportation, or work-related supplies (Figure 4). There were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of program and control group members who received help finding or paying for child care, or who received financial assistance for work-related clothing or tools. There was also no significant difference in the proportion of the two groups who received any type of transportation assistance. However,

Figure 4. Receipt of Mentoring, Advocacy, and Other Services During the 18 Months After Random Assignment



Source: Rural Welfare to Work 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 525 (313 program group members and 212 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of analytic methods.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

program group members were significantly less likely than control group members to receive vouchers for public transportation (12 versus 18 percent, respectively) or money for car repairs or maintenance (7 versus 21 percent, respectively) (not shown). These logistical services were not a focus of BNF educators' efforts and were provided to all sample members through Nebraska's TANF program.

IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT, SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND WELL-BEING

A central BNF goal was to help clients progress toward economic independence. To assess the program's success in meeting this goal, we investigated BNF's impact on a wide range of client outcomes, including employment and earnings, self-sufficiency, and various measures of well-being.[3] We relied primarily on detailed employment history data collected from the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys with sample members.

[3] To adjust for inflation, estimates were converted into 2004 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

- ***For the full sample, BNF improved some measures of employment toward the end of the followup, but did not affect earnings. Still, family income was higher and poverty lower for the program group than the control group.***

Because of BNF's indirect approach to helping low-income families move from welfare to work, we expected that any potential impacts on client outcomes would be strongest later in the follow-up period. Consistent with our expectations, there is some evidence of a stronger effect on employment toward the end of the follow-up period, although there is no consistent evidence of earnings impacts. We found no significant impacts on employment in the first two years of the 30-month followup (Figure 5). However, program group members worked for a significantly greater number of months during the final six months of the followup than did control group members (3.5 versus 3.1 months; Figure 5). Moreover, about three-quarters of program group members, compared to 68 percent of control group members, were employed at some point during the final six months of the followup; this difference is on the cusp of statistical significance (p-value=.104) (not shown). Program group members were also significantly more likely to have retained employment longer and to have moved to a better job (not shown). There were no significant differences, however, in the earnings of the program and control group members (Figure 5).

Program group members had significantly higher average family income than control group members in the month before the 30-month survey (Figure 5). These higher incomes were driven by statistically significant differences in public assistance income (most notably Supplemental Security Income) and by program versus control group improvements in earnings that were not statistically significant. The higher income among program group members translated into a significant reduction in the poverty rate 30 months after random assignment, with 55 percent of the program group living below poverty, compared to 63 percent of the control group (Figure 5).

Changes in other measures of well-being were mixed. On the 18-month follow-up survey, program group members scored significantly lower than control group members on scales measuring clients' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation.[4] There was also some evidence that BNF participants experienced greater hardship around the time of the 18-month followup. By the time of the 30-month followup, however, there were few differences in exposure to hardship between the two groups.

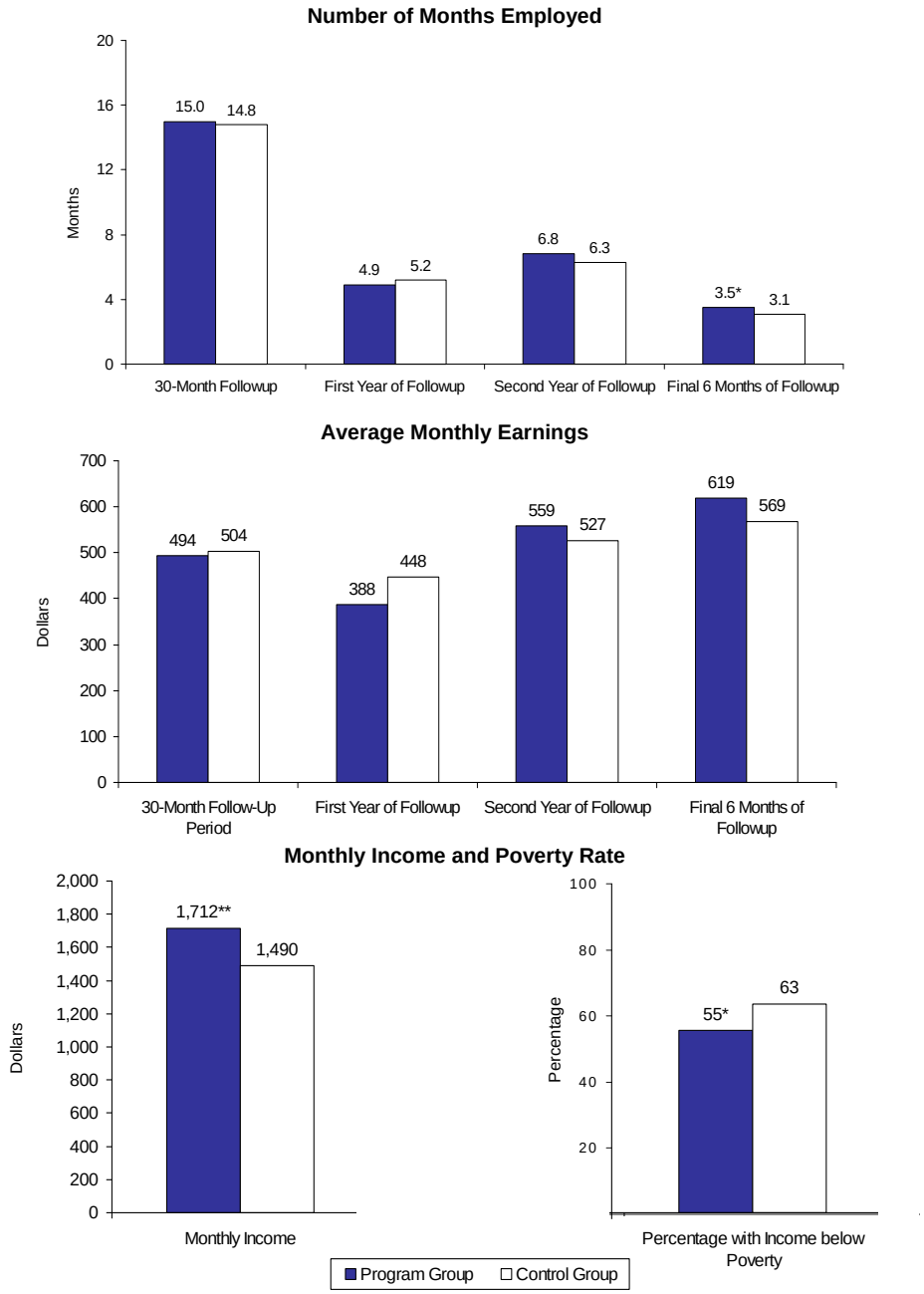
- ***For the more disadvantaged subgroup, BNF led to significant, robust impacts on employment, employment retention, job type, and earnings.***

For the more disadvantaged sample members, the BNF education and services led to large impacts on employment and earnings during the 30-month follow-up period.[5] During

[4] Data on these measures were not collected on the 30-month followup survey.

[5] For the subgroup analyses, we compared the experiences of the more disadvantaged program group members to those of the more disadvantaged control group members.

Figure 5. Impacts on Employment, Earnings, and Economic Well-Being for the Full Sample During the 30-Month Follow-Up



Source: Rural Welfare to Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 502 (309 program group members and 193 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of analytic methods.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

the second year and final six months of the followup, more disadvantaged BNF clients worked more months than did more disadvantaged control group members (Figure 6). The program group members were also more likely to retain employment longer. For example, 46 percent of program group members were employed for 12 consecutive months at some point during the followup, compared to 29 percent of control group members (Figure 6). Program group members were also more likely than control group members to move from a lower-wage job to a higher-wage one, and to be employed in higher-paying jobs with better benefits (Figure 6).

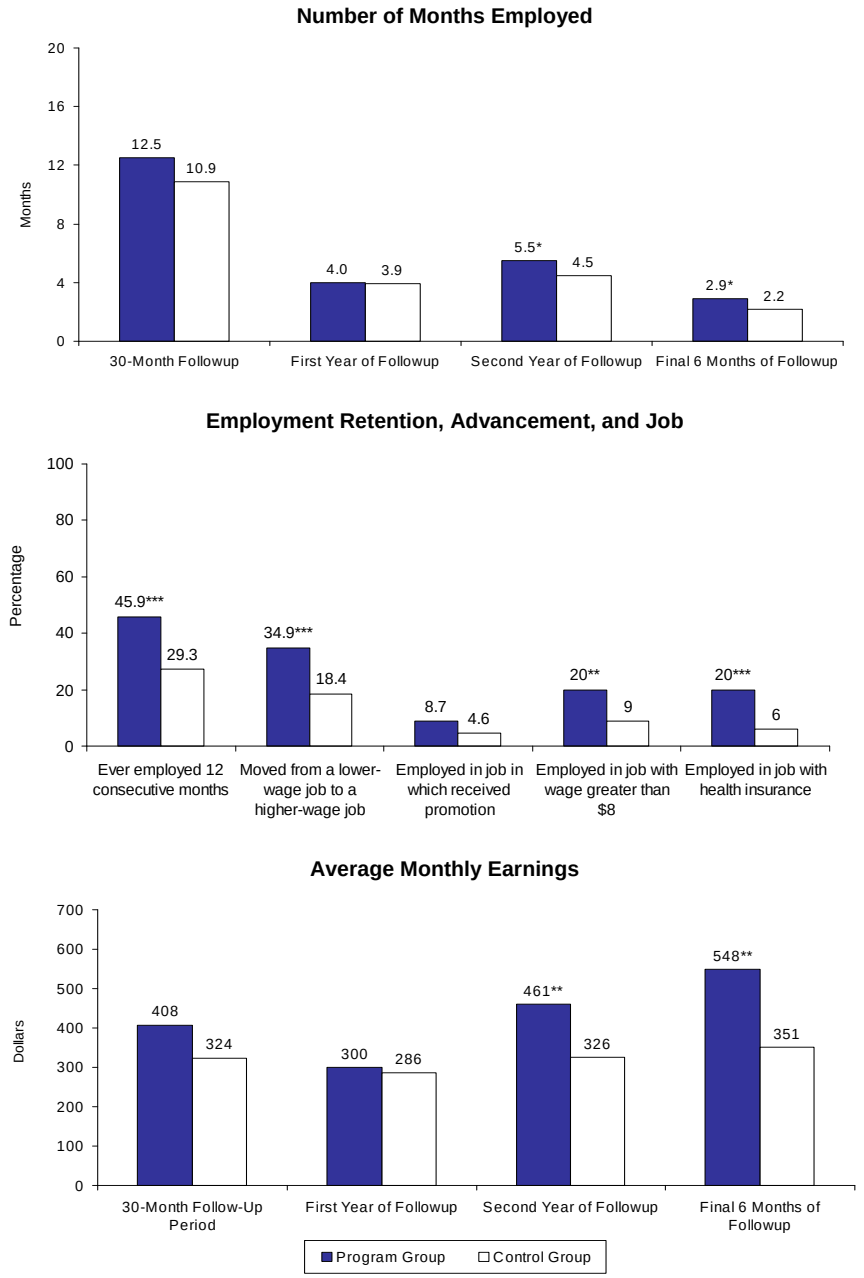
These employment and job quality impacts translated into large impacts on earnings. The earnings impacts for the more disadvantaged program group members grew during the 30-month follow-up period. They were particularly large during the last six months, when program group members average reported earnings of $548 per month were 56 percent higher than corresponding control group members' earnings of $351 per month (Figure 6).[6]

- ***More disadvantaged BNF clients received less TANF and food stamp income than more disadvantaged control group members across the full follow-up period. However, at the end of the followup, levels of TANF and food stamp receipt were similar for the two groups.***

Using administrative records data, we examined sample members' monthly TANF and food stamp receipt. These data show that levels of TANF receipt dropped quickly for the more disadvantaged sample members in both the program and control groups; approximately 9 in 10 sample members were on TANF in the first month after random assignment, while only 1 in 5 were on TANF 30 months later (not shown). Overall, the pattern of declining rates of TANF receipt is not unexpected, because many sample members would have faced increased pressure to leave TANF due to Nebraska's two-year time limit on spells of cash assistance. However, more disadvantaged BNF clients left TANF more quickly than did more disadvantaged control group members, resulting in significantly lower levels of TANF income during the second year of the followup—an average of $46 less per month for program than control group members ($81 versus $127 per month, respectively, for the two groups) (Figure 7). During the last six months of the followup, however, the control group members had TANF income that was similarly low to that of the program group. Overall, across the 30-month followup, the program group, on average, received nearly $900 less in cash assistance than the control group.

[6] The pattern of earnings impacts based on Nebraska's Unemployment Insurance (UI) administrative records data differs somewhat from the earnings impacts found in the survey data. For the full follow-up period, there were strong positive impacts on earnings for the more disadvantaged subgroup using Nebraska's UI records. However, earnings impacts based on the UI records were positive and significant in the first and second years of the followup, but not in the final six months. A key source of the difference in the UI- and survey-based earnings impacts is the exclusion of some types of employment from the UI records, including informal jobs, self-employment jobs, and jobs through an out-of-state employer.

Figure 6. Impacts on Employment and Earnings for More Disadvantaged Sample Members During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period



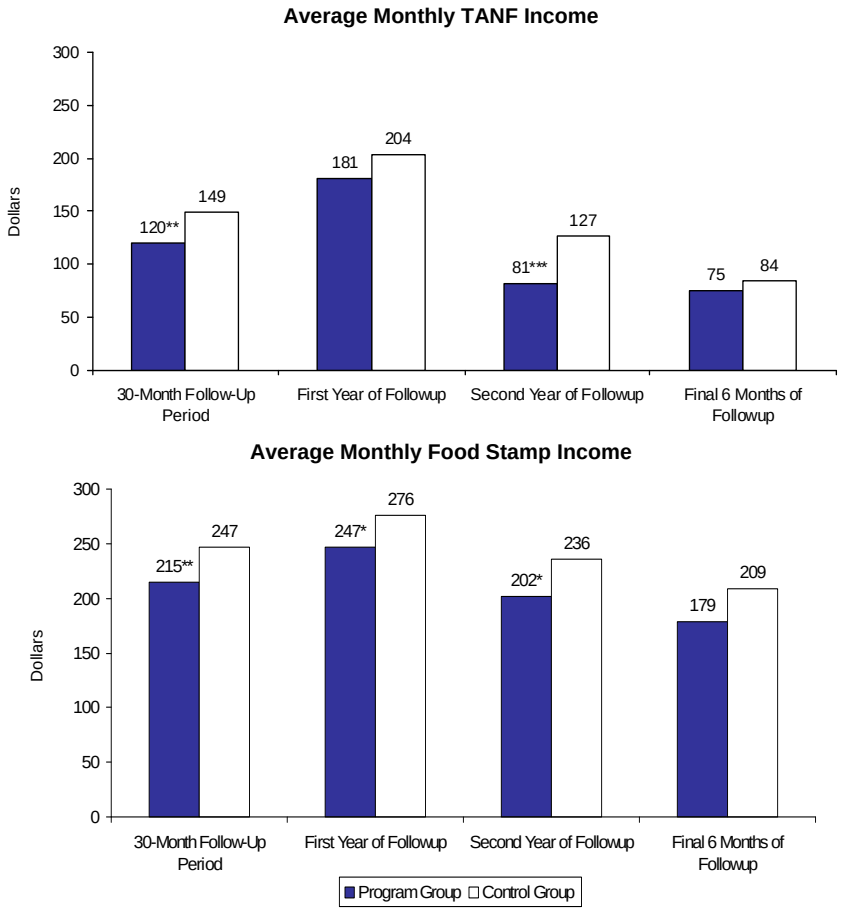
Source: Rural Welfare to Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 211 (128 program group members and 83 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of analytic methods.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Figure 7. Impacts on TANF and Food Stamp Receipt for More Disadvantaged Sample Members During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period



Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation. Based on a sample size of 252 (149 program group members and 103 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of analytic methods.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

The pattern of impacts for food stamp receipt is similar to that for TANF receipt; BNF had a modest impact on food stamp receipt for the more disadvantaged clients in the middle of the follow-up period and no effect toward the end of it. For the full followup, the average monthly income from food stamps was $32 less per month for the more disadvantaged program than the more disadvantaged control group members ($215 versus $247 per month, respectively, for the two groups). This difference was driven by significant differences in the dollar value of food stamp receipt in the first and second years of the followup.

- ***For the more disadvantaged BNF sample members, impacts on earnings translated into higher family income and reduced poverty. Changes in other well-being measures were mixed.***

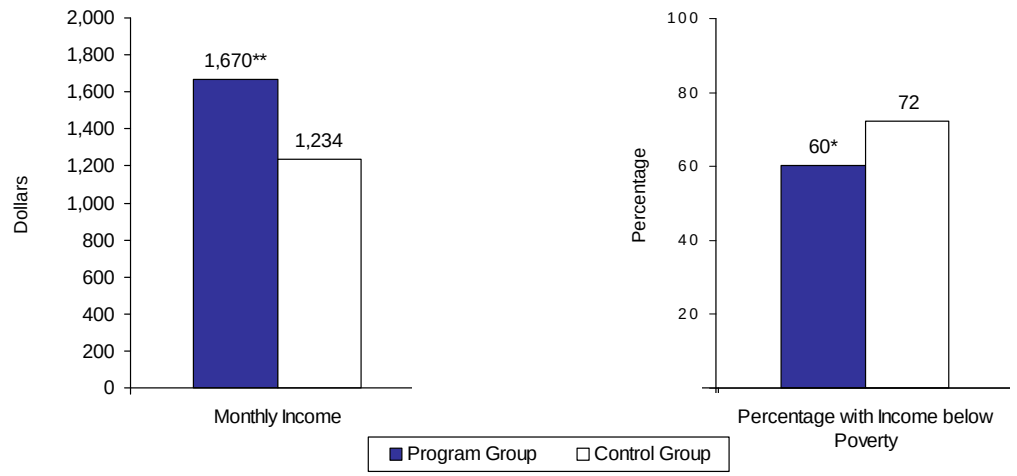
The more disadvantaged program group members had substantially higher family income than the more disadvantaged control group members at the time of the 30-month followup. More disadvantaged program group members had an average monthly household income of $1,670—35 percent more than the $1,234 of more disadvantaged control group members (Figure 8). The largest contributor to the difference between program and control group members' total income was sample members' own earnings, which represented about half of the total difference in income.

The higher income among program group members translated into a significant reduction in poverty. In the month before the 30-month survey, about 60 percent of more disadvantaged BNF clients, compared to 72 percent of more disadvantaged control group members, had household income below the federal poverty threshold for the size of their household (Figure 8).

The positive economic impacts on the more disadvantaged subgroup were accompanied by mixed findings on measures of personal and family well-being. On the 18-month follow-up survey, more disadvantaged program and control group members had similar scores on most measures of well-being, although positive impacts were found on some measures of health and well-being. In particular, the more disadvantaged BNF clients were less likely to report that their health was fair or poor, that they faced an emotional or mental health problem that limited their ability to work or participate, or that they had recently experienced physical domestic abuse. At 30 months, the BNF clients were also more likely than their control group counterparts to be living with their minor children and to have received more child support income.

Logistical issues, such as housing, remained challenging for the more disadvantaged clients. At 30 months, a significantly smaller fraction of more disadvantaged BNF clients, compared to more disadvantaged control group members, was living in public or government-subsidized housing. While this might indicate an improvement in housing situation, the BNF clients also had significantly higher housing costs and were more likely to experience housing or food availability hardships at some point during the 30-month follow-up period. The meaning of these health and well-being findings is not clear-cut. It is possible, however, that BNF's emphasis on life skills helped clients address or resolve some health and personal issues, while being employed may have made it more difficult and expensive to manage other aspects of their lives.

Figure 8. Impacts on Average Monthly Income and Poverty for More Disadvantaged Sample Members During the Month Before the 30-Month Survey



Source: Rural Welfare to Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 211 (128 program group members and 83 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of analytic methods.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

COMPARING THE BENEFITS AND COSTS OF BUILDING NEBRASKA FAMILIES

A comparison of the benefits and costs of BNF tells us whether the benefits of the program appear large enough to justify an investment of public resources. To make this comparison, we build on the program impacts described above to estimate dollar values for BNF's key benefits to society and other important stakeholders, such as program participants and the government. Because average program costs were calculated per participant, we also estimate benefits per participant, rather than per program group member, by adjusting impact estimates where appropriate. In summarizing our results, we emphasize the perspective of society, as this indicates the program's overall cost-effectiveness. We also extrapolate earnings impacts beyond the observation period, under various assumptions, to explore whether the program's benefits could equal or exceed its costs over time.

By design, the analytic approach yields a conservative estimate of the program's potential benefits during the 30-month follow-up period. That is, although our analysis includes the program's primary benefits, some potential benefits are not reflected in our estimates. For example, BNF's effects among more disadvantaged program group members of reducing the likelihood of domestic violence and increasing the likelihood that a minor child would remain in the home (noted above) may have created benefits to society (in the form of reduced medical costs or reduced use of child welfare services). However, we do not

have sufficient data to create a reliable estimate of the dollar value of these benefits. In addition, certain intangible benefits and costs–such as changes in sample members' quality of life that may result from employment—are not incorporated in the analysis because it is difficult to place a value on them.

- ***BNF's costs to society exceeded its measured benefits by $7,561 per participant within the 30-month follow-up period.***

The program's average cost per participant created a high threshold for overall cost-effectiveness. We estimate that BNF's costs to society exceeded its measured benefits by $7,561 per participant for the full sample of participants during the 30-month followup. The primary sources of program benefits to society were increased fringe benefits, reduced use of mental health services, and reduced administrative costs for TANF, food stamps, and other transfer payments.[7] These benefits were counterbalanced by the cost of participants' increased use of education services—particularly, vocational training. The total benefits from BNF that accrued to society during the follow-up period ($270) amounted to 3.4 percent of social costs. In other words, for every dollar spent on BNF and expenses related to working in the 30 months following random assignment, society received a benefit of 3.4 cents. From the perspective of participants, BNF created net benefits of $51. The largest single source of benefits to participants was increased receipt of SSI/SSDI. BNF's net costs for the government amounted to $7,351.

- ***BNF's services to more disadvantaged participants resulted in costs to society that exceeded benefits by $4,963, or about two-thirds of costs for the full sample.***

We estimate BNF's net costs to society for the more disadvantaged subgroup to be $4,963 per participant during the 30-month followup. These costs were substantially lower than those for the full sample, due mainly to positive and sizable benefits from earnings for more disadvantaged participants, totaling nearly $3,000, as well as increased receipt of fringe benefits totaling $740. For the more disadvantaged sample members, the total benefits that accrued to society during the follow-up period ($4,055) amounted to 48 percent of social costs. In other words, for every dollar spent on BNF and expenses related to working in the 30 months following random assignment, society received a benefit of 48 cents.

From the perspective of more disadvantaged participants, the program created net benefits of $1,574. In addition to earnings and fringe benefits, our benchmark estimate indicates that more disadvantaged participants benefited from increases in child support income ($669) and SSI/SSDI ($486). From the government perspective, BNF produced net costs of $5,868. Net costs to the government were lower than for the full sample because

[7] Our calculation of social benefits includes savings in administrative costs for TANF and other programs (and not reductions in the amount of assistance paid to recipients because any reductions in public assistance paid would be a benefit to government, but an equal cost to participants, and therefore neither a benefit nor a cost to society).

program costs were offset to some extent by reduced transfers, savings on administrative costs for transfers, and increased tax receipts.

- ***We estimate that BNF's measured benefits to society would exceed its costs if impacts on earnings and fringe benefits persisted beyond the follow-up period for at least 9.7 years for the full sample and 1.7 years for the more disadvantaged subgroup.***

BNF's impact on earnings toward the end of the follow-up period was relatively small for the full sample (an average of $50 per month during the last six months of the followup). Assuming that this impact does not decline over time, we estimate that the program would begin to produce net benefits to society by 116 months (9.7 years) after the end of the follow-up period—or 146 months (12.2 years) after random assignment. The persistence of program impacts for such an extended period seems unlikely, given evidence of declining impacts over time in other welfare-to-work programs (Grogger et al. 2002).

Continued impacts on earnings and fringe benefits for more disadvantaged participants would lead to positive net benefits to society much more quickly than they would for the full sample. The average monthly impact on income during the last six months of the follow-up period was $197. Under the assumption that this impact does not decline over time, cumulative benefits would exceed costs about 20 months (1.7 years) after the end of the follow-up period, or 50 months (4.2 years) after random assignment. Under an alternative assumption that average earnings for the last six months will decline by 15 percent each year after the end of the follow-up period, we estimate that an additional three months would be required for BNF to produce positive net benefits for the more disadvantaged subgroup. Although BNF's effects may fade out over time, sustained impacts of this duration seem plausible, particularly in light of the pattern of substantial impacts on monthly earnings toward the end of the 30-month follow-up period.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

The findings suggest that BNF shows promise as a model for increasing employment and earnings among very disadvantaged TANF recipients who face multiple obstacles and skill deficiencies. Past research shows that TANF clients in Nebraska's rural areas face the same types of obstacles at similar rates as do TANF recipients in rural and urban areas nationwide (Meckstroth et al. 2002; Johnson and Meckstroth 1998; Olson and Pavetti 1996). Thus, although BNF was implemented in rural Nebraska, the findings and lessons from this evaluation may have relevance for other settings. We present implications and lessons that may be useful to program designers, policymakers, and evaluators as they consider how best to address the needs of very disadvantaged TANF recipients, particularly those in rural areas.

BNF Findings in Context

It is useful to place the BNF 30-month subgroup impact findings in context with impacts from other evaluations of welfare-to-work programs that also have targeted disadvantaged populations. Although differences among evaluations complicate the

interpretation of impact findings across studies, comparisons can still provide a sense of whether BNF's impacts may be as promising as those of past welfare-to-work programs. Comparing the findings also allows for an assessment of whether the impacts may be large enough to make a difference in the lives of very disadvantaged TANF clients.

BNF's strong impacts on earnings for the more disadvantaged TANF clients may be particularly notable, given the service-rich context in which BNF was implemented. BNF faced a relatively high standard of comparison—the impacts on BNF measure the value of its services on top of an already strong TANF employment program. The counterpart control group, like BNF's program group, was held accountable to TANF work and participation requirements, which was generally not the case for the other studies we reviewed. However, our comparisons must be treated with caution because findings from the other evaluations for a more disadvantaged subgroup were only available using state-level UI data. Although we deem the BNF evaluation's survey data a better measure of the labor market experiences of BNF sample members than the Nebraska UI data, we did not find the same strong impacts at the end of the follow-up period using the UI data as we did using the survey data.

Overall, our comparison across evaluations suggests that the finding of strong BNF impacts on earnings for more disadvantaged welfare clients is broadly consistent with findings from past experimental evaluations of successful welfare-to-work programs (Gennetian et al. 2005; Grogger et al. 2002; Michalopoulos and Schwartz 2001; Freedman et al. 2000a). We focus our cross-study comparison on impacts for a more disadvantaged subgroup during the third year after random assignment. Because of BNF's educational mission and indirect focus on employment, program designers hypothesized that its labor market impacts would be stronger later in the follow-up period, as clients' life skills and functioning improved. Using the survey-based BNF findings, BNF's percentage impact on earnings in year 3 was 56 percent, compared to 51 and 49 percent, respectively, for the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS) pooled data. In real-dollar terms, BNF's impact on average monthly earnings for the more disadvantaged subgroup was $197 in year 3, which exceeds the comparable impact for all the other studies reviewed, including the NEWWS Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment program ($160), MFIP ($119), and the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN)-Riverside program ($99). Overall, these comparisons, along with the contextual differences noted above, suggest that BNF's impacts for its more disadvantaged subgroup measure up favorably against those of other welfare-to-work programs that are viewed as successful.

Interpreting the Findings: The Role of Distinctive BNF Features

The evaluation's impact findings suggest that longer-term interventions like BNF, which are indirectly related to employment, may help more disadvantaged TANF clients in rural areas overcome obstacles, transition to and retain employment, and move toward self-sufficiency. Although we cannot link specific BNF program features to the impacts, or determine which might be most influential, our implementation study points to several BNF features that may be important in understanding the findings:

- ***Complementary Services.*** BNF complemented the employment-related services already available through Nebraska's TANF program by offering unique education and support services both before and after clients took a job.

- ***Home Visitation.*** BNF's use of regular home visitation facilitated accessible, individualized education and support, a feature that may have particular value in geographically dispersed rural areas.

- ***Life Skills Curriculum.*** BNF's research-based curriculum promoted wide-ranging life skills education to hard-to-employ TANF clients.

- ***Highly Qualified Staff.*** BNF educators were master's-level professionals with a level of education and experience exceeding that of staff from typical welfare-to-work programs.

- ***Very Low Caseloads.*** Low caseloads of between 12 and 18 clients allowed BNF educators to provide intensive services.

Implications and Lessons for Welfare-to-Work Policies and Programs

BNF's experiences—both its accomplishments and challenges—and the evaluation's findings suggest several potential implications and lessons for policymakers and program developers. Although these were derived from experiences in rural Nebraska, they may also have relevance for welfare-to-work policymakers and program staff in other settings:

- ***Program Targeting.*** In today's TANF context, longer-term programs like BNF will likely require separate state funding (for example, using non-TANF or state maintenance of effort (MOE) dollars). Because of the strong impacts for the more disadvantaged subgroup, any future BNF efforts should target services to particularly disadvantaged and low-functioning TANF clients.

- ***Possible BNF Replication in Other Settings.*** BNF may transfer well to other rural states, as well as to urban areas. If BNF is replicated, several cost-saving adaptations might be (cautiously) considered, especially in urban areas. Because of the greater population density in urban areas, educators may be able to carry somewhat larger caseloads and deliver a limited number of lessons in group settings. Because the BNF curriculum is now well established, new programs might also consider using bachelor's level staff as educators.

- ***Useful Implementation Practices.*** Several implementation practices helped shape BNF's success in delivering program services across a dispersed rural service area: (1) a strong partnership with a university's statewide cooperative extension service, (2) performance-based contracting tied to program enrollment goals, and (3) active use of performance management tools.

- ***Greater Emphasis on Postemployment Work Supports.*** The negative impacts on housing- and food-related hardships suggest that transitioning to work may not have been easy for sample members. BNF clients were also less likely than control group members to receive some types of transportation assistance. These findings may reflect higher time and resource costs associated with working among the program group. Any future BNF efforts might place greater emphasis on ensuring that clients receive available logistical supports, such as those related to child care and transportation. More generally, future efforts might place greater emphasis on service coordination and advocacy.

Issues for Future Evaluations

The evaluation findings also reinforce a couple of lessons that may be relevant for evaluators as they consider how to make future welfare-to-work research as useful as possible:

- ***Importance of Pilot-Testing.*** Summative evaluations are most useful when they test mature, well-developed programs. BNF benefited from a three-year pilot-testing phase, which helped it strengthen the service model and its implementation.

- ***Measurement of Well-Being Outcomes and the Costs of Working.*** Future evaluations of welfare-to-work programs that serve hard-to-employ TANF recipients might focus greater attention on measuring outcomes related to personal and family functioning and the costs to TANF recipients of working.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To receive cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, welfare recipients must meet work participation requirements and are subject to time limits on cash assistance. These conditions provide a strong impetus for low-income people to find and keep jobs. For many of these people, however, serious obstacles and skill deficiencies hamper their efforts toward stable employment and self-sufficiency. The most disadvantaged TANF recipients typically face many challenges, among them mental and physical health problems, substance abuse, domestic violence, low cognitive functioning and learning disabilities, and unstable housing, child care, and transportation. Because of TANF work requirements—made stricter for states through the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005—TANF and workforce agencies have been developing new ways to address challenges and improve the work and well-being of their most disadvantaged TANF recipients and families. These efforts represent both an important social policy concern and a considerable programmatic challenge.

In rural areas, the problems and challenges that welfare recipients and service providers face are often more profound and complicated than in urban areas. Families in rural areas are more likely than those in nonrural areas to be poor, and they are more likely to be poor longer (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2004). Moreover, the distinct economic and geographic conditions in rural areas may create additional hurdles. In rural labor markets, jobs are generally more scarce and scattered than in urban ones, and available jobs more often involve low wages or part-time work (Lichter and Jensen 2000). Education and training, as well as services such as health and mental health care, also can be more difficult to obtain. A lack of public transportation, common in rural areas, can make access to existing jobs and services difficult (Weber and Duncan 2001; Friedman 2003). In addition, tight-knit social networks may further hamper employment efforts if a poor personal or family reputation negatively affects someone's job prospects (Findeis et al. 2001). Conversely, for people with few local ties, a lack of local connections can make it more difficult to obtain jobs.

The Rural Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Strategies Demonstration Evaluation rigorously tested the effectiveness of innovative programs to address challenges facing the rural poor as they strive toward sustained employment and self-sufficiency (textbox). The evaluation arose in response to a gap in research on effective strategies to help TANF recipients and

THE RURAL WELFARE-TO-WORK STRATEGIES DEMONSTRATION EVALUATION

The Rural WtW Strategies Demonstration Evaluation is the first rigorous, systematic evaluation of programs designed to help low-income rural families transition from welfare to sustained employment, job progression, and economic independence. The evaluation included three complementary studies of two programs—Building Nebraska Families (BNF) and Illinois Future Steps:

- ***Implementation and Cost Study.*** This study provided an in-depth examination of the context, operation, and costs of the BNF and Illinois Future Steps programs based on site visits, program records, and client focus groups. We identified important implementation issues, examined how programs achieved observed results, drew lessons about service delivery challenges and innovation, and developed estimates of program costs.

- ***Impact Study.*** Random assignment allowed evaluators to determine what difference the programs made in clients' employment, earnings, welfare dependence, and well-being. For both BNF and Future Steps, more than 600 people eligible for limited program slots were assigned to either a treatment group (which was offered program services) or a control group (which was not offered program services but was able to use all other services available in the community). To determine each program's net impact, we compared the behaviors and outcomes of the two groups over a 30-month follow-up period using both survey and administrative records data.

- ***Benefit-Cost Study.*** The evaluation calculated estimates of net program benefits based on data from the impact and implementation studies and published research. We examined the distribution of benefits and costs from several perspectives—participant, government, and society at large.

The Rural WtW Strategies Demonstration Evaluation began in 2000 and was completed in 2008. The Illinois and Nebraska programs and evaluations were implemented on a staggered schedule, with random assignment and data collection completed a year and a half later in Nebraska than in Illinois. A report on cross-site implementation lessons was finalized in early 2004. In March 2006, we completed a comprehensive interim report on Illinois Future Steps, which included 18-month impact findings, along with an assessment of the program's implementation, participation, and costs. A final 30-month impact report on Future Steps was completed in 2008. This final report on BNF presents 30-month impact and benefit-cost analysis findings, along with an examination of the program's implementation, participation, and costs.

other low-income people in rural areas get and keep stable employment and move out of poverty. Random assignment was used to assess whether programs improve the employment, earnings, and well-being of low-income people. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR), along with its subcontractor, Decision Information Resources, Inc., conducted

the evaluation with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. DHHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

During the evaluation's early phases, MPR and ACF worked closely to identify promising local programs that could be evaluated with rigorous, random assignment methods. In selecting programs, we focused on those that appeared to (1) address challenges important to rural areas, (2) provide services substantially different from existing services, (3) generate enough excess demand for services to justify a random assignment experiment, and (4) have an adequately large potential research sample so that program impacts could be reliably detected. Through a multistage process, we examined 25 initiatives across 20 states. Overall, it was challenging to identify programs that were large enough to meet the selection criteria. Ultimately, in 2001 we selected three distinct program models:

- ***Building Nebraska Families (BNF)***, an intensive home visitation and life skills education program to improve the basic life skills and job readiness of vulnerable TANF recipients

- ***Illinois Future Steps***, an employment-focused case management program to prepare TANF and food stamp recipients and other low-income people for work and help them find and keep good jobs

- ***Tennessee First Wheels***, an interest-free car loan program to address the lack of reliable transportation among low-income families[1]

This report focuses on the BNF program. It provides a final analysis of BNF's 30-month impacts and net benefits and offers lessons for policymakers and program developers. In the rest of this chapter, we describe BNF and our evaluation design and methods. In Chapter II, we assess BNF's implementation and context and develop estimates of program costs. In Chapter III, we highlight clients' participation and experiences in BNF. Chapter IV presents program versus control group differences in service use. Chapter V examines 30-month impacts for the full sample on employment, earnings, welfare dependence, poverty, and well-being. Chapter VI examines the same set of outcomes for key subgroups, focusing most on a group of very hard-to-employ ("more disadvantaged") BNF sample members. In Chapter VII, we describe the evaluation's benefit-cost methodology and provide estimates of BNF's net benefits, for both the full sample and the more disadvantaged subgroup. Finally, in Chapter VIII, we compare the magnitude of the BNF impacts with those from evaluations of other welfare-to-work programs, highlight key conclusions and implications of the evaluation's findings, and offer lessons for future welfare-to-work policy and programs.

[1] Tennessee First Wheels formally withdrew from the evaluation in September 2003. Tennessee withdrew after the random assignment process began because of ongoing difficulties enrolling clients into the program. Reductions in the program's state-level funding exacerbated these difficulties.

WELFARE-TO-WORK IN RURAL NEBRASKA: BUILDING NEBRASKA FAMILIES

BNF, an intensive home visitation and life skills education program for hard-to-employ TANF clients in rural Nebraska, brought specialized education, mentoring, and service coordination support to families in geographically isolated areas. BNF served TANF recipients who were required to participate in work activities and who faced serious obstacles and skill deficiencies. The program did not offer employment services; rather, it complemented Nebraska's already strong TANF employment program by developing clients' life skills and job readiness. BNF services were regular and intensive, and they were delivered by master's-level educators who carried small caseloads of between 12 and 18 active clients. Clients typically met weekly or every two weeks with their educator during one-and-a-half-hour individual educational sessions. Their period of participation ranged from 2 to 18 months, or 8 months on average. This time period could include up to six months after a client's exit from TANF. BNF served 358 clients over a 28-month enrollment period from March 2002 through June 2004.[2]

TANF case managers identified nonexempt TANF clients for BNF and encouraged them to participate in it. To be eligible for BNF, a person had to be an active TANF recipient (or in sanction status). TANF clients deemed appropriate for BNF were those with serious obstacles and skill deficiencies and relatively low personal functioning. Those targeted by case managers were often clients who had already tried, or been considered for, less intensive programs and activities, and who appeared to have considerable difficulty managing their personal and family life. After eligible clients agreed to participate in BNF and the evaluation, they were randomly assigned into the program group (which was then enrolled in BNF) or the control group (which was not).

Because all evaluation sample members—program and control group members alike—were part of Nebraska's TANF program, they were all subject to work requirements, sanctions, and a two-year time limit on spells of cash assistance. Likewise, all could access the full range of services available through TANF or their communities. The only difference between the two groups was that BNF services were offered to the program group. Thus, the evaluation is testing the value of BNF in addition to Nebraska's regular TANF program.

Participation in BNF was required for clients once they agreed to enroll. BNF was one of many TANF activities among which nonexempt clients were required to choose to help fulfill their TANF self-sufficiency plan. Although participation in BNF alone was not sufficient to meet clients' work participation requirement, time in BNF activities could count

[2] BNF continued to operate in Nebraska until December 2006. After the reauthorization of TANF through the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act, Nebraska modified its TANF program to conform with the U.S. DHHS's revised definition of allowable TANF work activities. BNF was not included as part of Nebraska's modified TANF program. Nebraska concluded that BNF, as a longer-term intervention, did not fit well into the revised categories of allowable work activities and, thus, did not support Nebraska's ability to achieve its mandated work participation rate. Moreover, because of the relatively high cost of BNF, along with general budget pressures within the Nebraska Health and Human Services System (NHHSS), the agency decided against continuing to fund BNF with non-TANF or state maintenance-of-effort (MOE) dollars.

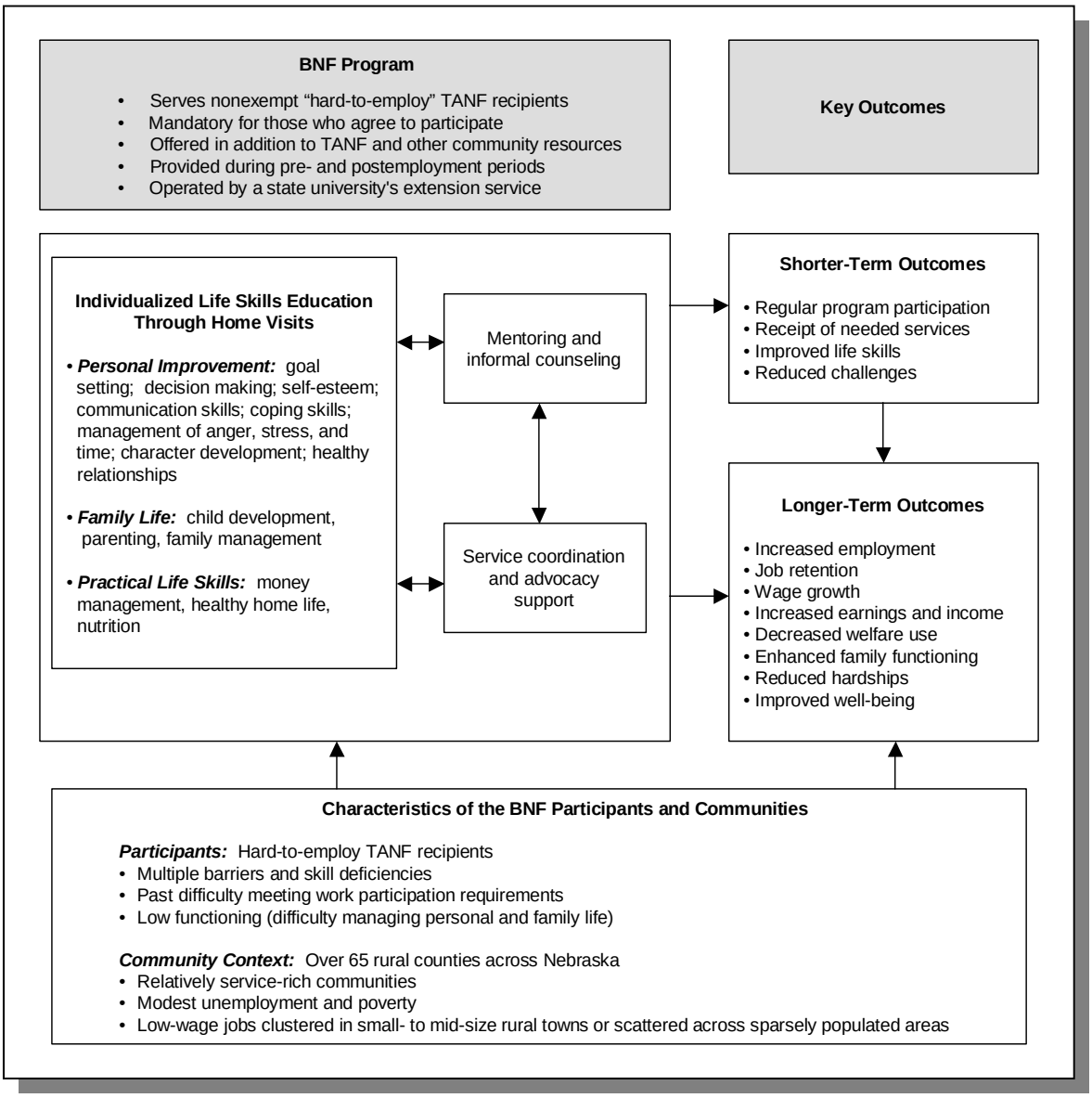
toward the requirement. Typically, clients deemed appropriate for BNF were strongly encouraged by their TANF case manager to participate as a way to help fulfill their self-sufficiency plan. Most clients who were approached for BNF did agree to enroll. After they did so, they were expected to participate and could be sanctioned by their TANF case manager if they did not. Still, given the use of home visits and its potential encroachment into clients' privacy, clients' initial decision to enroll in BNF was voluntary. In addition, they could withdraw from BNF when they felt they were no longer benefiting from its services. Overall, however, even though clients' enrollment was voluntary, the BNF educators reported that clients typically perceived BNF as a mandatory activity since they were actively recruited for it, highly encouraged to enroll, and required to participate once they did enroll.

BNF intended to improve TANF recipients' basic life skills, family functioning, and overall well-being. The program model theorized that, through improved life skills and family functioning, clients would not only be better equipped to address obstacles and participate in job search and training activities, but would also improve their ability to maintain and advance in employment and enhance their family's well-being. Figure I.1 illustrates the key elements of the program. These elements were intended to work together to help clients enhance skills, address challenges, and progress toward work and self-sufficiency.

Through individualized, interactive teaching sessions in clients' homes, the BNF educators provided research-based education and guidance to enhance clients' life skills and family management practices. The lessons focused on the BNF client, but sometimes also involved other family members. Various topics were covered, as needed, from household management, budgeting, and parenting to decision making and self-esteem. To promote skill building and reinforce the educational lessons, clients completed short assignments between regular meetings. When possible, educators linked the lessons to clients' job preparation and workplace efforts. Educators also provided mentoring and informal counseling to clients on personal and work-related issues. They modeled positive behavior and coached clients in how to address complications in their lives and complete practical tasks. In addition, educators provided service coordination and advocacy support by helping clients access services and resources, resolve problems, and mediate issues. To do this, they typically drew on their strong knowledge of, and familiarity with, the local area.

BNF operated as a partnership between NHHSS, which runs the TANF program, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension (UNCE). UNCE operated BNF under a contract with NHHSS. UNCE is the "outreach arm" of the University of Nebraska. It extends the university's educational resources to rural areas by providing a network of educators throughout the state. The program's key staff during the evaluation period included a full-time program coordinator, a part-time program evaluator, and 11 full-time UNCE educators located in county-based UNCE offices around the state. The educators all held master's degrees, typically in family studies, education, social work, or counseling.

Figure I.1. The BNF Program Model for Developing Stronger and More Self-Sufficient Families



The BNF service area during the evaluation included more than 65 counties across rural Nebraska. Each of the 11 educators worked in a multicounty service area, which generally included from three to eight rural counties. The counties varied in population density, including some that were remote and sparsely populated, and others that were home to mid- and large-size towns. Most BNF counties had their own NHHSS office, which referred TANF clients to the local BNF educator.

TESTING INTENSIVE SERVICES FOR HARD-TO-EMPLOY TANF RECIPIENTS

BNF combined two strategies that were hypothesized to be valuable for hard-to-employ TANF clients: (1) an emphasis on life skills education, and (2) service delivery through home visitation. Life skills education responds to a perceived need to improve the capacity of clients—especially those considered very disadvantaged and hard to employ—to manage their lives, make sound decisions, and solve problems independently. This type of training has become a common feature of TANF programs, yet previous studies have not provided experimental evidence of its impacts.

The second strategy—home visiting—offers a potentially useful mode of service delivery, in part because it creates the opportunity for an intensive, individualized intervention. Moreover, home visiting may have particular value in rural areas, where clients often live in relatively isolated areas with limited transportation. In general, the evaluation literature shows some degree of promise for this method of delivering services, although findings from existing studies vary and are not conclusive. In particular, research does suggest that using better-qualified home visitors may be an important factor in a program's success (Olds et al. 2004). This finding suggests that BNF's emphasis on employing master's-level educators as home visitors may enhance its promise. Overall, this evaluation of BNF adds to the literature by investigating the impacts on employment and earnings of a home visitation and life skills education program that has parental self-sufficiency as its primary goal.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

The overall goals of this Rural WtW Evaluation are to evaluate the effectiveness of promising welfare-to-work interventions in rural areas and to guide future policymaking and program development. In particular, the evaluation is aiming to answer the following four sets of research questions about the BNF program:

1. How was BNF implemented and operated, and what did it cost?

2. How effective was BNF over a 30-month period at increasing employment and earnings, reducing welfare dependence, and improving well-being? Was the program more effective for certain subgroups of clients?

3. Do BNF's benefits outweigh its costs?

4. What are the implications and lessons for policy and programs?

Next, we describe the methods and data collection sources used to answer these questions.

Implementation and Cost Study

The implementation and cost study sought to document the BNF program model and service delivery strategies, describe client experiences, assess program implementation, and, more generally, provide a context for interpreting the impact study findings. To explore

these topics, we relied on quantitative data from the BNF Information System (BNFIS) and qualitative information collected through in-depth program site visits and focus groups. In addition, we used a careful methodological approach to develop an estimate of the cost of the program during a typical ongoing year of operation. These data sources and methods together provide a detailed picture of the management and operation of BNF.

Service Use Data. Information on clients' program participation and service use comes from the BNFIS, which we developed and maintained in collaboration with the program. The BNFIS accommodated record-keeping tasks that educators regularly performed, such as documenting the topics discussed in home visits and the referrals and other services provided to clients. The system also provided data on how frequently clients met with educators, the duration of educator/client interactions, the type and quantity of educational lessons clients received, indicators of clients' life management behaviors and attitudes, and clients' progress toward meeting predetermined goals.

Site Visits and Focus Groups. A team of two researchers made two site visits to Nebraska, one in each year of the demonstration period. These visits lasted five days each. Across the two visits, we met or talked with staff from all the BNF service areas. Site visits included in-depth, executive-level interviews with staff from BNF, NHHSS, and other local agencies; case reviews; and observations of program activities. We also conducted focus groups with program participants in Beatrice, Grand Island, and North Platte and with members of the evaluation's control group in Grand Island. Through the focus groups, we gathered information on program and control group members' experiences.

Cost Study Methods. We built up an estimate of the aggregate cost of operating BNF during a one-year, steady-state period by using information obtained through in-depth staff interviews during the site visits, along with program expenditure records. In developing the cost estimate, we followed the methodological approach articulated by Thompson (1998), which has been used successfully in other social service program settings (Perez-Johnson et al. 2002; Ohls and Rosenberg 1999). We measured the market value of all resources used to deliver services and operate the program during the cost period, including "off-budget" expenses that were donated, shared with other programs, or absorbed by an organization's general administrative structure. We excluded costs associated with program startup and participation in the evaluation. We standardized our aggregate cost estimate by converting it into an average cost per participant. Through the benefit-cost analysis, we will assess BNF's net benefits by examining its benefits in relation to its costs.

Impact Study

We used an experimental design to determine the difference BNF made in employment rates, earnings, welfare receipt, and well-being. Using random assignment, during the 28-month enrollment period, 602 people eligible for BNF were assigned to either the BNF treatment (program) group or a control group. A total of 358 individuals were assigned to the program group and 244 to the control group. Midway through the demonstration, in order to form a large enough sample, we worked with NHHSS and UNCE to broaden BNF's catchment area to include additional rural counties. Moreover, although the

experiment began with a balanced design, we shifted to an unbalanced design within the first nine months of the study period. That is, across the study period, the probability of selection to the program group was 60 percent. This probability varied across the 11 BNF sites, from a low of 50 percent in two sites to a high of nearly 70 percent in two others. In some sites, we increased the probability of selection to the program group because the BNF educator was having difficulty achieving a full caseload, and we were concerned that the presence of the control group would cause program slots to go unfilled, thus jeopardizing the experiment. Because of the different probability of selection into the two groups across the BNF sites, all analyses were conducted using appropriate weights, as described in Appendix A.

Sample members assigned to the program group were enrolled in BNF and offered program services (generally within a day or two of random assignment), while control group members were not offered program services (although they had full access to all other available services). BNF participation among the program group was nearly universal; 95 percent of program group members received at least one program service. Program participation is assessed in detail in Chapter III.

The random assignment process was implemented correctly. The baseline characteristics of the two groups (displayed in Chapter II) were very similar, and there were no systematic, significant differences between them. In addition, our monitoring of program enrollment throughout the study found that no members of the control group enrolled in BNF.

Data Sources and Methods. We relied on three key methods and sources to collect data for this study of 30-month program impacts:

1. ***Baseline Information Form.*** We collected baseline demographic and socioeconomic data on sample members just before random assignment using information forms developed for the evaluation and completed by sample members.

2. ***Follow-Up Surveys 18 and 30 Months After Random Assignment.*** We conducted two follow-up surveys with sample members. For both, we used comprehensive telephone interviewing methods, along with intensive field followup. The first survey was a 45-minute interview conducted 18 months after sample members were randomly assigned. We achieved a response rate of 87 percent (525 completes out of 602 sample members). Of the completes, 313 were program group members, and 212 were control group members. The second survey was a 30-minute interview conducted 30 months after sample members were randomly assigned. We attempted to conduct interviews with all sample members, whether or not they had completed an 18-month interview. We achieved a response rate of 83 percent on the 30-month survey (502 completes out of 602 sample members). Of the completes, 309 were program group members and 193 were control group members. Appendix A contains a full discussion of survey data collection and weighting methods. The weighting methods account for survey nonresponse and the different probabilities of selection into the two groups across the BNF sites.

3. ***Administrative Records from the State of Nebraska.*** We obtained state-level administrative records data on sample members for reported monthly TANF and food stamp receipt (from NHHSS) and on quarterly employment and earnings (from Nebraska's unemployment insurance [UI] records). Data were obtained for a 36-month (or 12-quarter) period after random assignment. The data were weighted, as described in Appendix A, to account for the different probabilities of selection into the program and control groups across the BNF sites.

The key findings that relate to BNF's employment and earnings impacts were based on data collected from the follow-up surveys. Still, in the body of the report, where appropriate, we integrate findings based on administrative data, and, in Appendix B, we provide a comparison of the two key data sources and the findings that are based on them. Overall, we rely on the surveys as the primary data source for employment and earnings because they provide a detailed picture of clients' labor market experiences.[3] Although administrative data represent accurate information for all sample members on the jobs and earnings that are reported by employers in Nebraska, these data are incomplete because they exclude sample members' self-employment, out-of-state employment, and informal jobs. These can all be important sources of earnings, but are unlikely to be captured through the state UI system. However, these earnings sources typically are reflected in the survey data. Indeed, the broader coverage of the evaluation's survey data may be particularly important given that the survey data show that self-employment was significantly more prevalent among BNF program than control group members. Likewise, about one-third of the counties in BNF's service area were adjacent to neighboring states, where clients might have obtained employment (see Figure II.2 in Chapter II). Finally, we cannot identify which jobs in clients' survey-based employment history were informal, thereby limiting our ability to assess the importance of informal employment. Data sources used for particular outcome measures are described next.

Outcome Measures. Overall, the analysis assessed the effects of BNF on outcomes related to labor market success, dependence on public assistance, use of services, individual and family functioning, and family well-being and poverty status. For most outcome measures, the primary data sources for the impact analysis were the 18- and 30-month surveys, which provided a more detailed set of data than the administrative records. The surveys included monthly estimates of employment and earnings, as well as variables on the characteristics of jobs held at followup, income sources, and family income. Where possible, we measured outcomes at specific points in time, as well as continuously. Point-in-time measures included such items as job characteristics, income, living arrangements, and hardships. Continuous measures included such items as the duration of employment and welfare receipt. Depending on the source, period-specific measures were defined by month or quarter, as well as for aggregated periods (such as the full 30-month follow-up period and

[3] As described in Appendix B, we performed a rigorous quality review check of all completed surveys to check for consistency and validity in the survey responses. Corrections for missing or confusing data were obtained from sites or from sample members, and outliers in the survey data were omitted from the analyses.

the last 6 months of the follow-up period). To adjust for inflation, estimates were converted into 2004 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

While the 30-month survey was our primary data source for most outcomes, we relied on the 18-month survey for several types of measures. First, data related to service use and to self-esteem and other personal-functioning measures were collected primarily through the 18-month survey. Second, to develop a monthly timeline of sample members' employment and earnings experiences for the full 30-month follow-up period, we relied on both the 18- and 30-month surveys. When sample members responded to both surveys, we drew on their responses to the 18-month survey for data on their monthly employment and earnings for the first 18 months after random assignment. Then, we drew on their 30-month responses for data on their monthly employment and earnings since the time of the 18-month survey. For sample members who were interviewed only through the 30-month followup ("30-month-only respondents"), we collected monthly employment and earnings data from the 30-month survey for the full follow-up period.[4]

Analytic Methods. Because random assignment was used to create the program and control groups, we can attribute subsequent differences in the two groups' outcomes to the incremental services the BNF program offered in addition to Nebraska's regular TANF program and services. We estimated impacts by comparing mean outcomes for the program and control groups for the period up to 30 months after random assignment. The differences between the mean outcomes represent unbiased estimates of the average effects of BNF. To measure the impacts for the average sample member, we weighted the data to account for the different probability of selection to the program and control groups across the BNF sites, and to account for survey nonresponse.

To improve the precision of the impact estimates, we used multivariate regression methods. We controlled for relevant demographic and socioeconomic variables collected at baseline, as well as key contextual variables (such as the level of population density of clients' BNF service area and the year of their enrollment into the program). We estimate that the variance of the impact estimates was reduced by 15 percent as a result of using multivariate modeling.

We identified program impacts if program group outcomes differed from control group outcomes by a margin that was statistically significant using a two-tailed test at the 90 percent confidence level. Power calculations indicated that, to detect significant impacts using our full survey sample, we needed to observe monthly earnings differences of about

[4] It is likely that the early employment and earnings histories of the 30-month-only respondents are more affected by recall error than those of sample members who responded to both surveys. However, both program and control groups should be equally affected by recall error, so there is no reason to believe that this error biases the estimated impacts. To make certain that the results did not vary substantially with the choice of sample, we repeated all analyses conducted on the full 30-month sample with the subset of sample members who responded to both surveys. Findings across the two samples were highly consistent, and are described in Appendix C.

$118, monthly TANF benefit differences of about $40, and employment and welfare impacts of about 9 to 10 percentage points.[5] If the program had effects of these magnitudes, we had an 80 percent chance of detecting them.

Subgroup Analyses. We conducted subgroup analyses to examine whether the program was more effective for certain subgroups of the target population. We expected that an examination of the patterns of subgroup effects would enhance our understanding of the BNF program experience and how it affected client outcomes. We focused our analyses on two key subgroups defined by sample members' characteristics:[6,7]

1. ***Degree of Disadvantage (or Employability).*** We anticipated that separate analyses for more and less disadvantaged clients might be useful in targeting future services. By design, BNF intended to serve TANF clients who faced multiple obstacles and had past difficulties meeting work requirements. Still, some sample members were more disadvantaged than others. We hypothesized that impacts would be larger for those who faced more challenges and were relatively less prepared for employment. We characterized sample members as "more disadvantaged" (or "very hard-to-employ") if they met two or more of five criteria at the time of their BNF enrollment: (1) did not have a high school diploma or GED, (2) had a self-reported health condition that limited their activity, (3) had a transportation barrier, (4) had no earnings in the prior year, or (5) had received TANF or AFDC for two or more years in their lifetime.[8] More than two-fifths (43 percent) of sample members were considered more disadvantaged.

2. ***Time of Random Assignment.*** Although BNF was well implemented throughout the demonstration, the program made improvements and

[5] Minimum detectable differences were somewhat smaller when administrative records data were used, because administrative data for all sample members were available. The evaluation was able to detect quarterly earnings differences of about $320, monthly TANF benefit differences of about $36, and employment and welfare impacts of about eight to nine percentage points based on the administrative data.

[6] As described in Chapter VI, we also conducted analyses of subgroup impacts by clients' household structure (single-parent versus other household types) and the level of population density of clients' BNF service area (areas with population densities less than 16.3 people per square mile (the average population density of the BNF counties) versus areas with population densities greater than 16.3 people per square mile.

[7] In the case of each of the subgroups, we compared the experiences of the subgroup's program group members to those of the subgroup's control group members. For example, the more disadvantaged program group members were compared to the more disadvantaged control group members.

[8] Clients with a health condition that limited their activity were those who responded at baseline that (1) they currently had a health problem that limited the kind or amount of work, training, or schoolwork they could do (including problems such as a preexisting medical condition, a physical disability, an emotional or mental health condition, or drug or alcohol use); or (2) someone else in their household had a disability or serious health problem that made it difficult for them (the sample member) to work, attend training, or go to school. Clients with a transportation barrier were those who responded at baseline that they did not have a driver's license or that they did not own a vehicle or have access to one on a daily basis.

refinements to its curriculum and service delivery methods over time. As a result, we expected that BNF program impacts on key outcomes might be larger for program group members who were randomly assigned and served later in the demonstration, compared with those who were randomly assigned and served earlier in the demonstration. About three-fifths (58 percent) of sample members were assigned during the first half (14 months) of the demonstration's enrollment period, while about two-fifths (42 percent) were assigned during the second half (14 months).[9]

Benefit-Cost Study

The benefit-cost study provides a basis for considering whether benefits of the BNF program are large enough to justify an investment of public resources in it. Potential benefits of BNF for participants, the government, or society as a whole include (1) increased earnings; (2) increased tax payments; (3) reduced TANF, food stamps, and other transfer payments; and (4) decreased use of alternative services. Balanced against these benefits are the costs of operating BNF and other costs that reflect program effects, such as child care and commuting expenses participants incur in order to work outside the home.

The benefit-cost analysis is useful in several ways. First, it provides a framework for assessing program impacts in financial terms. We estimated a dollar value for measurable benefits and costs in order to determine BNF's net benefits per participant. Second, the analysis recognizes that the government has different goals in implementing social welfare programs such as BNF. To this end, we examined the program's benefits and costs from different perspectives—those of participants and their families, government (and taxpayers), and society at large. Third, because program impacts varied for different groups of sample members, we assessed benefits and costs for the full sample, as well as for key subgroups, such as the very hard-to-employ (more disadvantaged) sample members.

We used an accounting framework to assess program benefits. Where possible, we valued benefits in dollar terms by drawing directly on the evaluation's impact estimates. In other cases, we used a unit cost estimate that represented an appropriate price. Our analytic and measurement approach was adapted from the methodology that MPR originally developed and used in the National Supported Work Demonstration Evaluation (Kemper et al. 1984) and has used extensively since, including recently as part of the National Job Corps Study and the Individual Training Account experiment (McConnell and Glazerman 2001; McConnell et al. 2006). In Chapter VII, we provide a more detailed explanation of our methodology, along with a presentation of the key benefit-cost findings.

[9] Random assignment and program enrollment were conducted during the 28-month period from March 2002 to June 2004. We examined impacts separately for program and control group members who were randomly assigned during the first half of the sampling period (March 2002 to April 2003) and for those who were randomly assigned during the second half of the period (May 2003 to June 2004).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the 30-month findings from this evaluation suggest that BNF shows promise as a model for increasing employment and earnings among very hard-to-employ TANF recipients. The implementation study found that BNF was implemented in close conformance with its model and provided substantial services to clients over an extended period. Although BNF operated in a relatively service-rich environment in which many control group members received services outside of BNF, significantly more program group members received skill-building services, mentoring, and service coordination support. For the full sample, these services translated into improved employment toward the end of the 30-month follow-up period, though there was no impact on earnings for the full sample. For the more disadvantaged subgroup, however, we observed large impacts on employment and earnings during the 30-month period after random assignment. The more disadvantaged BNF clients were more likely than the more disadvantaged control group members to work more months and hours during the follow-up period. They were also more likely to work in higher-paying jobs with better benefits, to be self-employed, and to retain and advance in their jobs. These employment impacts translated into large impacts on earnings. The impacts on earnings continued to grow during much of the follow-up period and were particularly robust during its last 6 months. The more disadvantaged program group members, compared with their control group counterparts, also had substantially higher family income and were less likely to be living in poverty at the time of the 30-month followup.

While the evaluation's impact findings point to the effectiveness of BNF for more disadvantaged clients, the program's measured benefits to society did not outweigh its measured costs during the 30-month follow-up period. However, for the more disadvantaged subgroup, our projections indicate that if earnings impacts that are equal to the average impact for the last six months of the 30-month follow-up period persist into the future, then BNF could pay for itself—that is, positive net benefits could result—in 1.7 additional years beyond the 30-month follow-up period (or 4.2 years after random assignment).

CHAPTER II

THE IMPLEMENTATION, CONTEXT, AND COSTS OF BUILDING NEBRASKA FAMILIES

To understand how Building Nebraska Families (BNF) achieved its observed impacts, what contextual factors shaped the experiences of both the program and control groups, and how service delivery issues influenced BNF's design and operation, it is important to assess BNF's approach and operation. Based on two rounds of in-depth site visit interviews, reviews of program service use data and other records, and client focus groups, we examined the program's operation and identified important challenges and lessons. Overall, our evaluation found that BNF was well implemented. The program complemented existing employment-related services in rural Nebraska. As planned, it provided intensive and individualized life skills education and mentoring to hard-to-employ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients. Moreover, BNF improved over the course of the evaluation as it further developed its curriculum, staff skills, and service delivery methods. Not surprisingly, given the intensity of the services BNF offered, the costs of the program were substantial.

In this chapter, we highlight the BNF program and its implementation, the context in which services were provided, and the population served. We first describe BNF's development and staffing approach, along with its program model and service delivery methods. Second, we explain how TANF recipients were identified for BNF, and we present characteristics of the evaluation sample. Third, we highlight the Nebraska TANF policy context in which BNF was implemented, including the other types of community services that were available to both program and control group members. Finally, we assess BNF's implementation, highlighting both successes and challenges, and present the estimate we developed of BNF's costs. In the next chapter, we present detailed findings on the nature and intensity of clients' participation in BNF and their receipt of BNF services.

PROGRAM MODEL AND SERVICE DELIVERY METHODS

BNF aimed to improve life skills and family management practices so participants would be better equipped to overcome hurdles and achieve success at home, school, work, and in the community. The program model featured individualized life skills education,

delivered through home visits, along with mentoring, referrals, and other forms of personal and family support. In this section, we describe BNF's development, staffing, and service delivery processes. (See text box for a summary of the key program elements.)

- ***BNF developed and operated through collaboration between a state welfare agency and a state university's extension service. The university's educational resources and expertise were vital to supporting BNF's mission.***

BNF emerged from a prior collaboration between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension (UNCE) and the Nebraska Health and Human Services System (NHHSS). Program staff believed that the educational mission of, and resources available through, the university extension service were critical to BNF's efforts.

In designing BNF, UNCE and NHHSS built on the model from UNCE's Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (FSNEP). This program provides home-based, one-on-one tutoring on healthy eating habits to families who have limited resources. Administrators from UNCE and NHHSS recognized a gap in life skills education and support for very disadvantaged TANF recipients in rural areas and believed a similar educational approach could benefit them. However, the range and intensity of services anticipated for BNF prompted an important adjustment to the FSNEP model: FSNEP staff were bachelor's-level staff, but BNF educators were required to have a master's degree.

UNCE operated BNF under contract to NHHSS. NHHSS case managers referred clients to BNF, and NHHSS administrators served on BNF's advisory committee and facilitated coordination across the organizations. BNF was funded by federal TANF dollars through a three-year, $2.2 million contract between UNCE and NHHSS.

- ***The core BNF staff included a full-time program coordinator and part-time program evaluator, along with 11 highly qualified educators, who each provided services to a small caseload of clients across a multicounty rural territory.***

A full-time program coordinator directed BNF. She directed and oversaw BNF's operation, performed day-to-day management activities, and supervised, trained, and guided the educators. The coordinator, herself a UNCE educator, had worked with UNCE for more than 20 years before taking on the role with BNF. Experience leading the FSNEP program, along with coalition-building skills and community contacts, made her well suited to this role. A UNCE program evaluator assisted the BNF coordinator. The evaluator tracked performance measurement data and worked closely with the coordinator to improve the program. In addition, other senior-level UNCE staff lent support to BNF. Most notably, a university dean participated in an advisory and oversight capacity and played a role in broad management and budget issues.

KEY FEATURES OF BNF

- ***Program Model.*** A home visitation program that provided individualized educational lessons to enhance TANF recipients' basic life skills, family management practices, and job readiness. Mentoring, referrals, and support around personal, family, and work-related issues were also provided.

- ***Duration and Intensity of Services.*** Average length of enrollment was eight months. Clients generally met with BNF educators two or three times a month, most often in one-and-a-half-hour meetings in clients' homes. Clients could receive support for up to six months after becoming employed.

- ***Target Population.*** Mandatory, nonexempt TANF recipients required to work or participate in work activities for at least 30 hours each week. BNF targeted very disadvantaged TANF recipients who had faced past difficulty meeting work participation requirements.

- ***Partner Organizations and Service Area.*** UNCE operated BNF, under contract to NHHSS. BNF services were provided to residents in more than 65 counties across Nebraska.

- ***Staffing.*** A program coordinator, program evaluator, and 11 master's-level educators provided services to clients. The educators were located in county-based UNCE field offices. A state-level administrator provided oversight.

- ***Caseload Size.*** Approximately 12 to 18 active clients per educator. Educators in the more sparsely populated areas typically carried the smallest caseloads because the distances between clients were greater.

During the evaluation, 11 well-qualified and experienced educators provided BNF services. Each was responsible for serving TANF clients in a rural territory that included from three to eight counties. Caseloads were small, typically ranging from 12 to 18 active clients. The educators were seasoned professionals with different educational and professional backgrounds. All held a master's degree, in such fields as social work, counseling, education, and family and consumer sciences. As a group, they had many years of previous work experience, often in social work, counseling, or teaching. About half had previous experience working with low-income, disadvantaged people, and they agreed that this was helpful in working with the BNF clients. At least two educators were themselves past recipients of public assistance, making them even more sensitive to the needs of their BNF clients. In addition, nearly all were very familiar with the areas they served.

- ***BNF relied on a clearly-articulated, research-based curriculum to teach life skills.***

BNF used a research-based curriculum to teach an extensive set of life skills to TANF clients. UNCE administrators and the BNF coordinator developed the program model and its core curriculum, with help from UNCE's wide network of educators. The curriculum and approach are grounded in family development research, most notably, the principles articulated in DeFrain (2002, 1999) and Stinnett and DeFrain (1985). This body of work examines the assets and qualities that strong families possess. It recognizes the importance of identifying and building on family strengths and assets in setting short- and long-term goals and in developing individualized educational plans to meet those goals.

The final BNF curriculum—*Survive, Strive, Thrive: Keys to Healthy Family Living*—aimed to develop stronger and more self-sufficient families by building skills in three key areas: (1) personal improvement, (2) family life, and (3) practical life skills (Fox et al. 2007).[1] The curriculum is designed to teach participants to move from "day-to-day surviving" to "thriving," by giving them the tools and assistance they need to "strive to make changes needed to be successful at home, at school, at work, and in the community." Across the three key areas are a total of 15 stand-alone components (see text box).[2] The component curricula are designed for easy use. Each includes an overview with goals and objectives, along with many teaching materials, such as lesson plans, suggested activities, relevant articles and other handouts, and teaching tips.

- ***BNF provided home-based education, mentoring, and service coordination support to develop clients' life skills and family functioning.***

The BNF model included two key types of services: (1) life skills education and skill-building activities, and (2) mentoring and service coordination support. Because participation occurred both before and up to six months after clients became employed, BNF aimed not only to help develop job readiness skills, but also to support clients during an important postemployment period. By design, the BNF services were *indirectly* related to employment; they were intended to complement the employment-related and other services already available through Nebraska's TANF program.

Life Skills Education and Skill-Building Activities. BNF educators and clients met regularly in clients' homes for educational instruction, discussions, and encouragement related to life skills topics. Meetings were typically conducted weekly or every other week. Lessons focused on the interests and needs of the client, as well as the family. At the outset, educators worked with clients to set goals and develop individualized educational plans.

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[1] The BNF curriculum is publicly available. For information on ordering the curriculum, see the reference list at the back of the report.

[2] The "Creating a Healthy Home" component encompasses household management topics, along with nutrition and basic food preparation skills. The "Building Healthy Relationships" component focuses on developing good relationships with others, including spouse, partner, and other family members.

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE BNF CURRICULUM
SURVIVE, STRIVE, THRIVE: KEYS TO HEALTHY FAMILY LIVING

Personal Improvement

Goal-Setting

Making Good Decisions

Developing Good Character

Stress Management

Building Self-Esteem

Coping Skills

Building Healthy Relationships

Communication Skills

Anger/Conflict Management

Time Management

Family Life

Strong Families

Positive Parenting

Child Development

Practical Life Skills

Money Management

Creating a Healthy Home

Educators conducted an assessment of clients' strengths and needs, and clients completed a detailed program entry checklist to help educators understand their typical behaviors and attitudes. Clients also completed goal sheets to identify short- and long-term goals that would help them improve their skills and progress toward economic independence. Educators helped clients articulate realistic goals. Together, they developed an education and support plan for meeting those goals.

The BNF curriculum was delivered using an interactive, experiential learning approach that applied educational lessons to everyday issues. The curriculum typically was not used in a sequential manner; rather, educators adapted the mix and order of components and lessons to fit the needs of individual clients. The BNF lessons and associated activities were designed to be practical, hands-on, and informative. Through their teaching, educators offered practical tools and guidance to help clients improve skills. These skills might be related, for example, to managing children's behavior; maintaining a positive outlook; developing strategies to solve everyday problems; communicating effectively with a spouse, partner, or service provider; using appropriate personal hygiene and grooming techniques; and developing and maintaining a budget. (See text box for vignettes highlighting BNF's teaching approach.) As an example of an activity, educators worked with clients on budgeting by developing a filing system to track expenses. Clients also were expected to complete short homework assignments. A weekly assignment might have involved asking a client to sort her expenditures into categories, then track them in the filing system.

THE BNF TEACHING APPROACH: VIGNETTES OF CLIENT EXPERIENCES

- Client A, at the time of her enrollment in BNF, lived with her two young children and her boyfriend (whom the educator described as emotionally abusive). Client A had little prior work experience, took medication for depression, and reportedly struggled with communication, anger management, and basic living skills. Through BNF lessons, the educator provided information on child development and parenting strategies. In addition, to help Client A develop better communication and problem-solving skills, the educator and client talked about principles of effective communication and characteristics of strong relationships. They role-played difficult conversations, such as those between family members and with employers. In so doing, the educator coached Client A on listening skills and strategies for building strong relationships, managing stress, and maintaining self-control. Additional information and assistance with budgeting, time management, and household routines were designed to help Client A better meet the basic needs of her family and foster an organized, calm, and cooperative home environment.

- Client B, at the time of her enrollment in BNF, lived with her two school-age children and was estranged from her husband. She was reportedly quiet and withdrawn, with low self-esteem. The BNF educator conducted lessons on developing a positive self-concept, understanding characteristics of healthy relationships, and developing and using effective coping, stress management, and communication techniques. In addition, goal-setting and decision-making exercises were used to help Client B develop a clearer vision and plan for her future and to take steps to make sound decisions and resolve problems. Role-playing was used to help the client practice interviewing skills and ask an employer for a raise. Through role-playing, Client B also practiced ways to contact service agencies, bill collectors, and her ex-husband in a firm and courteous manner that would allow her to work through challenges and find beneficial solutions to problems.

Mentoring and Service Coordination Support. In their work with clients, educators provided different types of nonteaching support to help clients organize their lives and overcome obstacles. First, through the lessons they conducted, educators mentored and informally counseled clients on personal and work issues. In so doing, educators provided guidance and encouragement on how to apply educational principles to practical life challenges (see text box). They modeled positive behavior and coached clients in how to address complications and complete practical tasks. Educators aimed not to do tasks *for* clients, but rather to build clients' confidence by teaching and guiding them in how to resolve problems and address challenges themselves.

Second, educators provided service coordination and advocacy support. This support was intended to complement the service coordination and logistical assistance that clients

EXAMPLES OF BNF MENTORING AND SUPPORT
Areas in which educators coached, encouraged, or helped clients

- Preparing for the GED
- Obtaining child care and transportation benefits
- Completing child support papers
- Organizing/resolving legal issues
- Making difficult telephone calls to schools and employers
- Mediating with NHHSS staff and other service providers
- Applying for or securing financial aid for education or training
- Discussing practical strategies for managing stress or overcoming feelings of helplessness
- Managing or leaving an abusive home environment

may have received through their TANF case manager. Most notably, TANF case managers were responsible for helping clients access available child care and transportation benefits. To help educators perform their own service coordination and advocacy role, each educator undertook a "community-mapping" process at the outset of the demonstration. They identified and cataloged relevant local and regional organizations and resources so they were well positioned to help clients connect with those resources. As necessary, educators helped clients communicate with other social service providers and, in some cases, with employers. In so doing, educators may have advocated for clients' needs, helped mediate challenges or issues they faced, and served as a personal reference for them with other organizations. They often acted resourcefully and drew on their own community connections in helping clients access resources and opportunities. The extent to which educators provided these types of service coordination and advocacy assistance varied, depending on their personal strengths and work styles.

Although educators typically had less contact with clients after the clients became employed, postemployment support was provided. As needed, educators provided the same mix of BNF services for up to six months after clients exited TANF (after which former TANF clients were no longer eligible to receive BNF services).

THE BNF TARGET POPULATION AND RESEARCH SAMPLE

BNF targeted TANF clients who faced serious obstacles and skill deficiencies. To be eligible, a person had to be an active or sanctioned, nonexempt TANF recipient and willing to enter BNF.[3] TANF recipients deemed appropriate were generally those who had already tried, or been considered for, less intensive programs and who faced many challenges, such as a poor work history and habits, limited education, low personal functioning, or difficulty with parental roles and daily structure. As TANF case managers interacted with their clients, they identified those who appeared to need the kinds of help BNF offered. Case managers met with clients they considered good prospects, determined whether they met the program's criteria and were interested, and, if appropriate, made a referral to BNF. Although clients had to agree to participate in BNF, typically they were firmly encouraged to do so by their TANF case manager. After they agreed to participate, they were expected to do so as part of their TANF "self-sufficiency plan" and could be sanctioned by their case manager if they did not.[4]

TANF case managers took different approaches to referring clients to BNF. Some systematically identified their most vulnerable and lowest-functioning clients, referring them to BNF only after other efforts had failed. In contrast, others quickly identified and referred clients, even those relatively new to TANF, if they believed they faced serious obstacles to work and could benefit from BNF services. Their approach varied, depending on the philosophy of their local TANF office, their own work style, the nature of their relationship with the local BNF educator, and the number of openings in the local educator's caseload.

Table II.1 highlights key characteristics of the BNF sample at the time of their referral to BNF.[5] Overall, more than 9 in 10 sample members were female (93 percent), more than 8 in 10 were between ages 20 and 39 (85 percent), and 6 in 10 had a child under age 3. We highlight other key characteristics of the sample below.

- ***On the whole, BNF was successful at enrolling disadvantaged TANF clients. While some faced more disadvantages than others, more than two-fifths could be considered very hard-to-employ clients who faced multiple, serious obstacles.***

As intended, BNF was largely successful at targeting and serving TANF clients with serious obstacles and skill deficiencies. We characterized sample members as very hard-to-

[3] Roughly 1 in 10 sample members were in sanction status when they applied to BNF.

[4] Sanctions in Nebraska resulted in the complete loss of cash assistance for the family, including a penalty of 1 month for the first sanction, 3 months for the second, and 12 months for the third.

[5] Although we focus our discussion in this section on baseline characteristics of the full BNF research sample, this table also highlights characteristics for program and control group members separately. The characteristics of the two groups were similar, and there were no systematic, significant differences between them. The significant differences that are present between the two groups are within the range of expected variation for a randomly selected sample.

Table II.1. Key Characteristics of BNF Sample Members at Baseline (Percentages)

Characteristic	Program Group	Control Group	All Sample Members
Age			
Average age	28	28	28
Race/Ethnicity			
Hispanic	15	11	13
White, non-Hispanic	72	80**	76
Black, non-Hispanic	2	1	2
Other race/ethnicity	10	9	10
Education			
No high school diploma or GED	35	30	32
High school diploma or GED	39	43	41
More than high school diploma or GED	26	27	27
Employment History			
Currently working for pay	17	16	16
Worked during past two years	94	88**	91
Earnings in Prior Year			
None	19	25*	22
$1 to under $5,000	53	50	52
$5,000 to under $10,000	19	18	18
$10,000 to under $20,000	7	6	6
$20,000 or more	2	1	2
Duration of TANF or AFDC Receipt Prior to Random Assignment			
Never received TANF or AFDC	3	3	3
Received TANF or AFDC 1 to 12 months	56	57	56
Received TANF or AFDC 13 to 24 months	19	15	17
Received TANF or AFDC 25 to 60 months	16	18	17
Received TANF or AFDC more than 60 months	7	8	7
Public Assistance at Baseline			
Receiving TANF or AFDC	89	88	88
Receiving food stamps	92	92	92
Receiving housing subsidy	28	25	27
Household Characteristics			
Average household size (number of people)	3.8	3.7	3.8
Average number of children in household	2.1	1.9*	2.0
Average age of youngest child (years)	3.5	3.2	3.3
Youngest child younger than 3 years old	61	59	60
Household Composition			
Single-adult household	55	51	53
Married or partner household	20	19	20
Other multiple-adult household	25	30	27
Sample Size	**358**	**242**	**600**

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work baseline information forms, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note Data were weighted to account for the unbalanced probability of selection into the program and control groups, which varied across the BNF sites. A complete set of baseline data was available for 600 of the 602 sample members.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

employ ("more disadvantaged") if, when they were referred to BNF, they met two or more of five self-reported criteria that reflect serious obstacles to employment and self-sufficiency. The last two criteria in particular reflect a range of challenges and circumstances that sample members may have experienced. The five criteria, or obstacles, are:

1. ***Limited Education.*** No high school diploma or GED

2. ***Health Problem.*** Self-reported personal or family health problem that limited the sample member's ability to work or participate in school or training (including a preexisting medical condition, a physical disability, an emotional or mental health condition, and/or drug or alcohol use)

3. ***Transportation Barrier.*** Lack of ownership of, or access to, a working vehicle, or lack of a valid driver's license

4. ***Limited Recent Work History.*** Lack of own earnings during the prior year, suggesting a limited recent work history

5. ***Welfare Dependence.*** Receipt of TANF or AFDC for two or more years during lifetime

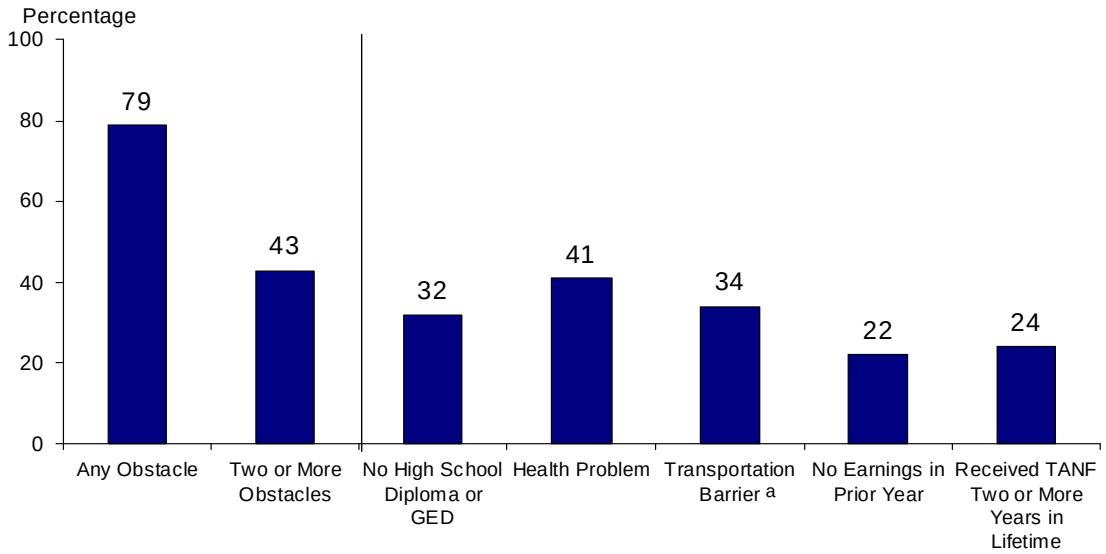
Based on self-reports at the time of program enrollment, more than 4 in 10 BNF sample members met at least two of these five criteria (Figure II.1). Nearly 8 in 10 met at least one of the five criteria. In focus groups, sample members shared observations and experiences related to the challenges they faced (see text box).

Although a great majority of sample members faced at least one serious obstacle or skill deficiency, many also appeared to have the education and experience needed to secure basic employment (Table II.1). Most had a recent employment history—more than 9 in 10 had worked for pay in the past two years—though earnings were limited and only a small fraction (16 percent) were working at the time of referral to BNF. In addition, two-thirds held at least a high school credential when they were referred to BNF, and more than one-quarter had some education beyond high school. Moreover, a minority (one-quarter) had received TANF or AFDC cash assistance for two or more years during their lifetime. This relatively low fraction of long-time welfare recipients reflects, in part, Nebraska's work-oriented TANF system and its two-year time limit on spells of cash assistance.

- ***Overall, the BNF population appeared to be somewhat more disadvantaged than rural TANF recipients statewide.***

Comparing the characteristics of the BNF sample to those of all TANF recipients in rural Nebraska suggests that, as intended, BNF sample members were more

Figure II.1. Prevalence of Key Obstacles to Employment Among BNF Sample Members



Source: Rural Welfare to Work baseline information form, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

[a]About 20 percent of sample members did not own or have access to a vehicle, while about 30 percent did not have a driver's license.

disadvantaged than the overall TANF population in rural Nebraska.[6] Indeed, qualitative assessments by Nebraska's rural TANF staff suggest that BNF clients were typically among the most disadvantaged one-third to one-half of Nebraska's TANF caseload.

In particular, comparing quantitative data on baseline characteristics of the BNF sample with data on the statewide TANF population shows a few important differences. BNF sample members were relatively less educated than other rural TANF recipients. Based on a recent statewide survey, about one-third (32 percent) of BNF sample members did not have a high school diploma or GED at the time of random assignment, compared to about one-fifth (22 percent) of TANF clients across rural Nebraska (Meckstroth et al. 2002). Moreover, a higher fraction of BNF sample members (34 percent) had a transportation barrier at baseline, compared to 26 percent of rural TANF recipients statewide. Measures of health status available at baseline for BNF sample members were not easily comparable to the statewide data, and, hence, are not presented here. However, at the 18-month followup,

[6] The available data on BNF sample members and all TANF recipients in rural Nebraska are not fully comparable, and comparisons should be viewed cautiously because data were not collected during the same time period. The BNF data were collected for clients who received TANF between 2002 and 2004; the statewide data were collected for clients who received TANF during 2000.

MANY BNF CLIENTS STRUGGLED WITH SERIOUS PERSONAL AND FAMILY CHALLENGES

In focus groups, sample members offered insights about the challenges they faced in their personal and home lives. Many were referred to the BNF program when they were struggling with serious personal issues, facing great difficulty managing their lives and those of their children, and living with low self-esteem and self-confidence.

Many participants discussed severe difficulties with parenting. Several had children in the foster care system. One explained that she had "had a very bad life.…I came from a very, very hard home and I really did not know how to be a good enough parent for my son." She further explained that her son had been removed from her home and placed into foster care and "right now we're fighting to get [him] back." Another shared that she "wanted to be a better mom, so [she] wouldn't be in a situation where [her] kids were taken out of the home.…I never had them taken away from me, but I came close to it once and I did not want it to happen."

Many participants shared personal challenges they faced related to domestic abuse, substance abuse, and mental health. Their stories conveyed that many had enrolled in BNF during a "real hard time" when they needed to "get [their] lives back on track." One described a relationship that had at times been both emotionally and physically abusive and how that abuse had affected her life: "I was in a really abusive relationship and I quit nursing school and everything." Another, who was a recovering drug and alcohol addict, explained that she enrolled in BNF when she was on the "verge of a relapse.…When you're in a situation with drugs and alcohol, it's hard to see your way out of those things." Some participants shared difficulties that resulted from living with alcoholic spouses or partners, others talked about challenges living with depression and bipolar disorder, and still others talked about how chronic medical conditions had prevented them from working.

Participants also talked about logistical obstacles they faced, such as paying for car repairs, managing personal finances, and completing regular household tasks.

the estimate of probable major depression was a little lower among BNF control group members compared to rural TANF recipients across Nebraska (33 versus 37 percent).[7]

[7] Because the survey data were collected 18 months after random assignment, BNF could have influenced the program group members' outcomes. For this reason, we present the control group data here. Findings for the program and control groups on this measure were similar (and presented in Appendix C). Both surveys

RURAL NEBRASKA: POLICY, ECONOMIC, AND SERVICE CONTEXT

The context in which BNF operated shaped the experiences of all sample members, program and control group members alike. Examining BNF's context allows us to understand the standard against which it should be compared. The impact findings presented in this report represent BNF's value on top of a supportive, work-oriented TANF program in a state that experienced relatively modest unemployment and poverty levels and that offered various supportive services. In general, evaluations may find it difficult to detect impacts when programs are implemented in such a service-rich environment. However, part of BNF's value in Nebraska may have been in how it complemented the work requirements and supportive services that were already present.

- ***Nebraska's supportive, work-oriented TANF program, which served both the program and control groups, offered employment services, support for short-term education and training, and a two-year time limit on cash assistance.***

Employment First—Nebraska's TANF program—is a supportive, work-oriented program. During the time of the evaluation, it espoused a work-oriented philosophy and encouraged those who could work to do so. However, it did not stress direct entry into the labor market for all clients. Rather, it used a flexible, targeted "human capital investment model" of service delivery that provided some short-term support for education and training. Education and training needed to be completed within 24 months, however, because of Nebraska's two-year time limit on continuous TANF receipt.

As TANF recipients, all sample members—program and control group members alike—had access to all TANF employment-related opportunities and supportive services (except that the control group did not have access to BNF). Job search training and assistance varied across the state, but generally included help with writing resumes, completing job applications, obtaining job leads, and conducting interviews. Job search workshops commonly lasted up to three weeks, requiring up to five days of participation each week. The TANF job readiness and life skills training was designed to prepare clients for work by addressing such practical life skills topics as health and wellness, appearance and demeanor, interpersonal skills, stress and time management, problem solving, self-esteem, and job attitudes and work ethic. Job readiness training was typically provided in a structured, group setting during standard business hours. In some areas, it was offered through a one-day group workshop; in others, it took the form of two five-hour group sessions or was incorporated into ongoing job search sessions.

A mix of transitional benefits was also available to support clients as they became employed. Child care and medical benefits were available for up to two years after clients

(*continued*)
used the World Health Organization's Composite International Diagnostic Interview Short-Form (CIDI-SF) to measure the prevalence of major depression during the past 12 months (Kessler et al. 1998).

were no longer eligible for cash assistance. Payments related to transportation and work-related supplies were available for up to six months after clients left cash assistance.

Finally, Nebraska provided relatively supportive case management services, helping to ensure that clients received useful opportunities and services. TANF clients generally tended to be well connected with services and staff. Participation in work-related activities was relatively high. In a recent survey, more than three-fifths of TANF clients in rural Nebraska reported having participated in an employment activity during the past year (Meckstroth et al. 2002). In the same survey, nearly two-fifths of TANF clients in rural Nebraska reported talking with their TANF case manager at least every two weeks (Meckstroth et al. 2002). In addition, slightly more than half of rural clients who were identified through the survey as having a mental health or substance abuse problem reported that they had received services to help address the problem.

- ***Supportive services were available in most BNF service areas for both program and control group members. Some service gaps remained, particularly for substance abuse treatment and transportation.***

Many workforce development, education, health, family support, and other organizations offered assistance in communities throughout Nebraska. TANF case managers often played a role in referring their TANF clients to other service providers. This assistance was available to both program and control group members. In addition, BNF educators helped connect their clients to other providers and resources in the community.

Various entities offered employment and training services. Private TANF contractors delivered employment preparation services, such as job search assistance and job readiness training. In some places, they also provided case management services. Several BNF target areas also offered one-stop centers that included Workforce Investment Act, TANF, and other education and training services. Community colleges and adult education agencies also offered education and training. For people who were disabled, Vocational Rehabilitation provided services in many communities. Based on a recent survey, more than a third of TANF recipients in rural Nebraska reported talking regularly about employment-related issues with staff from an organization outside of TANF (Meckstroth et al. 2002).

Community action and other organizations helped meet the health and other specialized service needs of TANF clients and their families. For example, the statewide Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition trained many NHHSS staff on domestic violence issues and helped develop a domestic violence screening tool for use with TANF clients. In some NHHSS offices, a domestic violence counselor was available to provide support to clients affected by family violence. For mental health needs, counseling assistance through community mental health centers was generally available within two weeks, though waiting times could be substantially longer for psychiatric consultation. In addition, for general assistance, there were at least nine community action agencies throughout the state, with a combined service area that covered all counties in Nebraska. For example, the Family Support Program in North Platte offered individualized, home-based parenting and other

life skills training, though less intensively than BNF did. Parents of All Ages in Beatrice provided low-rent housing, life skills classes, and individualized counseling to participants.

Some service gaps remained, particularly related to substance abuse and transportation. In many areas, the availability of substance abuse treatment, or access to it, was limited. Child care (particularly during nonstandard work hours) and affordable housing were also inadequate in some places. Most noticeably, a lack of public transportation was a critical gap in the service infrastructure. In some areas, van service was available, though it was generally very limited for TANF clients. Nebraska's TANF clients generally relied on travel by personal vehicle—either their own or someone else's.

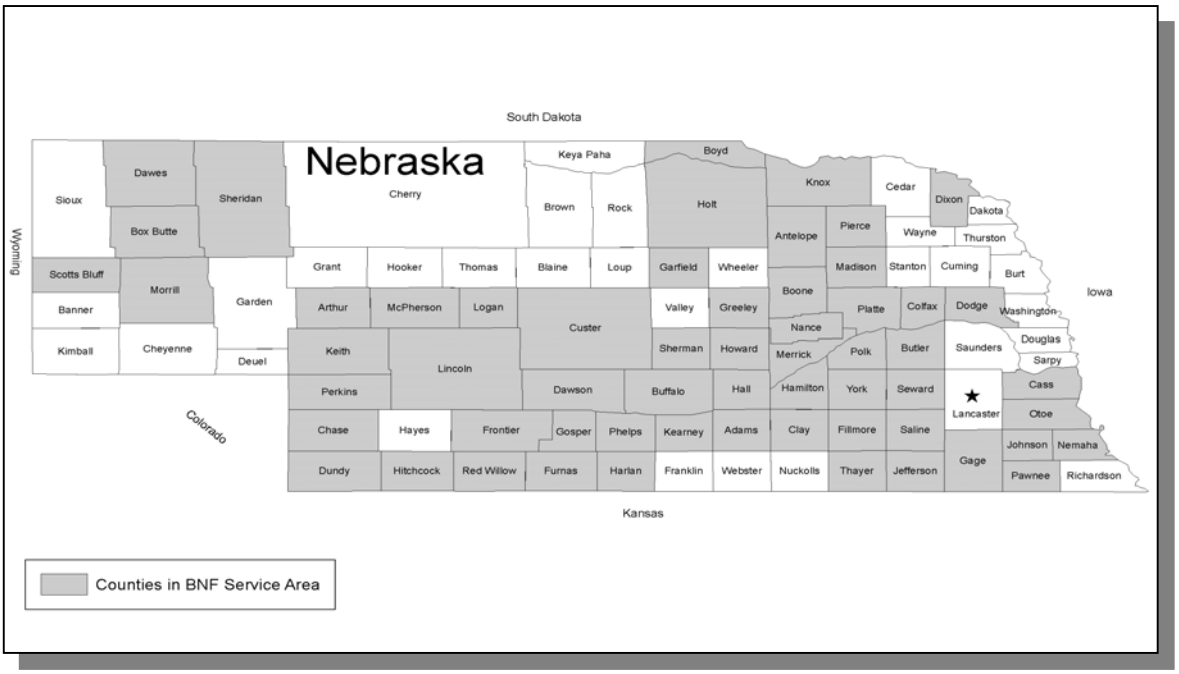
- ***The BNF counties varied in population density and geographic isolation. Poverty and unemployment were relatively modest.***

BNF's target counties varied in size, population density, and geographic isolation. Sample members were fairly evenly distributed across the areas served by BNF. Overall, BNF's service area encompassed remote, sparsely populated areas (such as Custer and Holt counties), small towns (such as Nebraska City in Otoe County and Beatrice in Gage County), and relatively large towns (such as Grand Island in Hall County) (Figure II.2). Most sample members lived in, or within an eight-mile radius of, a small town.

Much of the economy in rural Nebraska revolves around manufacturing, agriculture, and related services, with such industries as meat processing, machinery, and electric equipment. Available entry-level jobs in the BNF areas often included jobs at local nursing homes and assisted-care facilities, housekeeping and other service work, clerical and administrative support positions, and assembly-line work at local factories. Telemarketing and government jobs were less common but available in some areas. The larger, less rural areas generally offered more employment opportunities than the more remote rural areas. Despite available opportunities, however, entry-level workers tended to earn relatively low wages and were vulnerable to layoffs in business downturns.

During the time of the evaluation, Nebraska experienced relatively low unemployment and poverty compared to many states. In general, the BNF counties were no exception. The unemployment and poverty rates were relatively modest during the evaluation period. For example, the average unemployment rate in the BNF areas—3.6 percent—was less than the 2003 statewide unemployment rate of 4.0 percent and the 2003 national rate of 6.0 percent. Although the average poverty rate in the BNF counties—10.5 percent—was slightly higher than the 2003 statewide average of 10.0 percent, it was still below the national rate of 12.5 percent. Moreover, there was relatively little variation across BNF counties in unemployment and poverty, though the more remote and sparsely populated counties had the highest poverty and unemployment rates.

Figure II.2. Geographical Representation of the State of Nebraska and the Building Nebraska Families Service Area



Economic conditions in rural Nebraska declined somewhat during the evaluation period. There were small increases in unemployment in most BNF counties from 2002 to 2004. In addition, qualitative comments made during the site visits suggested that economic conditions in several areas declined from the first to second year of the evaluation, with layoffs due to manufacturing plant closures and business downturns.

- ***Most sample members felt connected to their community and reported that they could turn to family, friends, neighbors, and community organizations for assistance if they needed it.***

Data collected through the 18-month follow-up survey show that BNF sample members generally felt familiar with, and connected to, their local area. For example, control group members generally had lived in their community for a substantial length of time (about nine years, on average), and three-quarters felt "very connected" or "fairly connected" to their communities.[8] Only 1 in 10 said they felt "very disconnected" to the people and organizations in their communities.

[8] Because the survey data were collected 18 months after random assignment, the BNF program could have influenced the program group members' outcomes. For this reason, and to illustrate the program's context, we present only the control group data here. Overall, findings for the program and control groups on these measures were generally similar.

Sample members also felt they could access different types of support if needed. For example, nearly all control group members reported that they had family, friends, or neighbors they could turn to for help with such needs as transportation, shelter, meals, or child care. In addition, more than 8 in 10 (85 percent) said that they had received some type of help from family or friends during the 18-month follow-up period. Moreover, more than 9 in 10 said that a community organization that provides such services as a food pantry, crisis hotline, thrift store, or family assistance was available in their area, and more than 7 in 10 had accessed services from such a group at least once during the follow-up period.

KEY FINDINGS ON BNF IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing a welfare-to-work program in a geographically dispersed rural area creates challenges related to recruiting and supporting qualified staff, as well as to monitoring staff performance and the delivery of services to clients. In addition, implementing a program in an area that already offers numerous services and supports, as described above, requires an approach that successfully fills a gap in the available service structure. Successful implementation typically requires a combination of factors, such as clear leadership, adequate pilot-testing, consistent delivery of program services, collaboration with partner organizations, and the recruitment and development of skilled staff. In this section, we assess the operation of BNF, highlighting both successes and challenges in these areas.

- ***Guided by an effective leader, BNF was implemented in close conformance with its model. It filled a service gap by providing individualized, home-based education and support at a level of breadth and intensity not otherwise available.***

Based on observations during site visits and interviews with a broad range of BNF and other program administrators and staff, we concluded that BNF was well implemented throughout the evaluation period. The program coordinator provided clear vision and leadership during the development and ongoing implementation of the program. She relied on systematic methods to shape the curriculum, focus the educators' efforts, and work with NHHSS to recruit new clients into the program. By and large, the educators were consistent in delivering intended services directly to clients and in monitoring and supporting clients' progress toward achieving their individual goals. Data from the BNF Information System (BNFIS), which is described in the next chapter, suggest that the average client received a substantial amount of services and support from BNF over an extended period, in a manner closely conforming to the expectations of the program and NHHSS.

BNF's brand of life skills education and mentoring was a unique service in rural Nebraska. Although life skills education and job readiness training were available through Nebraska's TANF program, BNF's education was more comprehensive and intensive than that offered through TANF. BNF's use of home visits and a broad and detailed curriculum set it apart from the life skills training sessions offered through TANF. Moreover, the TANF-based training was not as extensive as BNF, nor was it designed to extend over a long period, as was the case with BNF. In addition, the BNF educators' low caseloads allowed them to provide both individualized and intensive training to clients. As a point of

comparison, while educators had caseloads of between 12 and 18 TANF clients, specialized TANF case managers typically had caseloads of between 70 and 100 TANF clients.

- ***The BNF model and its implementation benefited from a strong partnership between UNCE and NHHSS, as well as a lengthy pilot-testing phase.***

The partnership between administrators and staff from UNCE and NHHSS appeared to be strong and well grounded in experience. At the state level, there was regular communication between the two organizations, and efforts during the evaluation period appeared to be well coordinated. The organizations' history of collaborating in the operation of FSNEP (described earlier) provided a solid foundation for implementing BNF, both at the state level and within local communities.

Working together to implement BNF was a natural fit for the two partner organizations, as it represented the blending of two distinct, but complementary, organizational missions. While NHHSS is committed to helping TANF recipients leave cash assistance and achieve self-sufficiency, UNCE is dedicated to providing educational services to improve family and community life. UNCE has a strong reputation in Nebraskan communities and a wide range of educational resources. For these reasons, NHHSS saw UNCE as an important ally in helping the most disadvantaged TANF recipients make the transition off welfare and into work and self-sufficiency.

BNF was first implemented three years before the evaluation. Although BNF continued to develop its curriculum and refine its service delivery methods after the evaluation began, because of its three-year pilot period, the evaluation provides a good test of BNF as a fairly mature program. BNF was initially implemented during summer 1999 in two of the eleven BNF target areas. A year later, educators were hired in three additional sites. These first five BNF sites were also FSNEP sites, so their involvement in BNF was viewed as a natural progression from that experience. By the start of the evaluation in March 2002, educators were enrolling clients and delivering services in seven sites, including the original five plus two additional areas. Then, within the evaluation's first three months, BNF hired and trained educators in three new sites, and a year into the evaluation added a fourth (and final) new site.

Several key lessons learned during BNF's pilot-testing and early implementation phase served its administrators and staff well once the program was fully implemented across all 11 sites. First, they became aware of the challenges and time involved in recruiting clients for the program. Client recruitment into BNF continued to pose challenges during the early phases of the demonstration, as described below. Second, the program director recognized the inherent challenges in managing staff located in widely dispersed and remote areas. Therefore, she spent considerable effort in developing a solid approach to training, guiding, and overseeing the educators in their work. Third, educators practiced delivering services to very disadvantaged TANF recipients. Most of the educators' previous experiences did not include working with this type of client, so they benefited from training and guidance throughout the demonstration on challenges faced by and strategies for serving hard-to-employ TANF recipients, as described below.

- ***Recruiting clients to BNF was challenging. Still, educators and TANF case managers collaborated successfully in marketing the program, overcoming clients' concerns about home visitation, and enrolling clients in BNF.***

Programs in rural areas face significant challenges in recruiting clients from a geographically dispersed population of potentially eligible people. Without active efforts in rural areas to identify eligible clients, inform them about the program, and encourage them to participate, it can be difficult to enroll enough clients to make a program fully operational (Burwick et al. 2004). Evaluation requirements added to the difficulty of filling BNF slots: two-fifths of eligible clients referred were randomly assigned to the control group, which could not participate in BNF.

The many obstacles the BNF target population faced, together with the personal nature of the home-visiting lessons, made recruitment of new clients inherently challenging. The people BNF recruited for the program (as described earlier) often had been difficult to engage in other TANF activities, and this difficulty persisted in efforts to recruit them for BNF. Although some clients (particularly those who had little past success with TANF activities) did face the threat of a sanction if they did not agree to try BNF, the program did not offer tangible incentives to entice clients to participate. By and large, to recruit clients, TANF case managers had to actively market the program as a positive opportunity and, in some cases, be very persuasive in encouraging clients to participate. The personal nature of BNF and its focus on home visits made some clients reluctant to participate. TANF staff reported that this reluctance was magnified for some clients who worried that a home visit might expose child neglect and trigger a referral to Child Protective Services.

Several strategies helped in recruiting eligible clients for BNF. First, educators actively marketed the program to case managers and clients. Referrals were facilitated when NHHSS staff viewed BNF as a positive way to help very disadvantaged clients overcome challenges and progress toward self-sufficiency. Early in the evaluation, to boost BNF referrals, educators periodically conducted short, one-time life skills sessions that were open to all TANF clients.

Second, when an educator established a strong, collaborative relationship with the local TANF case managers, referral of clients was regular and required little effort. In general, this was more difficult for the educators whose NHHSS offices were dispersed across a larger area. Recruitment challenges eased as the level of familiarity and trust between educators and case managers grew and as educators developed a successful track record in providing BNF services to clients, communicating regularly with case managers, and doing their job without infringing on the case managers' role in monitoring clients' progress and providing other types of services (such as employment-related support and child care and transportation benefits).

Third, linking UNCE compensation to BNF enrollment appeared to be an effective incentive for BNF staff to market the program aggressively and pursue referrals actively. BNF had a strong financial incentive to ensure that educators had full caseloads. NHHSS compensated UNCE on a case rate basis, paying a fixed amount of $500 per BNF client

served each month. This payment structure, with no additional payments or incentives, encouraged staff to respond quickly to declines in enrollment through active communication with NHHSS administrators and caseworkers.

- ***The strong qualifications of the BNF educators, coupled with active training and guidance, promoted a high level of staff professionalism. This was essential because of BNF's large, dispersed service area.***

Using master's-level professionals to deliver educational lessons and other services was advantageous to BNF. NHHSS suggested using bachelor's-level professionals as a way to reduce BNF costs, but UNCE felt that master's-level professionals were best qualified for the position, given the broad range of skills it required. To provide individualized education and support to clients, and to do so across a dispersed service area, required that educators be creative, resourceful, and self-directed, as well as highly reliable and organized.

The BNF educators functioned as independent professionals, and they exercised leadership, substantial discretion, and independent judgment in their daily work. Based in separate locations across the state, the educators had to independently manage their schedules, prioritize tasks, conduct client meetings, and decide when to travel to remote parts of their service area. They also needed to demonstrate strong communication skills and creativity in developing and conducting educational sessions with clients, motivating clients to do their best, and modeling for clients how to apply life skills lessons to their lives. Educators also acted as representatives for the BNF program and UNCE in their local communities. They had to act resourcefully and assertively in developing local connections and helping link clients to other services and opportunities in the community. In addition, as described below, they played a role in helping to refine the curriculum over the course of the demonstration. To perform these various tasks effectively with a high level of independence, educators had to have a high degree of maturity and professionalism, as well as a broad range of personal, organizational, and leadership skills.

The educators benefited from the active leadership of the program coordinator, who drew on the resources available through UNCE, to train educators for BNF and guide and assist them. At the outset, the coordinator provided an individualized, in-person training to each new educator over a three- to four-day period. Various topics were covered, including the BNF curriculum, confidentiality issues, and the program's performance-monitoring tools, home-visiting techniques, and the community "asset-mapping" process. In addition, educators attended a two- to three-day training through NHHSS that covered TANF regulations and procedures, expectations for client recruitment into BNF, TANF service delivery methods, and TANF case managers' roles and responsibilities. The topics covered during these initial trainings were reinforced throughout the demonstration, as highlighted below. Regular staff meetings, conducted quarterly with the full group of educators and annually with each individual educator, provided a natural forum for providing ongoing training and assistance to educators. In addition, informal communication and feedback occurred more frequently between the educators and the program coordinator, usually weekly, by telephone, email, or through feedback on case notes.

- ***Over time, BNF's service delivery methods grew stronger through a commitment to staff development, along with modest staff turnover and attention to cross-organization coordination.***

Based on two rounds of site visit interviews with a broad range of staff, we assessed that BNF educators developed in their roles over time, becoming more effective teachers, mentors, and advocates for their clients over the course of the demonstration. Educators fine-tuned their skills through ongoing training, as well as through mentoring relationships between more and less experienced educators. First, as part of quarterly educator meetings, guest experts provided specialized training on specific topics. These trainings, intended to prepare educators to work more effectively with the disadvantaged TANF clients targeted by the program, focused on such topics as wraparound service delivery, substance abuse, domestic abuse, conflict management resolution, legal aid, consumer credit counseling, and child abuse and neglect. Educators also attended a one-day "poverty training" to sensitize them to issues facing low-income families and prepare them to work more effectively with very disadvantaged families. To this same end, they participated in a UNCE-sponsored "coaching workshop" that taught techniques for developing rapport and building trust with clients, and for helping clients improve problem-solving skills and self-reliance. As UNCE professionals, educators were given their own budgets for professional development, allowing them the flexibility to seek out and participate in trainings or other activities that had particular value for their BNF work.

Second, to promote mentoring and information sharing across educators, more experienced educators were matched as mentors with newer educators. At the outset, the less experienced educators spent one to two days with their mentor to review and discuss the BNF curriculum, educational techniques, and service delivery challenges and lessons. The two colleagues were encouraged to interact regularly, with the more experienced educator providing guidance and assistance to her less experienced colleague. In addition to paired mentoring, the BNF educators used an online "listserv" as a way to discuss topics of mutual interest and concern with other educators and the program coordinator. Program staff reported that the mentoring relationships, along with the collaborative information sharing, promoted the development of a strong team of BNF professionals who were focused on a common mission and goals.

The program experienced relatively modest staff turnover during the demonstration. There was no turnover among the educators during the first year. During the second year, three educators did leave the program, but replacements were hired fairly quickly through UNCE. In general, the systematic process BNF used to train and assist educators, both new and old, allowed for the smooth integration of the new staff into the program.

BNF administrators and educators alike noted that, with ongoing training and limited staff turnover, educators gradually became more efficient and focused in their work with clients. Moreover, NHHSS and BNF staff agreed that communication and collaboration between educators and TANF case managers improved over the course of the demonstration. That is, as staff developed rapport and mutual trust and respect, it was easier

for educators and case managers to work together to ensure that clients' needs were met, as well as to recruit new clients into BNF.

- ***BNF's final curriculum was not in place at the start of the demonstration. Rather, program staff further developed and refined it over the course of the demonstration.***

During the demonstration, BNF made improvements and refinements to its curriculum. At the outset, the core curriculum was a compilation of existing lessons and teaching materials on various topics. While some of the curriculum materials were created explicitly for BNF, others had been compiled and adapted from other sources, most notably from other states' university extension services. Educators adapted and refined the materials, as appropriate, to fit the needs of BNF's target population. For example, in some cases, the original curricula had been used in group settings. These materials were revised for use in an individualized setting. In addition, educators also revised the curriculum to better fit the specific needs and challenges of BNF's disadvantaged TANF population (see below), because many of the initial materials had originally been developed for use among middle-income people. By the start of the evaluation's second year, most of the core materials in the final curriculum were in place.

Overall, the process of refining the BNF curriculum was a collaborative one that drew on the expertise and experiences of the program coordinator and each of the educators. Each of these staff members was given responsibility for developing, assembling, and adapting relevant research-based materials for one or more of the 15 BNF curriculum components. As professional UNCE educators, many of the BNF educators had past experience writing curricula for other programs, and it was expected that they would play a role in the refinement of the BNF curriculum. In further developing the curriculum, staff found it valuable to tap into the educational resources available through the Cooperative Extension System, a nationwide network of university-based extension education providers. These providers offer practical, research-based information to individuals, families, and groups in rural areas across the country.

Improving the BNF curriculum while the program was in operation allowed the educators to make the material responsive to clients' needs and situations. As educators worked with clients in their homes, they became more aware of the basic challenges that disadvantaged TANF clients face, and they adapted the curriculum accordingly. Tailoring the curriculum to this population often involved articulating strategies and tools to help educators connect with clients and to provide basic information and guidance to help clients organize their lives (which were typically quite disordered). For instance, educators enhanced curriculum components on conflict resolution, goal-setting and problem-solving techniques, and money management and budgeting. To help ensure that the curriculum would resonate with Nebraska's TANF population, BNF at times asked NHHSS' TANF staff to review and comment on parts of the curriculum.

By the end of the demonstration period, a professional curriculum writer helped the program package the final curriculum. After the curriculum for each of the components was

well developed, the curriculum writer (a part-time consultant hired by the program) revised, synthesized, and finalized the curriculum materials into a polished, stand-alone document (Fox et al. 2007). This consultant, who held a doctorate in adult education and was a former extension educator and home visitor herself, was well suited to the task of completing the BNF curriculum.

- ***The active use of performance measurement tools helped program leaders monitor client progress through the program and oversee staff activities.***

BNF staff created and used assessment tools to track improvements in clients' ability to manage their lives. These instruments were intended to measure incremental changes in soft skills that normally are difficult to discern. First, an "entry-exit checklist" and a "success markers" tool itemized the attitudes and skills that BNF sought to encourage among participants. Both of these tools measured participants' progress toward developing the BNF-related attitudes and skills, and did so over the course of clients' participation in the program and also from month to month. In addition to assessing changes in participants' skill levels, these tools helped the program coordinator and the educators stay focused on an explicit set of program goals. (See text box for a description of the tools and Appendix B for a copy.)

Second, educators recorded detailed information in the BNFIS on the education and services provided to clients. The customized BNFIS was developed to serve both program and evaluation purposes. Educators regularly entered information on the frequency, intensity, and content of their teaching sessions, on other services provided to clients, and on contacts made with other service providers. Educators also recorded case notes in the BNFIS to further describe the challenges clients faced and educators' efforts to help address them. The program coordinator used the BNFIS to stay informed about clients' experiences and the educators' role in working with them. In turn, she provided regular feedback and guidance to educators to help them improve their work with clients.

Third, distinct from the performance measurement tools, educators periodically wrote "success stories" in collaboration with clients to describe clients' program experiences and achievements. These qualitative vignettes of clients' progress through the program provided a powerful mechanism for conveying the spirit of the BNF experience.

COSTS OF BNF

We estimated costs for BNF to provide context for the results described in this report and inform policymakers and practitioners who might consider funding or undertaking similar programs. The estimate incorporates information from several sources. Program financial documents and explanations from agency administrators offered details on line item expenditures, staff salaries, and indirect costs. In addition, BNF and NHHSS staff members provided estimates of the working hours they devoted to BNF, which we used for our approximation of program component costs and our valuation of uncompensated labor. Finally, participation data gathered through the BNFIS facilitated our estimate of per-participant costs.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT TOOLS IN BNF: ENTRY-EXIT CHECKLISTS AND SUCCESS MARKERS

BNF used two customized tools—entry-exit checklists and success markers—to monitor program operations and track changes in clients' ability to manage their lives. Entry-exit checklists documented pre-post changes in clients' behaviors and attitudes, and success markers provided a monthly indicator of clients' progress toward meeting predetermined goals.

The entry-exit checklist helped educators understand participants' strengths and weaknesses and provided a point of comparison for assessing changes in clients' lives. The checklist asked participants for responses to 20 statements that reflect life skills and personal behaviors and attitudes. Using a five-point scale, participants rated how often they did or felt what the statements indicated—for example, "I feel positive about my life," "I keep a record of how I spend my money," or "I miss work or appointments." Participants completed the same checklist when they exited the program. Although administrators recognized the limitations of self-reported information, the checklist was useful for characterizing participants' progress during their time in the program.

Success markers conveyed program expectations and tracked participants' monthly progress toward meeting goals. The markers were divided into three tiers, corresponding to the perceived likelihood and difficulty of achieving them: (1) basic tasks BNF "expects to see," such as attending appointments and being prepared for lessons; (2) higher-level activities BNF would "like to see," such as setting short-term goals, practicing new skills, overcoming obstacles, and completing assignments; and (3) accomplishments BNF would "love to see," such as setting and achieving longer-term goals, maintaining employment, and serving as a volunteer or mentor for others.

Each month, educators used a four-point scale to indicate how frequently participants showed each success marker behavior. Some bias was inevitable, because educators not only provided instruction and support to clients, but also rated their improvement. However, success markers allowed administrators and educators to examine clients' progress against program goals and compare client groups, such as those who graduated from the program to those who dropped out.

- ***The estimated cost to operate BNF for one year was $994,554.***

We estimated that BNF cost $994,554 to operate during a typical 12-month period. (All figures are presented in 2004 dollars.) In analyzing program costs, we focused on a period of relatively stable services, staffing, and client flows (July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003). By the beginning of the cost period, the program had been operating for about three years and the demonstration had been under way for several months. The program was also fully staffed during this period (although it expanded from 10 to 11 educators afterward).

Our estimate incorporates the market value of all resources used to operate the program and deliver services, including labor, other direct costs, and administrative and indirect costs associated with BNF's operation.[9] We include both UNCE and NHHSS expenditures and assign a value to in-kind contributions (in particular, overtime labor), to provide a comprehensive estimate of all resources required to operate BNF, including those not incurred directly by the program.

Labor expenses represented the largest share of program costs. About 70 percent of the total estimated cost went toward salaries and fringe benefits for UNCE and NHHSS staff members (Table II.2). Salaries and benefits for BNF educators alone accounted for nearly half of all program costs. This result is consistent with the BNF program model, which emphasized highly qualified staff and low caseloads. Many educators also contributed uncompensated overtime to the program; this "donated" labor made up more than five percent of all labor and benefits costs. Other direct costs, including travel and office supplies for BNF staff members, made up a small proportion of total costs (5.5 percent).

General administrative and other indirect costs made up the remaining portion of program expenses—about one-quarter of the annual cost of operating BNF. These costs included such overhead expenses as rent and building maintenance, utilities, and administration. As large, statewide organizations, UNCE and NHHSS maintained indirect cost rates that were higher than those typical of smaller agencies.[10] However, their size and resources allowed BNF to be implemented across a large geographic area. Both organizations maintained a network of offices throughout Nebraska, which helped facilitate referrals and service provision in the state's rural areas. In addition, BNF benefited from UNCE's administrative infrastructure in such tasks as recruiting educators and administering employee benefits.

[9] We excluded costs explicitly related to participating in the evaluation. We estimate that any costs that could not be fully excluded were very small (likely less than one percent).

[10] UNCE and NHHSS reported indirect cost rates of 36 and 38 percent of labor costs, respectively.

Table II.2. Total Estimated Costs for a One-Year Period of BNF Program Operation (in 2004 Dollars)[a]

Type of Cost	University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension (UNCE)	Nebraska Health and Human Services System (NHHSS)	Total
Labor Costs[b]			
Managers	114,668	11,247	125,915
Educators	504,420	—	504,420
Supervisors/caseworkers	—	49,149	49,149
Support staff	19,395	—	19,395
Subtotal—Labor Costs	**638,483**	**60,396**	**698,879**
(Percentage of total)	(70)	(72)	(70)
Other Costs			
Travel	42,978	—	42,978
Office supplies	11,316	—	11,316
Administrative and other indirect costs	218,431	22,950	241,381
Subtotal—Other Costs	**272,725**	**22,950**	**295,675**
(Percentage of total)	(30)	(28)	(30)
Total Costs for One-Year Period	**911,208**	**83,346**	**994,554**
(UNCE and NHHSS percentage of total)	(92)	(8)	

[a]We estimated costs for the period July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2003.

[b]Labor costs include fringe benefits. Manager costs include senior-level administrators within UNCE, the BNF program coordinator, and NHHSS state and regional administrators. Supervisor/caseworker costs include NHHSS local office staff.

The preponderance of program costs (more than 90 percent) were related to UNCE activities. This finding is expected, as UNCE had primary responsibility for operating the program and compensating staff. NHHSS expenses were about eight percent of total program costs. Agency staff played an important supportive role in program operation by coordinating with program leaders, identifying and referring clients to BNF, and communicating regularly with BNF educators. NHHSS expenses for these activities included salaries and benefits for staff at different levels in the agency—program specialists, area administrators, local office supervisors, and caseworkers—as well as indirect costs.

- ***Among program components, life skills training accounted for the largest proportion of program costs.***

We allocated program costs to several program components, to understand the resources devoted to key activities and facilitate comparisons across programs. We defined four program components:

1. ***Outreach and Recruitment.*** This category included activities aimed at publicizing program services and generating referrals for enrollment, including time BNF staff spent describing BNF services to potential participants and coordinating with NHHSS staff to enroll clients.

2. ***Case Management.*** Case management activities included general assistance that BNF staff provided to participants, including orienting participants to the program, conducting assessments, making and following up on referrals, helping coordinate services, mediating with other agencies on clients' behalf, and monitoring client progress (including recording and reviewing case notes in the BNFIS).

3. ***Life Skills/Job Readiness Training.*** This component comprised education sessions with clients, including time spent establishing goals and developing an educational plan, delivering lessons based on the BNF curriculum, and offering practical guidance to help clients improve life skills.

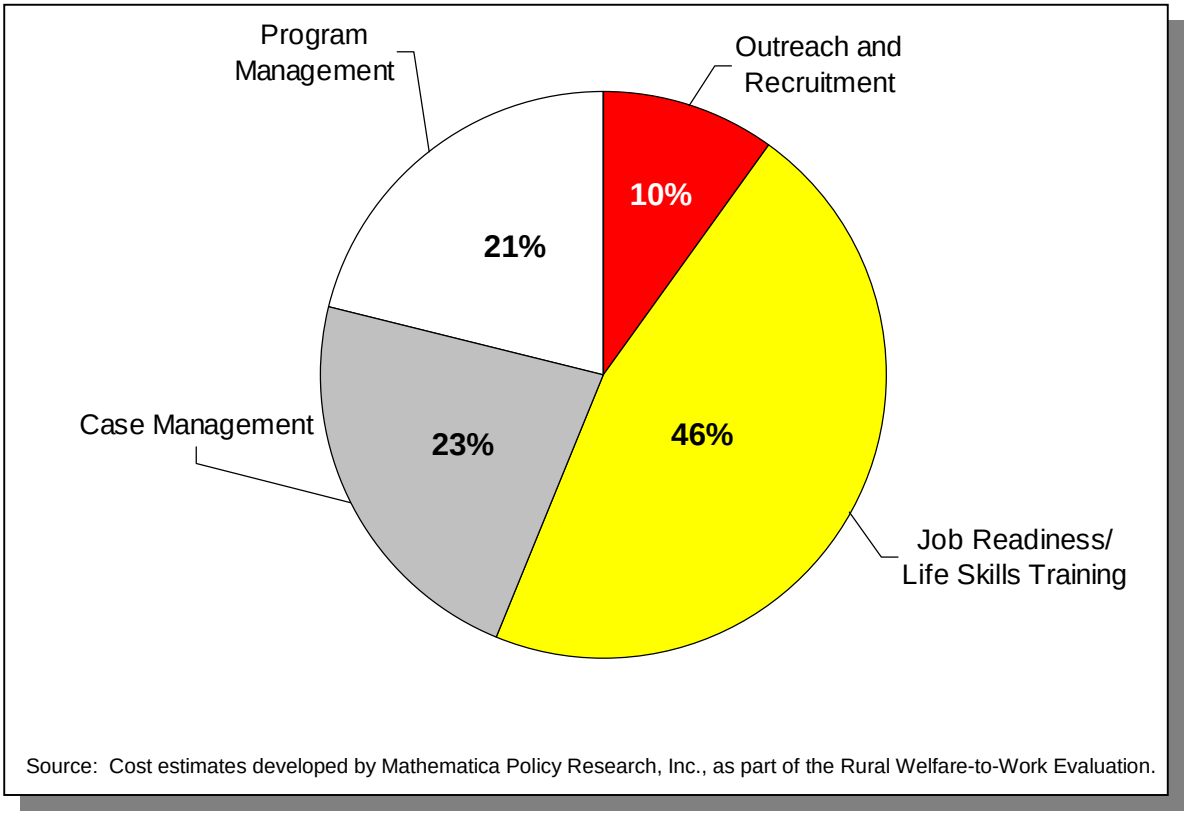
4. ***Program Management.*** Management activities included program oversight and internal evaluation, staff training, general record keeping, and other administrative duties. A portion of program management time was also devoted to ongoing curriculum development.

To allocate costs across components, we relied primarily on information regarding how staff members spent their time in delivering program services. On site visits, we asked administrators and staff of both UNCE and NHHSS to reflect on the fraction of time they devoted to each program activity in a typical week or month. We used these data to determine the fraction of total staff time per component, then applied these fractions to total labor costs to allocate costs across components.[11] Because the nonlabor costs we identified were not directly associated with particular components, we allocated these costs to components in the same proportions used for labor costs.

The largest share of program costs, 46 percent, was devoted to job readiness and life skills training (Figure II.3). As the core of the BNF program model, these educational activities would be expected to consume a large share of program resources. When life skills training is considered in combination with case management (23 percent of costs), it appears that about seven-tenths of program costs were related to direct services for enrolled clients. About 21 percent of program costs went toward program management and 10 percent toward outreach and recruitment.

[11] In allocating time to program components, we made two adjustments. First, hours reported separately as travel time were split between case management and life skills training. Second, some hours reported as program management were later reallocated to case management, to accurately characterize time spent using the BNFIS to monitor client progress, a case management activity.

Figure II.3. Allocation of Costs Across BNF Program Components



Source: Cost estimates developed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

- ***The average cost of serving a BNF participant was $7,383.***

It cost $7,383 to serve each BNF participant over an average enrollment period of nearly nine months (Table II.3). We developed a per-participant cost estimate using several steps, relying on our overall cost estimate and BNFIS enrollment and service use data. First, we determined the number of program participants enrolled during the cost period (216). A participant was defined as a client who had received, or engaged in, at least one of four activities: (1) a teaching contact, (2) a nonteaching contact, (3) a success marker rating, or (4) completion of an entry-exit checklist. Second, we calculated the number of months during the cost period that each participant was enrolled in the program. We summed these months to ascertain the total number of "person months" of participation (1,185). Third, we calculated the average cost per participant month ($839) by dividing the total program cost estimate by the total person months of participation. Fourth, we determined the average overall length of participation for cost period enrollees (8.8 months). The participation period was defined as the time between the date of random assignment and the date of the last program service or contact the client received. Our final step in developing the per-participant estimate was to multiply the average cost per month by the average length of participation.

Table II.3. Average Total Cost per BNF Participant

Total Program Cost (One Year)	Total Participants During Cost Period	Total Person-Months of Participation During Cost Period	Average Overall Duration of Participation (Months)	Average Cost per-Participant Month[a]	Average Total Cost per Participant[b]
$994,554	**216**	**1,185**	**8.8**	**$839**	**$7,383**

[a]Average cost per-participant month = (total program cost / total person-months of participation).

[b]Average total cost per-participant = (average cost per-participant month x average overall duration of participation).

- ***The relatively high average cost of serving a BNF participant appears to reflect the intensity of program services, the qualifications of program staff, and the involvement of a large institution as program operator.***

Compared to other WtW initiatives that have been rigorously evaluated, BNF was expensive on a per-participant basis. Although substantial differences in program models exist between BNF and other WtW programs, a cost comparison is still informative, as some programs previously studied share characteristics with BNF, such as targeting hard-to-employ populations or operating in rural areas. Compared to Future Steps, the other program in the Rural WtW Evaluation, BNF was much more costly: $7,383 per participant, compared to $3,046 (in 2004 dollars) for Future Steps (Meckstroth et al. 2006). The difference in costs between the two programs is due in large part to lower labor costs for Future Steps and lower indirect costs incurred by the community college that operated Future Steps.

BNF's per-participant costs also exceeded those of all 16 programs studied under the U.S. Department of Labor's Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Grants. Among the WtW grant programs, the highest per-participant cost—$7,285—was observed in an urban program offering transitional employment assistance to long-term, hard-to-employ welfare recipients (Perez-Johnson et al. 2002).[12] Like BNF's individualized life skills education, the transitional employment assistance (in the form of paid work experience) was very costly to implement. The average per-participant cost for WtW grant programs operating in rural areas—$4,566—was substantially lower than BNF's per-participant cost. Unlike BNF, however, the WtW grant programs in rural areas were not operating across an entire state.

The BNF program model prioritized intensive services and highly credentialed staff, and these characteristics appeared to contribute to the program's comparatively high costs. BNF's higher labor costs were the result of two factors: (1) a larger number of staff

[12] The estimates from the WtW Evaluation's cost study were converted from 2000 dollars into 2004 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

members, and (2) higher staff compensation. BNF's staff size facilitated very low caseloads for individual educators, helping produce a more intensive intervention for participants. The larger number of staff members also allowed BNF to address the logistics of covering an expansive service area. Higher compensation for staff helped BNF fulfill its goal of employing only master's-level professionals to deliver services. The experience and credentials of BNF educators increased the likelihood that BNF services would be delivered as intended. In addition, a relatively generous compensation package probably contributed to a low level of staff turnover during the demonstration.

Higher indirect costs for BNF were a reflection of the type of agency that operated the program. The comparison with Future Steps is informative in this regard. As a statewide educational system, UNCE incurred much greater indirect costs than did Shawnee Community College, the local institution that operated Future Steps. UNCE's indirect expenses supported infrastructure that benefited BNF, such as university offices throughout the state and a large faculty and administration that could provide additional support and management oversight for BNF. University resources also were valuable in the development and improvement of the BNF curriculum.

CHAPTER III

CLIENT EXPERIENCES IN BUILDING NEBRASKA FAMILIES

Program group members received a great deal of education and assistance through the Building Nebraska Families (BNF) program. Services were provided both before and after clients became employed, and more services were provided to clients who faced a greater number of obstacles. Descriptive BNF program data, along with focus group comments, help us understand how the evaluation's program group experienced BNF and its services.

BNF SERVICE USE AND PARTICIPATION

An analysis of quantitative data from the BNF Information System (BNFIS) offers insights on the intensity of clients' participation, the type of services and level of mentoring and support they received, and differences in service use among important subgroups.

- ***The average client met frequently with her BNF educator for more than eight months, participating in two or more teaching sessions each month.***

Most clients were well connected with their educator and the services offered through BNF. The average client had more than 20 substantive contacts with her educator. Most of these contacts were interactive educational lessons ("teaching contacts"), and a few involved assistance with service needs or referrals ("service coordination contacts") (Table III.1). Educators provided mentoring and encouragement to clients as part of both types of contacts. Ninety-five percent of program group members had at least one program contact, and three-fifths had more than 10. More than 9 in 10 program group members had at least one teaching contact, and two-thirds had at least one service coordination contact (Table III.1).

Table III.1. Duration and Intensity of BNF Service Use and Participation

	Percentage
Length of Participation (Average, in Months)	8.3
Program Contacts (All Types)	
At least 1 contact (percentage) [a]	95
More than 10 contacts (percentage)	61
Less than 5 contacts (percentage)	23
Average number of contacts	22
Median number of contacts	15
Program Contacts (Specific Types)	
Teaching Contacts	
At least 1 teaching contact (percentage)	94
More than 10 teaching contact (percentage)	57
Average number of teaching contacts	19
Median number of teaching contacts	12
Service Coordination Contacts	
At least 1 service contact (percentage)	67
More than 5 service contacts (percentage)	21
Average number of service contacts	3
Median number of service contacts	1
Contact Time (Among Clients with at Least One Contact)	
Total contact time (average, in hours)	25
Time per teaching lesson (average, in minutes)	60
Time per home visit (average, in minutes)	86
Time per service contact (average, in minutes)	20
Sample Size	**358**

Source: BNFIS, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

[a] An additional two percent of program group members completed a BNF program form (a BNF entry-exit checklist or success marker form) or had one completed on their behalf. These clients, however, did not otherwise receive a program service (a teaching or service coordination contact).

The average client participated in BNF for more than eight months, with an average of two or three contacts each month with her educator (Table III.1).[1] The duration of participation in BNF among clients varied. This was expected, because educators aimed to address clients' individualized needs and situations. While 23 percent of program group members participated for 12 months or longer, 20 percent participated for less than 3 months (not shown).

[1] We estimated clients' length of participation in the program as the duration of time between the date of random assignment and the date on which they received their last program service. In almost all cases, clients' date of enrollment was the same as, or within a few days of, their date of random assignment.

Total contact time between clients and educators was substantial. Among clients who had at least one teaching or service coordination contact, participation time totaled 25 hours, on average (Table III.1). About 70 percent of this time involved teaching lessons, more than 20 percent involved time clients spent on BNF assignments, and less than 10 percent involved service coordination contacts (not shown).[2] The average amount of client contact time per month was three hours. The average teaching lesson lasted 60 minutes, and the average service coordination contact required 20 minutes of educators' and/or clients' time. The home visits typically lasted close to one and a half hours.

BNF program contacts were individualized and personal. More than three-quarters of the teaching contacts were conducted through in-person meetings. Of these, nearly three-fifths were conducted in clients' homes, and the rest in other locations (most commonly, an educator's office or a neutral location in the community).

While most clients received a substantial level of service, some were harder to engage and received relatively few services. Twenty-three percent received fewer than five contacts. It was difficult to engage most of this group of clients in program services. Educators estimated that they faced difficulties working with, or maintaining ongoing participation with, at least one-quarter of the clients referred to the program. Indeed, educators placed 15 percent of clients in noncooperation status. As recorded in the BNFIS, these clients generally had little contact with educators, usually despite repeated attempts by educators to call clients, or even visit them. After repeated nonparticipation, educators typically dropped nonactive clients from their caseload, usually within three months. Many of these clients were also sanctioned by their TANF case manager (for nonparticipation in BNF and/or other TANF activities). Overall, based on data from the BNFIS, nine percent of BNF clients had their TANF grant sanctioned by NHHSS while they were enrolled in BNF. Reasons for client nonparticipation in BNF varied, but they included client ambivalence toward the program or loss of interest in it, reluctance to participate because of family concerns, a move out of the area, or the choice to waive their TANF cash grant.

- ***As expected, only a minority of clients "graduated" from BNF. The program's emphasis on graduation declined over time, as educators recognized the benefits of continuing BNF services after clients began working and left TANF.***

One in five BNF clients were considered program completers, or "graduates." Just as clients' involvement in BNF was individualized, so was their graduation from it. In practice, educators and clients together determined that the client had completed BNF, or "graduated" from it, when clients achieved preset goals, demonstrated improvement as estimated by performance measurement tools, achieved stability in their lives, required little ongoing assistance, and demonstrated substantial progress toward self-sufficiency. At a minimum, program completion typically implied that clients actively participated in BNF, got and maintained employment, and left TANF. Clients who graduated from BNF were

[2] Feedback from program staff suggests that some educators underreported the extent to which they provided service coordination support to their clients.

generally similar to the full sample of BNF program group members. For example, nearly mirroring the full sample, about two-fifths of graduates met the criteria for the more disadvantaged subgroup of clients.

Program graduates received more services than nongraduates. The average graduate participated in the program for 12 months, compared to 7 months for the average nongraduate. During their time in the program, graduates received 36 BNF contacts (32 teaching and 4 service coordination), compared to 19 contacts for the nongraduates (16 teaching and 3 service coordination) (not shown).

Overall, the relatively low rate of BNF graduation was consistent with the program's expectations. Because the standards for completion were high and most clients could benefit from receiving BNF services after they got a job and/or left TANF, BNF anticipated that only a minority of participants would officially graduate. Program leaders felt this outcome was reasonable for a program targeting a disadvantaged population and that clients would benefit even if they did not graduate. Because of the largely subjective criteria for graduation and the policy that BNF services would be discontinued after graduation, educators often chose to keep clients in the program rather than risk graduating them early. Indeed, BNF's emphasis on program graduation decreased over time, as staff realized that it was beneficial for most clients to continue to receive BNF services for the maximum time period allowed under TANF (that is, for six months after clients exited TANF).

- ***BNF's education focused most on developing parenting skills; building goal-setting, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities; and improving personal-functioning and relationship skills.***

The individualized BNF education focused on a broad range of topics (Table III.2). The teaching contacts that clients received covered nearly 20 topic areas, as recorded in the program's BNFIS. These topics generally corresponded to those articulated by the BNF curriculum. The most common topic area related to parenting skills and strategies. Two-thirds of clients received at least one lesson on parenting, and 29 percent received five or more lessons on parenting. Practical life skills were also important; for example, lessons that coached clients on how to manage their finances and households also played an important role in BNF, affecting 39 and 16 percent of program group members, respectively.

Lessons that emphasized setting attainable short- and long-term goals and developing reasonable strategies for achieving them were also common. Nearly three-quarters of clients received at least one lesson on topics related to setting and achieving goals, such as goal setting, decision making, and problem solving (Table III.2). In addition, one-third of clients received five or more lessons on such topics.

Improving clients' personal functioning, supporting their self-concept, and reinforcing principles of good character and ethics were also important aspects of the BNF program. Topics supporting these goals, as characterized in the BNFIS, encompassed personal life skills, building self-esteem, coping skills, and stress and time management. Sixty-seven percent received at least one lesson on any of these topics, and 27 percent received five or more such lessons.

Table III.2. Lesson Topics Taught to BNF Clients

Topic	Program Group Members with at Least One Lesson (Percent)
Personal Improvement	
Goal setting/problem solving	72
Character development/personal functioning	67
Relationship-building skills	53
Family Life	
Parenting	66
Child development	21
Practical Life Skills	
Money management	39
Household management	16
Nutrition	14
Sample Size	**337**

Source: BNFIS, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

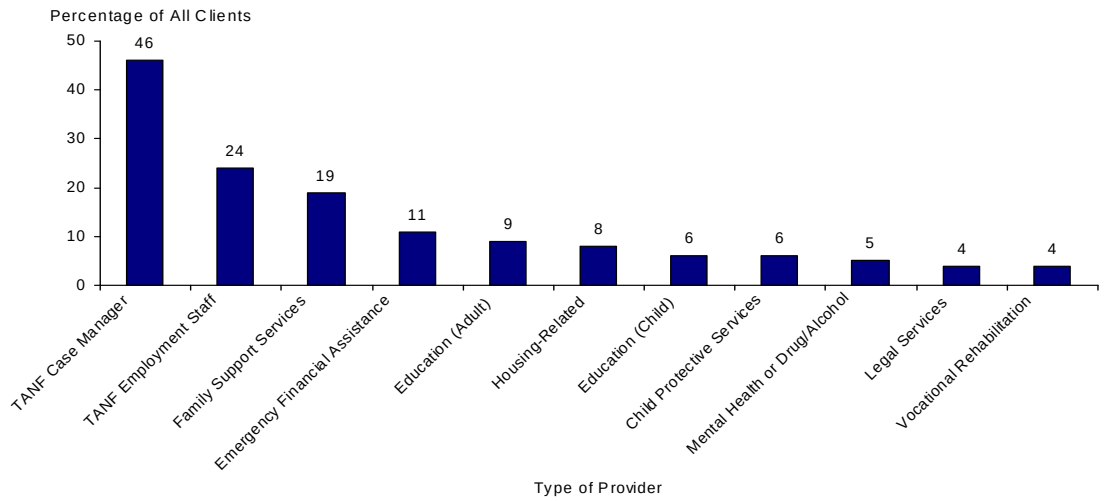
Note: These topic areas are generally organized in the same way as the BNF curriculum.

Helping clients develop positive and productive relationships with spouses, partners, family members, and others was also an important aspect of the educational lessons clients received. Relationship-building lessons focused on healthy relationships and personal boundaries, communication skills, and anger management. More than half of program group members received at least one lesson on such topics, and 15 percent received five or more such lessons.

- ***In providing service coordination support to clients, educators collaborated with a variety of organizations and service providers—most notably, TANF case managers and employment contractors.***

Educators acted resourcefully in collaborating with other service providers for the benefit of their BNF clients. As mentioned above, two-thirds of BNF clients received at least one service coordination contact during their enrollment in the program, including referrals to, and contacts with, other providers on clients' behalf. Nearly half of all service coordination contacts that educators made involved collaboration with TANF case managers, typically about mutual clients (Figure III.1). One-quarter of all contacts that educators made involved staff from the TANF employment service contractors. Smaller fractions of the service coordination contacts involved other organizations—most notably, family support providers, emergency assistance groups, educational organizations, mental health providers and substance abuse counselors, and legal aid groups. In addition, a limited fraction of contacts related to clients' children; for example, educators at times contacted children's schools, as well as the Child Protective Services system (Figure III.1).

Figure III.1. Service Coordination Contacts, by Type of Provider



Source: BNFIS data, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: The percentages are based on the full sample of 358 BNF program group members.

- ***Clients received substantial BNF services both before and after they got a job.***

BNF clients received a substantial amount of BNF assistance both before and after they became employed. Among the more than four-fifths of program group members who obtained employment after they enrolled in BNF, 7 in 10 received at least one program contact before getting the job, and more than 6 in 10 received at least one contact after getting the job. Among this group of employed clients, the average number of contacts (for those with at least one contact) was nearly twice as high during the period before the client obtained the job than after: 29 versus 16 contacts.

The educational topics covered during the periods before and after clients obtained a job were generally similar, though they did vary in expected ways. For example, the fraction of clients who received a lesson on parenting skills was substantially lower after they got a job than before (35 versus 45 percent). In contrast, the fraction who received a lesson on practical life topics was slightly higher during the postemployment period. Examples include money management (26 versus 20 percent), time management (17 versus 12 percent), and stress management (22 versus 18 percent).

- ***The more disadvantaged clients received BNF services for a longer time than their less disadvantaged counterparts***.

Very hard-to-employ ("more disadvantaged") BNF clients were those who met two or more of five criteria at baseline: (1) did not have a high school diploma or GED, (2) had a reported health-limiting condition, (3) had a transportation barrier, (4) had no earnings in the prior year, or (5) had received TANF or AFDC for two or more years in their lifetime. As described earlier, more than two-fifths of program group members were part of this group.

The BNF educators provided more services to sample members who faced greater needs and obstacles. Overall, the more disadvantaged clients received BNF services for a month and a half longer than their less disadvantaged counterparts (9.3 versus 7.7 months) (Table III.3). Reflecting their longer program duration, more disadvantaged clients also received a few more contacts than less disadvantaged clients (25 versus 21 total contacts) across more hours of contact time (27 versus 22 hours). In particular, the average number of both teaching and service coordination contacts was higher for more disadvantaged clients than for less disadvantaged ones.

Certain types of educational lessons and service coordination contacts were provided more frequently to the more disadvantaged clients (Table III.4). Compared to their less disadvantaged counterparts, a higher fraction of the more disadvantaged clients received at

Table III.3. Duration and Intensity of Service Use and Participation, by Clients' Level of Disadvantage

	More Disadvantaged (Very Hard-to-Employ)	Less Disadvantaged
Length of Participation (Average, in Months)	9.3	7.7
Service Contacts (All Types)		
At least 1 contact (percentage)	96	95
More than 10 contacts (percentage)	65	59
Less than 5 contacts	22	23
Average number of contacts	25	21
Median number of contacts	17	13
Service Contacts (Specific Types)		
Teaching Contacts		
At least 1 teaching contact (percentage)	93	95
More than 10 teaching contacts (percentage)	60	56
Average number of teaching contacts	21	18
Median number of teaching contacts	14	12
Service Coordination Contacts		
At least 1 service contact (percentage)	72	65
More than 5 service contacts (percentage)	26	18
Average number of service contacts	4	3
Median number of service contacts	2	1
Contact Time (Among Clients with at Least One Contact)		
Total contact time (average, in hours)	27	22
Time per teaching lesson (average, in minutes)	62	59
Time per home visit (average, in minutes)	96	83
Time per service contact (average, in minutes)	21	20
Sample Size	**149**	**201**

Source: BNFIS, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Table III.4. Lesson Topics Taught to BNF Clients, by Clients' Level of Disadvantage

	Program Group Members with at Least One Lesson	
Topic	More Disadvantaged (Percent)	Less Disadvantaged (Percent)
Personal Improvement		
Goal setting/problem solving	71	73
Character development/personal functioning	71	64
Relationship-building skills	55	52
Family Life		
Parenting	68	64
Child development	20	21
Practical Life Skills		
Money management	38	41
Household management	19	14
Nutrition	13	14
Sample Size	**139**	**191**

Source: BNFIS, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

least one lesson related to character development and personal functioning (71 versus 64 percent), parenting (68 versus 64 percent), and household management (19 versus 14 percent). These differences may reflect a relatively lower level of personal functioning among the more disadvantaged clients. In addition, reflecting a higher prevalence of obstacles, more disadvantaged clients were somewhat more likely than less disadvantaged ones to have a service coordination contact involving a TANF employment service contractor (28 versus 21 percent), an education and training provider (11 versus 4 percent), their child's school (9 versus 3 percent), and Child Protective Services (9 versus 4 percent) (not shown).

The more disadvantaged clients were somewhat less likely than the less disadvantaged ones to complete the BNF program. A lower fraction of more disadvantaged clients "graduated" from BNF, compared to their less disadvantaged counterparts (19 versus 23 percent). Despite more needs and challenges at the outset of the evaluation among the more disadvantaged group, the rate of noncooperation was similar for the two groups: 17 percent of more disadvantaged clients were ever in noncooperation status, compared to 15 percent of less disadvantaged clients (not shown).

- ***Clients who entered BNF during the stronger second half of the demonstration participated for less time than those who entered during the first half.***

Although BNF was well implemented throughout the demonstration, our implementation study found that the program grew stronger, with refinements to the curriculum and improvements in educators' perceived skills as teachers, mentors, and advocates for their BNF clients. Clients who were randomly assigned and served during the

first half of the demonstration received BNF services for two and a half months longer than clients who were assigned and served during the second half (9.4 versus 6.9 months) (not shown). The fraction of clients who received at least one teaching and service coordination contact was comparable for the two groups. However, reflecting their longer program duration, the early assignment clients received more teaching contacts (25 versus 19 total contacts) across more hours of contact time (29 versus 17 hours). The average number of service coordination contacts was the same for both groups (a total of three). The types of services clients received during the two periods were also similar.

The reasons for the shorter program duration among clients who enrolled during the second half of the demonstration are somewhat unclear. However, it may reflect, in part, the lower TANF rates among the late assignment clients, compared to those of the early assignment ones. Because late assignment clients appeared to exit TANF relatively more quickly, it is not surprising that they received fewer BNF services over a shorter time period, given the requirement that BNF services must end six months after clients exit TANF.

INSIGHTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

During the focus groups, BNF clients shared their work-related experiences, their work and personal challenges, and feelings about the BNF program and the services they had received. The focus group comments allow us to explore the program's possible influence on clients' self-concept, motivation, and level of personal functioning. Although this data source is limited by design, and is not representative of all clients served by BNF, it offers useful insights about the program from the clients' perspective.[3]

- ***Clients valued the ongoing BNF lessons, mentoring, and support, as well as their educator's commitment to them and the high standards to which their educator held them accountable.***

In focus groups, many clients said that their involvement in BNF had helped them improve personal skills, overcome challenges, and better their family's situation. Most said they were referred to BNF at a time when they were having difficulty managing their life. Many struggled with serious personal and family challenges, including domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental and physical health problems. Often, they enrolled in BNF expecting to improve parenting and financial management skills and find new ways to gain control over their lives while preparing for a job or beginning one. Some also hoped for assistance in preparing for further education and training. Several clients summarized how they felt BNF's support and encouragement had helped them improve their self-esteem and develop the motivation to be successful at home, school, and work (see text box).

[3] Although program group members in a given service area were randomly selected for recruitment to the focus groups, the participants were not necessarily representative of all BNF program group members, because some clients who were recruited chose not to participate.

COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS ON THE OVERALL VALUE OF BNF

"[My BNF educator helped me] get my life back on track, and she got me to where I had self-esteem and didn't put myself down anymore."

"[BNF has] absolutely been helpful to me. I think more than anything I have somebody to tell me, 'Yeah, you can do this; and don't sell yourself short and don't give up.' When you have a door shut, five more open."

"She was just encouraging, and I could talk to her about anything.…She helped [me] understand the problems [I was facing]…and the feelings [I was] having."

"[My educator] helped me build my self-esteem up enough so I could go to school on a more regular basis and keep going. And I think just from [my BNF] experience I could be more reliable on the job."

"When it comes to…finding employment, keeping employment, and being successful, there's a lot more to just 'Oh, I found a job and [I'm] keeping it.' If you don't feel good about yourself when you get up in the morning, chances are eventually that…you're just going to get up and say…I'm not going to work today'.…And [it seems that BNF] is about, more or less, teaching a person that they're worthwhile."

Clients appreciated the high standards to which their educator held them and the commitment their educator made to them. Several focus group participants made comments that illustrated the important role BNF educators played in promoting positive behavior among clients. They explained that educators expected that clients would complete homework or practical tasks in a timely way. In addition, many clients said that educators were very committed and accessible (see text box).

COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS ON THE EXPECTATIONS AND COMMITMENT OF BNF EDUCATORS

"[My educator] brought things that I could work on. And then she'd have me do them and then I'd have to meet her or call her when I got them done. And she always gave me a deadline….And I liked that because I like being on a deadline and knowing I have to get something done at a particular time."

"[My educator] wanted to know, "Did I get [the tasks] done?" She would like to see that I got the [tasks] accomplished."

"[My educator] gave me her home phone number and her cell phone and office numbers. So I could reach her whenever I needed to."

Clients valued the BNF educational lessons, along with the mentoring and advocacy support that educators offered. The educational lessons that focus group participants mentioned as being especially helpful included those on healthy relationships, communication skills, self-esteem, parenting, and budgeting and money management. Clients also shared examples of how the advocacy support that educators provided translated into tangible assistance to them (see text box).

COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS ON BNF MENTORING AND ADVOCACY

"[My educator] was a very good advocate if [I] needed her."

"I was looking to go to school. So [my educator and I] went through all the steps: financial aid, and getting grants and scholarships, and just all the little small steps to get to your goal. I was very amazed at how much help there was out there for things you wanted to do. Because, you know, [my educator] helped [me] find it."

"When my car broke down, I was trying to get the state to pay for it to get fixed…and they wouldn't do it. And so I called [my educator] and I told her what was going on, and what my problem was and everything. And so she helped me get the vouchers to get my car fixed."

"[My educator] got me help for some of the bills that my husband had left me with so that we could pay them so they didn't go to a creditor. I had to write letters to some collection agencies…to see if I could pay them off little by little."

Overall, focus group participants were very enthusiastic when talking about their experiences with the BNF program, and many wished the BNF services could last longer. There were no negative comments about BNF from focus group members. Rather, a drawback for some was being allowed to receive BNF services for only six months after leaving TANF. Many wished their involvement with BNF could continue for a longer period. Nevertheless, some participants reported receiving some unofficial support from their educator even after their formal involvement in the program had ended.

CHAPTER IV

IMPACTS ON SERVICE USE

All Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients in Nebraska stood to benefit from services that could help them secure and maintain employment. Nebraska offered a relatively service-rich environment, and both program and control group members could use available services. Building Nebraska Families (BNF) had the potential to enhance program group members' access to various services, however, through educators' coordination and advocacy on their clients' behalf. Positive impacts on service receipt among BNF participants also could result from the life skills education that educators offered, as participants became more resourceful in identifying and securing the services they needed. Thus, we expected that BNF would lead to higher service use among program group members than control group members.

In general, our findings are consistent with this expectation. In this chapter, we describe differences in the receipt of key services among program and control group members, focusing on the 18-month period after random assignment. We focus on services that might have an important role in helping TANF recipients develop skills and move toward self-sufficiency: life skills education, employment-related training, mentoring and mediation, and logistical supports. We draw mainly on detailed data collected from the 18-month follow-up survey. In addition, limited data on service use were collected from the 30-month follow-up survey. We also incorporate these findings, where relevant. Although the survey data include information on service use for both program and control group members, they are potentially limited by two key factors. First, sample members may not have remembered all services they received, particularly those received early in the follow-up period. Second, there may have been differences in how sample members interpreted survey questions. In measuring service use, the surveys often included just one question related to a particular type of service or activity. If the terms clients used to describe the services or activities they received did not match those used in the survey, underreporting of some services or activities may have resulted.

EDUCATION AND OTHER SKILL-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

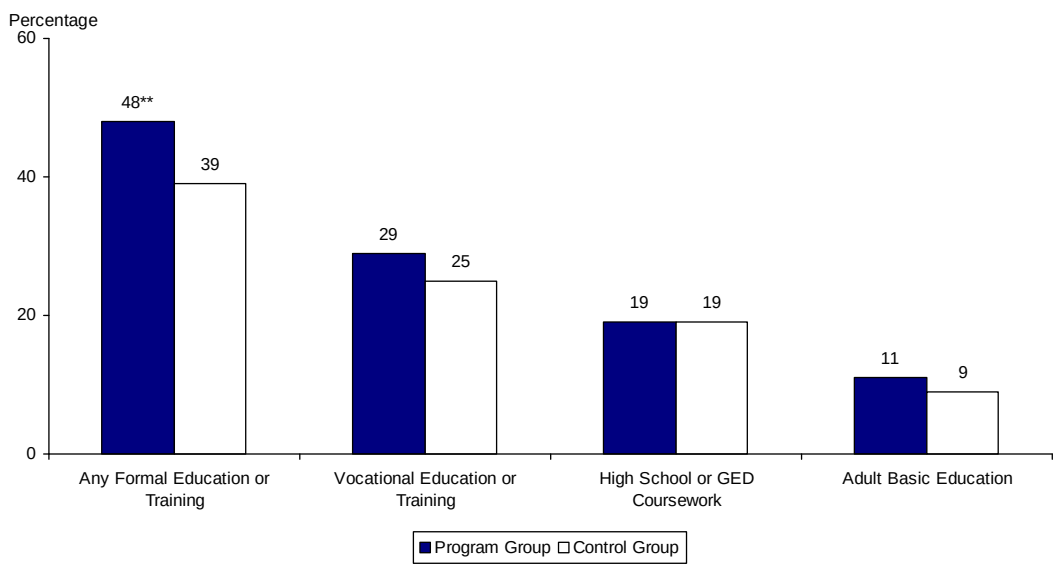
A variety of education and training opportunities were available to Nebraska's TANF clients. They ranged from life skills education and basic job readiness assistance to more traditional education and vocational training. We found that BNF participants were more

likely than control group members to receive several types of educational assistance during the 18-month period after random assignment.

- ***BNF had a positive effect on clients' receipt of formal education or training.***

To increase their employability, many program and control group members pursued additional education, with vocational training being the most popular avenue of skill development. BNF program group members were significantly more likely than their control group counterparts to receive some form of education or training in the 18 months after random assignment. Forty-eight percent of program group members, compared to 39 percent of the control group, reported that they had worked toward the completion of an adult basic education certificate, pursued a high school degree or GED, or received vocational education or training since random assignment (Figure IV.1). During the period between the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys, there was no difference in the fraction of program and control group members who reported participating in some type of education or training (not shown).

Figure IV.1. Participation in Formal Education or Vocational Training During the 18-Month Period After Random Assignment



Source: Rural WtW 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Notes: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. Data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

The sample used in this analysis includes 313 program group members and 212 control group members.

*/**/***Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

During the 18-month follow-up period, program group members were also more likely to have participated in each of the categories of education separately, though not at rates significantly higher than those of control group members. BNF provided no particular formal education services to participants and did not prioritize referrals to particular types of

education services. Instead, it emphasized setting personal goals and developing individualized educational plans. Some participants' goals included formal education, in which case BNF educators provided the support necessary for clients to follow through on enrollment and participation in classes. This approach was consistent with a positive effect on clients' general use of education services.

- ***There was no difference in the fraction of program and control group members who reported receiving life skills education.***

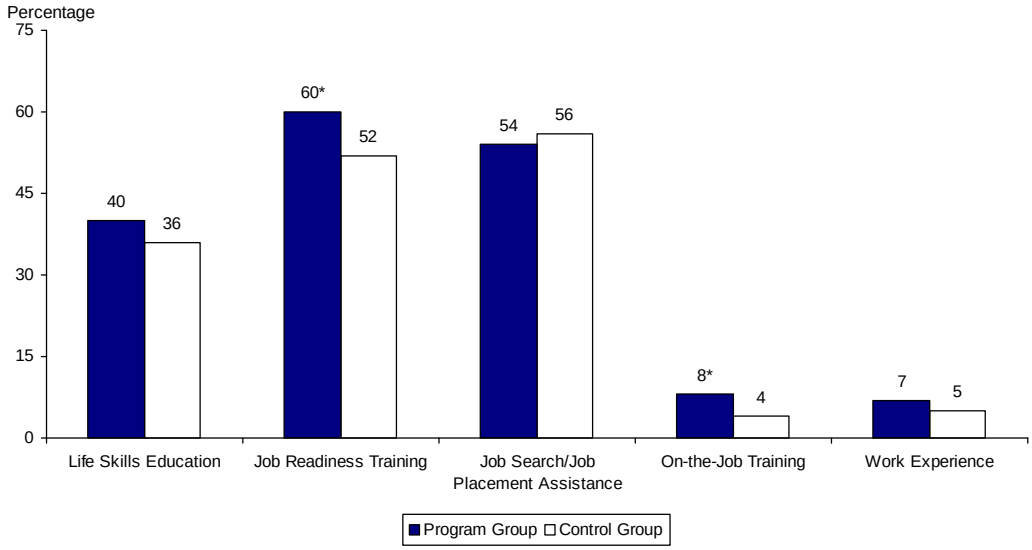
Life skills education was a major component of the BNF curriculum, yet program group members were not significantly more likely than control group members to report receiving such training. About two-fifths of sample members—40 percent of program group members and 36 percent of control group members—reported having attended life skills classes or training sessions on how to manage their lives while working—for example, by improving money management skills, developing parenting and relationship skills, and balancing job and family responsibilities (Figure IV.2). Program enrollees did report roughly a week of additional participation and eight more training sessions than control group members (not shown). However, these differences were not statistically significant.

The finding on the likelihood of receiving life skills education is unexpected, given BNF's emphasis on it. However, control group members were exposed to life skills classes through sessions provided by BNF educators as part of their recruitment efforts, as well as through short-term life skills classes offered by private TANF employment contractors. As a result, the comparison of program and control group members' reported life skills education is limited in value. It was the case, however, that the BNF program was distinct from the other life skills offerings in the intensity of the training offered, the comprehensiveness of the instruction, and the home-visiting mode of delivery.

- ***Program group members were significantly more likely than control group members to report receiving training to help them prepare for working.***

Job readiness training was not a formal component of the BNF curriculum, but the life skills lessons that educators taught were sometimes tailored to cover work-related situations. Sixty percent of program group members, compared to 52 percent of control group members, reported participating in job readiness training or classes, which addressed such topics as dressing for work, getting along with fellow workers, and sticking to a work schedule (Figure IV.2). To the extent that their clients experienced work-related difficulties, BNF educators sometimes adapted BNF lessons on some topics, such as building healthy relationships and developing time management skills, to cover relationships with coworkers and following a work schedule. In addition, although relatively few sample members participated in on-the-job training and work experience positions, program group members were significantly more likely than control group members to hold an on-the-job training position—eight versus four percent (Figure IV.2).

Figure IV.2. Receipt of Employment-Related and Other Skill-Building Services During the 18-Month Period After Random Assignment



Source: Rural WtW 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Notes: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. Data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

The sample used in this analysis includes 313 program group members and 212 control group members.

*/**/***Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

There were no significant differences in the proportion of program or control group members who reported receiving job search and job placement assistance. Indeed, program enrollees were slightly (but not significantly) less likely than their control group counterparts to receive these services. This pattern is in keeping with BNF's indirect emphasis on work; BNF educators helped prepare clients to search for work, rather than helping them directly with job search or placement. In addition, both program and control group members could access job placement assistance through Nebraska Health and Human Services System (NHHSS) caseworkers and contractors, reducing the likelihood that BNF would have positive impacts on receipt of this type of assistance.

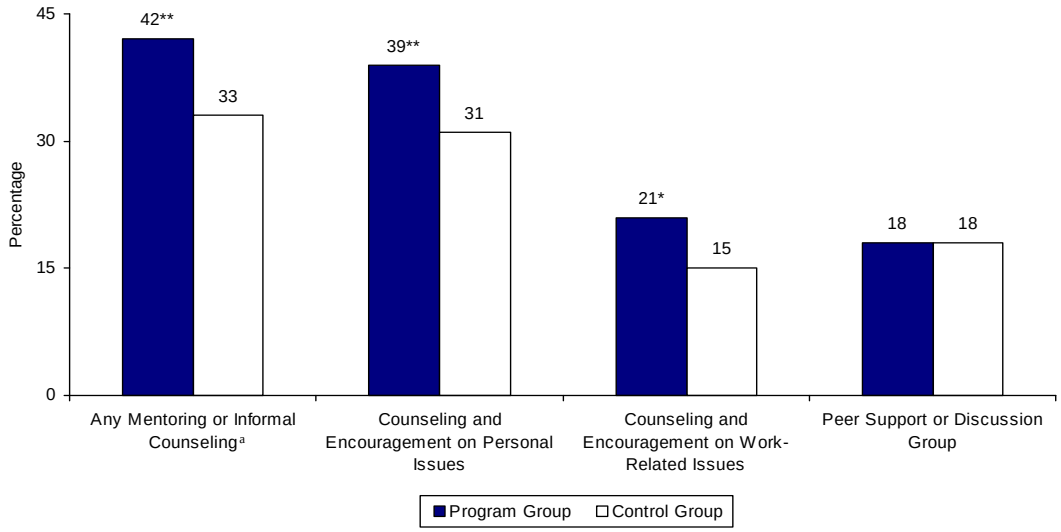
MENTORING AND ADVOCACY

Educators mentored BNF clients by encouraging them to apply principles covered in their BNF sessions to challenges that arose at home or work. Some BNF educators also tried to help clients address problems by interacting with other people or agencies on their clients' behalf. For example, an educator might help a client resolve a misunderstanding with her TANF caseworker or assist her in finding housing.

- ***Program group members were more likely than control group members to receive counseling and encouragement on personal and work-related matters—a sign of BNF educators' high level of involvement in their clients' lives.***

The BNF program's explicit focus on mentoring is reflected in the program's positive impact on receipt of personal and work-related counseling. BNF participants were significantly more likely than members of the control group to receive this kind of mentoring (42 versus 33 percent) (Figure IV.3). For both the program and control groups, receipt of counseling for personal issues was more common than for work-related concerns. Thirty-nine percent of BNF clients, compared to 31 percent of control group members, reported that they had talked with a caseworker, job coach, or counselor for help or encouragement about issues in their personal lives. Twenty-one percent of the program group, compared to 15 percent of the control group, reported receiving postemployment work-related counseling.

Figure IV.3. Receipt of Mentoring and Peer Support During the 18-Month Period After Random Assignment



Source: Rural WtW 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Notes: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. Data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

The sample used in this analysis includes 313 program group members and 212 control group members.

*/**/***Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

- ***BNF had positive impacts on participants' receipt of general advocacy services, such as mediation with other agencies and help finding housing, but not on their receipt of health-related services.***

A significantly higher fraction of program group members than control group members reported receiving this type of advocacy assistance. Fourteen percent of the program group, compared to 8 percent of the control group, indicated that a caseworker or other person

mediated or interceded on their behalf to resolve a problem with an employer or landlord (Table IV.1). Help finding housing was more common among both groups, but, again, program group members (approximately a quarter of whom received such help) were significantly more likely than control group members to report receiving assistance.

Though BNF did not provide health-related services directly, educators helped coordinate services for clients by making referrals and helping clients access such services. There was not a significant difference in the proportion of sample members who received any type of health-related service. More than half of both program and control group members reported that either they or a household member had received some type of health-related service during the follow-up period (Table IV.1). Less than a percentage point separated the two groups on measures of their receipt of substance abuse treatment, domestic violence counseling, and medical attention for physical ailments (Table IV.1). However, in one category of health-related aid—mental health services or counseling—program group members received assistance at a significantly lower rate than control group members (30 versus 40 percent).

Table IV.1. Specialized Services Received During the 18-Month Period After Random Assignment

Type of Service (Percentage)	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact
Advocacy Assistance			
Help finding housing	23.9	16.4	7.5**
Legal assistance	22.1	21.8	0.3
Mediation with employers, landlords, others	14.1	7.6	6.5**
Health-Related Services			
Any health-related service	56.1	52.2	3.9
Mental health services or counseling	30.3	39.5	-9.2**
Substance abuse services or treatment	6.8	7.7	-0.9
Domestic violence counseling	12.6	11.7	0.9
Medical attention for physical condition	29.7	29.5	0.2
Household member received counseling related to mental health, substance abuse, or domestic violence	20.4	19.9	0.5
Sample Size	**313**	**212**	

Source: Rural WtW 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. Data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

LOGISTICAL SUPPORTS

Logistical supports, such as child care benefits and help meeting transportation and other work-related costs, were available to program and control group members alike through NHHSS. BNF educators did not provide direct assistance to their clients in accessing child care and transportation benefits. Instead, clients' TANF case managers provided this form of assistance. Still, BNF educators provided advocacy, referrals, and service coordination that could have had a positive effect on program group members' receipt of logistical assistance compared to that of control group members.

- ***BNF had no positive impacts on participants' receipt of logistical supports, such as help with child care, transportation, or work-related expenses.***

We did not find evidence that BNF had an effect on program group members' receipt of logistical assistance related to child care or work-related supplies. There were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of program and control group members who received help finding or paying for child care, or who received financial assistance for work-related clothing or tools. Approximately half of both program and control groups—48 and 46 percent, respectively—reported that NHHSS or another agency had helped them find or make child care arrangements (not shown). Larger proportions indicated that an agency had helped them pay for child care, with program group members slightly (but not significantly) more likely to report receiving this assistance (Table IV.2).[1] In addition, program group members were about five percentage points more likely than those in the control group to have received help paying for job-related items, but again this difference was not significant (Table IV.2).

Program group members were significantly less likely than control group members to receive vouchers for public transportation or money for car repairs or maintenance. Only 12 percent of BNF participants reported receiving public transportation vouchers, compared to 18 percent of control group members. Reports of assistance with car repairs indicated an even larger negative impact, with 7 percent of program group members reporting receiving this assistance, compared to 21 percent of the control group (Table IV.2).[2] Descriptive findings also suggest that among sample members who received some form of transportation assistance, program group members received a significantly lower total

[1]When we examined child care assistance received by sample members during the period between the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys, we also found a lack of impacts. That is, there was no significant difference in the fraction of program and control group members who reported on the 30-month survey that they had received help paying for child care since the time of the 18-month survey.

[2] The pattern of control group members receiving more transportation assistance than program group members was not evident for the period between the 18- and 30-month surveys. That is, there was no significant difference in the fraction of program and control group members who reported on the 30-month survey that they had received help paying for transportation since the time of the 18-month survey.

Table IV.2. Logistical Supportive Services Received from Welfare or Other Agency During the 18-Month Period After Random Assignment

Type of Service (Percentage)	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact
Help Paying for Child Care	60.7	55.1	5.7
Help Paying for Job-Related Clothing, Tools, and Supplies	29.7	24.6	5.1
Help Paying for Any Type of Transportation Assistance	29.9	34.7	-4.8
Passes/vouchers for bus, van, or taxi	12.0	17.8	-5.7**
Gas vouchers	22.7	24.7	-2.1
Repair/maintain a car	6.5	20.9	-14.4***
Register, license, or insure a car	12.8	16.9	-4.0
Purchase a car	6.2	10.1	-3.9
Sample Size	**313**	**212**	

Source: Rural WtW 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. Data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

amount of assistance than control group members: $1,143 versus $1,810, on average, during the follow-up period (not shown). These negative findings are unexpected. However, BNF educators were not directly involved in authorizing supportive service benefits, such as those related to transportation. The authorization of these benefits was a task that TANF case managers performed. The case managers knew which of their clients were in BNF and which were not. Given this, it is possible that they may have extended logistical supports more readily to control group members and assumed that BNF participants would receive such assistance through their BNF educators.

DIFFERENCES FOR KEY SUBGROUPS

In addition to assessing BNF's effects on service use for the full sample, we examined whether these effects differed across subgroups of clients. We expected that BNF would have larger effects on more disadvantaged clients (who stood to gain more from its individualized, intensive service model) and on clients served in the second year of enrollment (who would benefit from midcourse improvements in program implementation). As for the full sample, we focused our analyses on the 18-month period after sample members were randomly assigned into the program or control group.

- ***The overall pattern of service use among subgroups was similar to the pattern for the full sample. In addition, there was limited evidence of greater participation in basic education activities among the more disadvantaged clients and those served in the second half of the demonstration.***

There were several notable differences in the patterns of service use impacts found in the subgroup analyses. For more disadvantaged clients, significant impacts were observed for several discrete measures related to participation in educational activities. Specifically, although similar fractions of more disadvantaged program and control group members participated in education or training outside of BNF, among those who did participate in such activities, the duration of participation was significantly greater for the program than the control group: seven months, on average, for the program group, compared to four months, on average, for the control group. In addition, among the nearly one-third of more disadvantaged sample members who did not have a high school credential at baseline, more program than control group members had earned one by the time of the 18-month followup (17 versus 5 percent).

The overall patterns of findings for sample members randomly assigned and served during the second half of the demonstration were, by and large, very comparable to the full sample findings. However, among the "late-assignment" sample members, program group members were significantly more likely than control group members to attend GED, regular high school, or adult basic education classes.

CHAPTER V

IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AND WELL-BEING FOR THE FULL BNF SAMPLE

Through intensive home visitation and individualized education services, Building Nebraska Families (BNF) sought to help clients improve life skills and family functioning so that they would be better able to address potential obstacles to acquiring and maintaining employment, and to move toward economic independence. Because of BNF's indirect approach to helping low-income families move from welfare to work, we expected that any potential impacts on client outcomes would be strongest later in the follow-up period.

In this chapter, we present and discuss findings related to the effects of BNF on employment, self-sufficiency, and well-being for the full sample. Overall, across the 30-month follow-up period, we find some evidence that BNF program group members were more likely to be employed, and stronger evidence that BNF increased total income. The following discussion of program impacts focuses on the 30-month period after sample members were randomly assigned into the BNF program or into the control group. We draw primarily on data from the 18- and 30-month client surveys. Where appropriate, we also include findings based on administrative records data.

IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS

In this section, we summarize program impacts on employment and earnings outcomes during the 30-month follow-up period after clients were randomly assigned to the BNF program or the control group. We first look at measures that focus on the entire 30-month follow-up period, such as whether the sample member was ever employed, and average monthly earnings for the full period. Because we do not expect BNF impacts to emerge immediately, we also examine outcomes that focus on the last 18 months of the follow-up period, when nearly three-quarters of the program group had completed BNF. Such outcomes include whether the sample members were employed during the second year of

the follow-up period, whether they were employed during the final six months of the followup, and average earnings during these time periods.

- ***BNF did not improve clients' employment status during the first two years of the follow-up period, but did improve employment during the final six months of the followup.***

Most sample members in both program and control groups worked at some point during the 30-month follow-up period. Based on survey data that collected information on job start and stop dates, about 9 in 10 sample members in both the program and control groups were employed at some point during the follow-up period (Table V.1).[1,2] Moreover, there were no significant differences in the number of months that program and control group members worked; both groups were employed for approximately half of the 30 months after random assignment (Table V.1).[3] Program and control group members also worked similar numbers of jobs during the follow-up period, with both groups working about three jobs on average (not shown).

The monthly profile of employment presented in Figure V.1 shows slight evidence of a stronger effect on employment toward the end of the follow-up period, as expected. In the period more than a year after random assignment, when most BNF participants were no longer enrolled in the program, employment rates were higher for program group members than for control group members in all but one month; these differences were significant in four of the final six months of the followup. At the time of the 30-month follow-up interview, 60 percent of BNF participants were employed, significantly more than the 45 percent employment rate for control group members (Table V.1). Although summary measures related to the first two years of the follow-up period do not indicate that program group members had significantly better employment outcomes than control group members during that period, there is evidence of increased employment during the final six months of the followup. About three-quarters of program group members were employed at some point during the final six months of the followup, significantly more than the 67 percent of control group members who were employed during this period (Table V.1). Program group members also worked for significantly more months during the final six months of the followup than did control group members (3.5 versus 3.1 months).

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[1] The pattern in administrative employment and earnings data drawn from Nebraska Unemployment insurance records is broadly consistent with that of the survey data. See Appendix B for a discussion of administrative employment and earnings findings.

[2] To improve the precision of the impact estimates, we report impacts that have been adjusted with multivariate regression methods that control for a set of baseline demographic and socioeconomic variables. Findings from unadjusted *t*-tests are consistent with the results presented here (Appendix Tables E.3 and E.4).

[3] For continuous outcomes, such as the number of months employed during the followup, regression-adjusted means and their standard errors were calculated in SAS using weighted least squares. For binary outcomes, such as whether the sample member was employed during the followup, these values were calculated using weighted logistic regression.

Table V.1. Employment During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period (Percentage, Unless Specified Otherwise)

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period				
Ever employed	90.7	87.6	3.1	0.26
Employed at followup	59.8	44.7	15.1***	0.00
Months employed	15.0	14.8	0.2	0.77
Monthly hours worked	70.6	69.4	1.2	0.80
First Year of Follow-Up Period				
Ever employed	65.0	66.7	-1.7	0.67
Months employed	4.9	5.2	-0.3	3.54
Monthly hours worked	54.5	62.3	-7.8	0.19
Second Year of Follow-Up Period				
Ever employed	78.7	81.2	-2.5	0.46
Months employed	6.8	6.3	0.4	0.26
Monthly hours worked	79.8	71.4	8.4	0.14
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period				
Ever employed	74.4	67.4	6.9*	0.07
Months employed	3.5	3.1	0.4*	0.08
Monthly hours worked	87.4	78.9	8.5	0.22
Sample Size	**309**	**193**		

Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

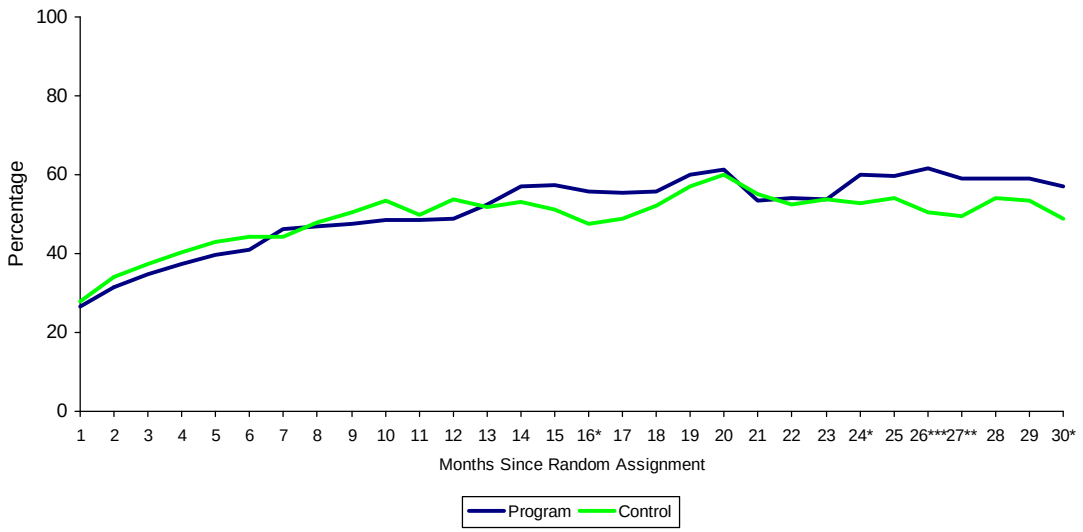
Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Earnings averages include those with no earnings. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

- ***BNF improved clients' ability to retain employment and to advance in their jobs.***

In addition to being able to find employment, an important component of achieving self-sufficiency lies in the ability to sustain employment and advance in jobs. There is evidence that BNF helped clients develop this ability. Program group members were significantly more likely to sustain employment for at least six consecutive months at some point during the followup; 77 percent of BNF participants achieved this benchmark compared to 68 percent of control group members (Figure V.2). At the time of the final follow-up survey, program group members were also more likely than control group members to be employed in jobs in which they reported having received a promotion (10 versus 6 percent), and were nearly four times as likely to be employed in a job in which they expected to receive a promotion in the next 12 months (16 versus 4 percent). The expectation of receiving a promotion is a subjective measure, but indicates that BNF at least had a positive impact on clients' optimism about their work skills and employment

Figure V.1. Employment Rates, by Month After Random Assignment (Percentage)

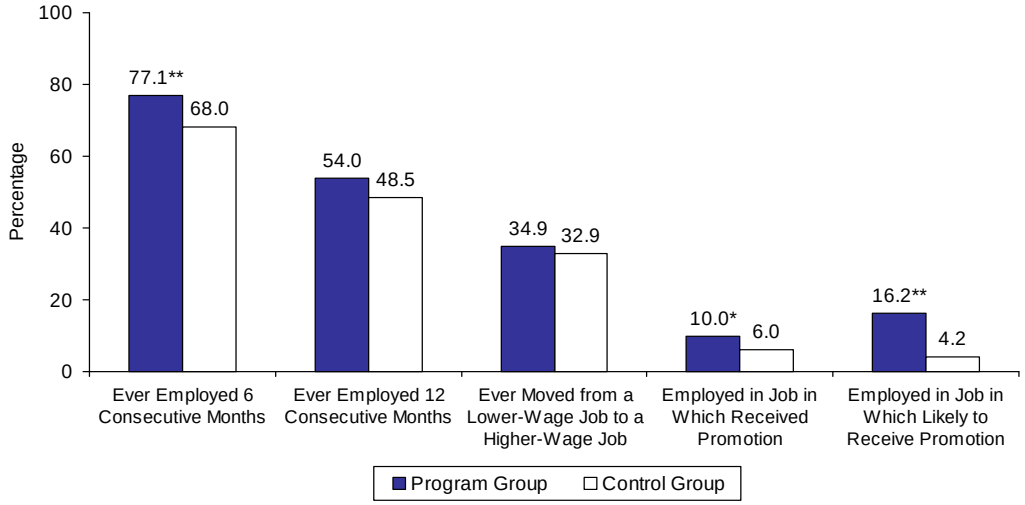


Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 502 (309 program group members and 193 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.
Data are presented in tabular format in Appendix Table E.1.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Figure V.2. Employment Retention and Job Advancement During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period (Percentage)



Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. . Based on a sample size of 502 (309 program group members and 193 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

prospects. However, BNF participants were not more likely to have been employed for 12 consecutive months at some point during the followup, nor were they more likely ever to have moved directly from one job into a job offering a higher wage.

- ***BNF increased the likelihood that clients would be working in jobs with certain desirable characteristics 30 months after random assignment.***

At the time of the 30-month followup, program group members were more likely to be working in regular daytime shift jobs or in jobs that provide health insurance or paid vacation (Table V.2). For example, 28 percent of program group members were employed in jobs that provide health insurance compared to 18 percent of control group members. In addition to being an important measure of economic success in its own right, working in higher quality jobs, such as those that are full-time or that offer health insurance coverage, has been shown to have a strong association with the longer term economic success of low-income single mothers, a group at high risk of TANF receipt (Moore et al. 2007).

Although BNF seems to have improved some dimensions of job quality, it did not improve all of them. There were no significant impacts on employment in a high-wage job, or on employment in jobs that offered other benefits, such as sick leave or a retirement plan

Table V.2. Employment in Jobs with Specific Characteristics at the Time of the 30-Month Follow-Up Survey (Percentage)

Outcome[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Job Characteristic				
Offers hourly wage greater than $8	21	17	3.7	0.29
Is full-time (more than 35 hours per week)	35	29	6.6	0.10
Employed in job at least 6 months	35	31	4.2	0.30
Is temporary or seasonal	5	2	3.0*	0.09
Is regular daytime shift	36	28	8.4**	0.04
Job Benefit				
Provides health insurance	28	18	9.3**	0.01
Provides sick leave	18	16	1.8	0.59
Provides paid vacation	27	20	7.0*	0.06
Provides retirement plan	20	15	5.4	0.11
Sample Size	**309**	**193**		

Source: Rural WtW 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. Analogous 18-month measures presented in Appendix Table E.5.

[a]The sample for these job characteristic variables includes both sample members who were working and those who were not. If the sample were limited only to those who were working, program-control group differences may reflect factors other than the effects of the program.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

(Table V.2). Program group members were also more likely to be working in temporary or seasonal jobs, which tend to be less desirable. Moreover, there is little evidence of job quality impacts at the time of the 18-month followup (Appendix Table E.5). That there were no impacts on job quality 18 months after random assignment but that there were one year later may suggest that along with improvements in continuous employment and job advancement (discussed above) came improvements in job quality.

Descriptive findings suggested that employed program and control group members were working in jobs that offered similarly low wages. It is not possible to assess directly program impacts on wages using experimental methods, because program participation affected employment, and sample members who were not employed did not have wages.[4] However, among sample members who were employed at some point during the 30-month follow-up period, wages of program and control group members in their most recent job were similar, with average hourly wages of slightly less than $7 for both groups (Table V.3). These average wage levels are relatively low compared to those of low-wage workers nationally. A study of welfare leavers in eight states showed that the average hourly wages for welfare recipients about 12 months after leaving welfare ranged from $7.97 to $9.28 (Acs and Loprest 2001).[5] This difference probably reflects the limited employment opportunities available in rural Nebraska, as well as the relatively low cost of living.

In addition to similar wages, descriptive results also suggest that program and control group members who were employed during the follow-up period had similar earnings, similar time spent on the job, and similar hours worked per week (Table V.3). Program group members who had been employed were less likely than employed control group members to be working in cleaning or health services positions and more likely to be working in the other service positions (Table V.3). As with the wage findings, these differences should not be interpreted as program impacts because program participation affected employment and each of these measures requires employment.

- ***There is no evidence of an impact on clients' earnings.***

Across the full follow-up period, earnings were similar for program and control group members. Average monthly earnings were around $500 for both program and control group members (Figure V.3).[6] As with employment, monthly earnings increased for both program and control groups during the follow-up period, although somewhat faster for program group members (Figure V.4). Nonetheless, the average monthly earnings of program participants during the final six months of the follow-up period was $619, not significantly greater than the $569 average earnings of the control group (Figure V.3).

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[4] Results related to employment in higher wage jobs (presented in Table V.2) can be regarded as experimental impacts since this outcome is defined for all sample members, not just employed sample members.

[5] We converted the average hourly wage estimates from Acs and Loprest (2001) into 2004 dollars (from 2000 dollars).

[6] These earnings averages include those with no earnings.

Table V.3. Characteristics of the Current or Most Recent Job, for Sample Members Who Were Employed During the Follow-Up Period (Percentage, Unless Specified Otherwise)

Outcome[a]	Program Group	Control Group
Hourly Wage Rate (Dollars)	$6.85	$6.83
Number of Months on Job (Months)	8	7
Usual Hours Worked per Week (Hours)	34	34
Commute Time to Work (Minutes)	16	14
Occupation		
Administrative support/clerical	8.9	9.8
Sales/retail	15.4	15.6
Health services	10.2	18.1*
Food services	17.0	16.8
Cleaning services	6.7	12.2**
Other services	13.9	6.5**
Production/trade	13.7	10.0
Manager/professional/technical	10.4	8.1
Other	3.0	3.8
Sample Size	**281**	**164**

Source: Rural WtW 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. Analogous 18-month measures presented in Appendix Table E.6.

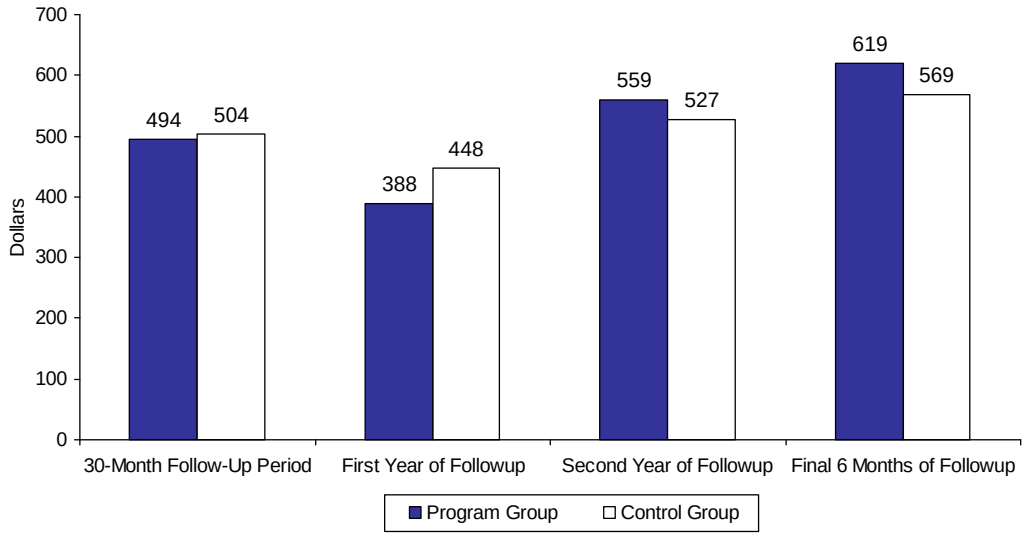
[a]Because sample members who did not work are not included in the table, program-control group differences may reflect factors other than the effects of the program. Thus, these differences should not be interpreted as program impacts. To highlight this point, we do not show program-control group differences in a separate column, but we do report the significance of differences between workers in the program and control groups.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

CHANGES IN WELFARE DEPENDENCE, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AND WELL-BEING

BNF was designed to reduce the welfare dependence and improve the self-sufficiency of its clients by helping them improve their basic life skills, address challenges in their lives, and support their efforts toward employment and ongoing labor market success. In this section, we summarize program impacts on public assistance, family income, and self-sufficiency during the 30-month period after clients were randomly assigned to the BNF program or the control group. This analysis focuses both on survey reports of outcomes in the month before the time of the 18-month follow-up survey and on administrative TANF and Food Stamp Program (FSP) records covering the entire follow-up period.

Figure V.3. Average Monthly Earnings During the Follow-Up Period (2004 Dollars)

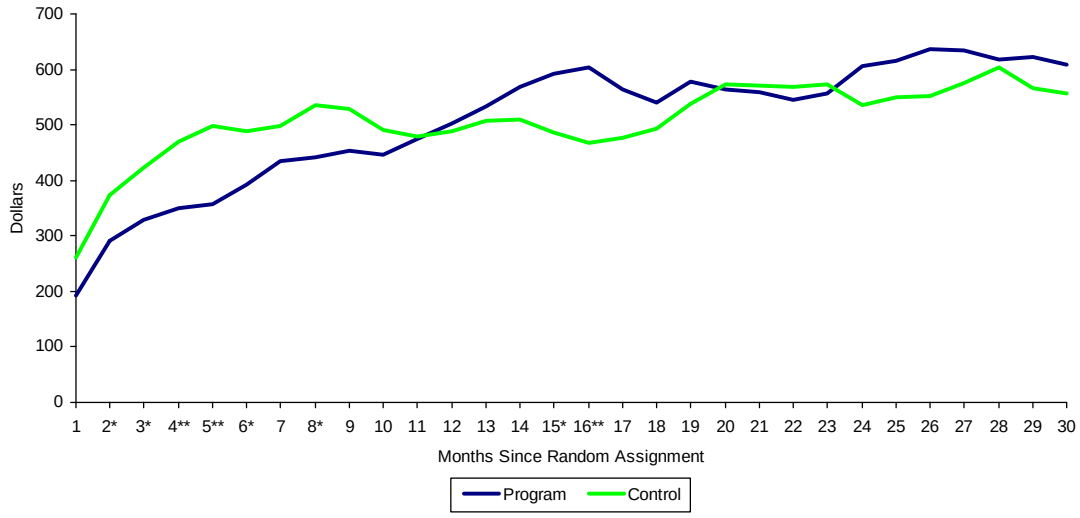


Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 502 (309 program group members and 193 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Figure V.4. Average Earnings, by Month After Random Assignment (2004 Dollars)



Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 502 (309 program group members and 193 control group members).

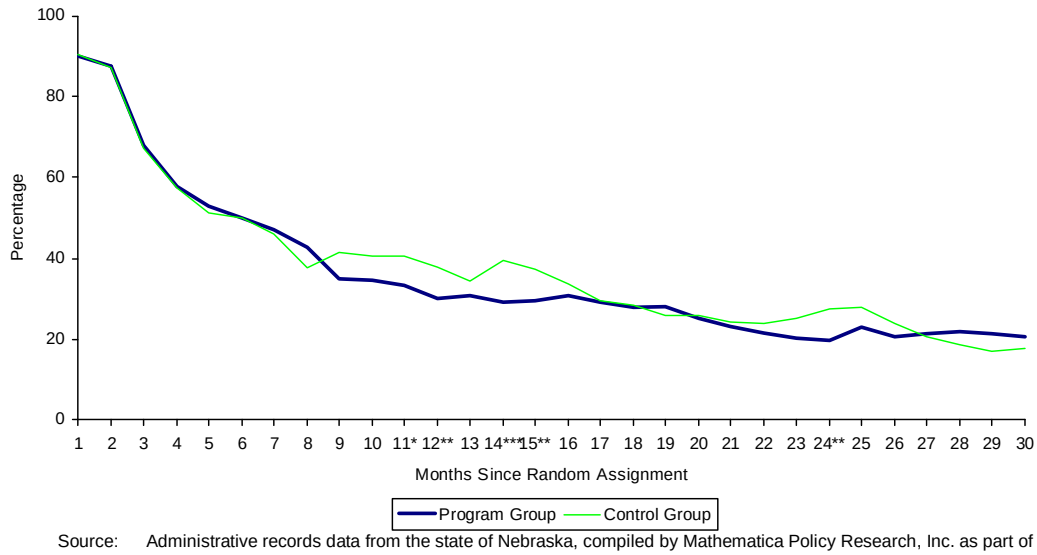
Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.
Data are presented in tabular format in Appendix Table E.2.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

- ***BNF did not have strong impacts on the receipt of TANF, food stamps, and on other forms of public assistance.***

We used administrative data from the entire 30-month follow-up period to examine monthly TANF and food stamp receipt. The rate of TANF receipt dropped dramatically during the follow-up period for both program and control group members, and similar fractions of program and control group members received TANF during most of the 30-month follow-up period (Figure V.5). About 9 in 10 sample members from both groups received TANF the month after random assignment, while only 1 in 5 received TANF 30 months later. Overall, the pattern of declining rates of TANF receipt is not unexpected, because many sample members would have faced increased pressure to leave TANF due to Nebraska's two-year time limit on spells of cash assistance. However, program group members were not less likely to have ever received TANF at any time during the followup, did not receive TANF for fewer months, and did not receive less TANF funds (Appendix Tables E.7 and E.8). Across the entire follow-up period and during the final 18 months of the followup, the rate of TANF receipt for the two groups was not significantly different.

Figure V.5. TANF Receipt, by Month After Random Assignment (Percentage)



Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation. Based on a sample size of 600 (358 program group members and 242 control group members).

Notes: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.
Data are presented in tabular format in Appendix Table E.7.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Food stamp receipt also declined for both groups, although at a slower rate than TANF receipt (Figure V.6). During the first month after random assignment, about 9 in 10 of both program and control group members received food stamps, compared to about 6 in 10 in month 30. The differences between the groups were not significant at any point during the follow-up period, nor do summary measures show any differences in receipt across the full follow-up period (Appendix Tables E.8 and E.9).

We relied on survey data pertaining to the month before the follow-up surveys for information on public assistance programs other than TANF and food stamps. Approximately 8 in 10 of both program and control group members received some form of public assistance (TANF, food stamps, or other forms of government assistance) during the months before the 18- and 30-month surveys (Table V.4). Program group members were significantly less likely than control group members to have reported receiving WIC in the month before the 18-month survey (31 versus 41 percent). However, this difference did not persist at the time of the 30-month survey. Program group members also were significantly more likely than control group members to report receiving SSI or disability insurance at 18 months (12 versus 8 percent). However, this impact also did not persist at the time of the 30-month survey. At the time of both follow-up surveys, program group

Figure V.6. Food Stamp Receipt, by Month After Random Assignment (Percentage)

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation. Based on a sample size of 600 (358 program group members and 242 control group members).

Notes: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.
Data are presented in tabular format in Appendix Table E.9.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

members were significantly more likely to have reported receiving other forms of public assistance, which included payments from programs such as General Assistance and Foster Care (Table V.4). However, payments from these programs were small, averaging less than $20 for both groups at the time of both follow-up surveys (Table V.5).

Despite program and control group differences in participation *rates* that were not significant for most public assistance benefits, program group members did receive a significantly greater *amount* of public assistance income on average in the month before the 30-month followup than their control group counterparts ($451 versus $368, Table V.5). The two programs that contributed the most to this difference were SSI and Social Security. Differences in the average income received from these two programs account for three-quarters of the total difference in total public assistance income. BNF participants reported receiving $100 in SSI payments in the month before the 30-month followup, significantly more than the $57 reported by control group members. Social Security income averaged about $20 for program group members, compared to $2 for control group members. Although there were no significant program versus control group differences in the participation rates in these two programs at the 30-month followup (Table V.4), both programs provide generous benefits, so even small differences in participation could translate into relatively large differences in income.

- ***EITC receipt was common for both program and control group members.***

The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is often an important source of income for working families. Through an analysis based on several survey questions, we estimated that about 9 in 10 sample members in both the program and control groups had received or were likely to have received the EITC at some point during the follow-up period (not shown).[7] Because we do not have reliable information on the amount of EITC received, this income is not included in total family income or in poverty status calculations.

- ***BNF did not affect total income received from private sources other than own earnings.***

Overall, program and control group members received similar amounts of income from private sources other than their own earnings, such as earnings from a spouse or partner, earnings from other income, earnings from informal jobs, and child support income. Child support income was significantly greater for program than control group members at the time of the 18-month followup; however, this difference did not persist at the time of the 30-month followup (Table V.5). The total amount from these types of income at the time of the 30-month follow-up survey was $694 for program group members and $651 for control group members (Table V.5).

[7] We considered a sample member likely to have received the federal EITC if that sample member reported receiving, or applying to receive it, or if three conditions were met: (1) the estimated annual household earnings of the sample member were below the EITC limit, factoring in differences by family size; (2) someone else had prepared the sample member's tax return; and (3) the sample member had received a federal refund.

Table V.4. Self-Reported Participation Rates in TANF, Food Stamps, and Other Public Assistance Programs During the Month Before the 18- and 30-Month Surveys

	18-Month Followup				30-Month Followup			
Income Source (Percentage of Sample Receiving)[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Means-Tested Programs								
TANF		30.7	-0.5	0.91	20.4	19.8	0.6	0.86
Food stamps	73.7	71.6	2.1	0.58	71.6	71.2	0.4	0.92
WIC	31.1	40.5	-9.3**	0.02		29.4	-0.1	0.97
Social Insurance Programs								
SSI or Disability Insurance	12.0	7.7	4.3*	0.09	29.3 16.0	11.9	4.1	0.15
Social Security	3.4	2.4	1.0	0.51	3.6	1.7	1.8	0.33
Unemployment Insurance	1.2	3.4	-2.2	0.13	2.9	1.5	1.4	0.29
Other Public Assistance	5.6	1.3	4.3**	0.01	3.5	1.0	2.5*	0.07
Any Public Assistance (Any of the Above)[b] 30.2	82.2	84.8	-2.6	0.43	81.6	78.5	3.1	0.37
Sample Size	**313**	**212**			**308**	**193**		

Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]The outcome measures represent the percentage of sample members whose household received the benefit during the month before the 18-month follow-up survey. The month before the survey represented a different number of months after random assignment for different clients. For example, for some clients, the month before the survey represented 18 months after random assignment. For others, it represented from 19 to 24 months after random assignment.

[b]Receipt of foster care assistance is also represented in this aggregate category. However, the point estimates for the receipt of foster care assistance were too small to report.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

SSI = Supplemental Security Income; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children.

Table V.5. Impacts on Monthly Income in the Month Before the Follow-Up Surveys (2004 Dollars)

	18-Month Followup				30-Month Followup			
Total Income from Source (Dollars)[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Own Earnings	578	528	49	0.37	574	480	95*	0.10
Other Private Income Sources	640	620	20	0.82	694	651	43	0.66
Spouse or partner's earnings	402	419	-17	0.84	444	427	17	0.83
Other householders' earnings	207	188	19	0.69	214	208	6	0.93
Earnings from informal/odd jobs[b]		8	-3	0.47	5	9	-4	0.40
Child support	38	20	17*	0.06	37	27	10	0.36
Other private income sources	10	10	0	0.98	10	11	-1	0.87
Total Public Assistance	472	475	-3	0.93	451	368	83**	0.02
TANF	105	115	-10	0.57	69	63	6	0.65
Food stamps	228	228	0	0.99	220	217	3	0.87
WIC	26	31	-5	0.40	21	18	3	0.54
SSI	76	46	30	0.15	100	57	43**	0.04
Social Security	24	27	-3	0.84	20	2	19*	0.06
Unemployment Insurance	3	26	-23**	0.01	11	8	3	0.60
Other governmental assistance	15	7	8	0.31	3	2	2	0.67
Total Income (All Sources)	1,681	1,618	63	0.55		1,490	222**	0.04
Sample Size	**313**	**212**			1,712 **309**	**193**		

Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]By household, during the month before the 18-month follow-up survey. The month before the survey represented a different number of months after random assignment for different clients. For example, for some clients, the month before the survey represented 18 months after random assignment. For others, it represented from 19 to 24 months after random assignment.

[b]Earnings from informal or odd jobs may have been jobs held by either the sample member or another adult household member.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

SSI = Supplemental Security Income; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children.

- ***The program group had significantly higher family incomes, on average, than the control group 30 months after random assignment.***

BNF clients had incomes that were significantly greater than those of the control group in the month before the 30-month follow-up survey, although there was no significant difference in total income in the month before the 18-month follow-up survey (Figure V.7). In the month before the final follow-up survey, program group members had an average total household income of $1,712—15 percent more than the $1,490 of control group members. These estimates of household income are derived from three primary sources of income during the month before the survey: (1) client's own earnings; (2) other private income sources (primarily, earnings of other adults in the household); and (3) public assistance (primarily, food stamps and TANF). The difference in program and control group members' total income was driven primarily by differences in earnings, which represented 45 percent of the total difference in income, and by differences in public assistance income, which represented 40 percent of the total difference in income (Table V.5).[8]

On average, both program and control group members' own earnings represented slightly more than three-tenths of total income during the month before both surveys (Figure V.7). Approximately one-quarter of the average monthly income was derived from different forms of public assistance at the time of both surveys, with the value of food stamps representing more than one-half of public assistance income for both program and control group members (Table V.5). The largest component of income for both groups at the time of both surveys was from private income sources other than own earnings, such as earnings of a spouse, partner, or another adult in the household.

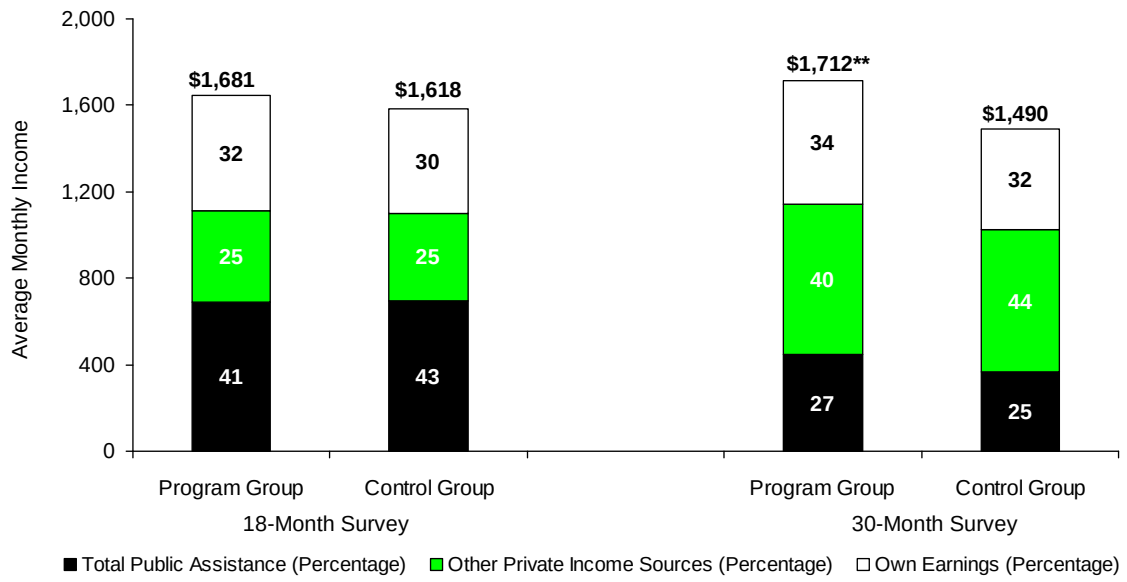
- ***Poverty and severe poverty were significantly less common among program group members than control group members, while home ownership was significantly more common.***

In addition to having higher average total income at the time of the final follow-up survey, BNF clients were less likely than control group members to be in poverty or to be in severe poverty. During the month before the survey, more than 55 percent of program group members had household income that was below the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) poverty guidelines for the size of their household, compared to 63 percent of control group members (Figure V.8).[9] Fewer BNF participants than control group members were in extremely poor households; approximately 20 percent of program

[8] The difference between the program and control groups' own earnings is statistically significant at the ten percent level, while the difference in public assistance income is significant at the five percent level (Table V.5).

[9] The poverty levels we report are based on DHHS federal poverty guidelines for the year 2004. For example, based on these guidelines, a family of three is considered to be in poverty if its monthly income is below $1,306 ($15,670 on an annual basis), and a family of four is poor if its monthly income is below $1,571 ($18,850 on an annual basis). Poverty and extreme poverty levels are similar if the U.S. Census Bureau poverty

Figure V.7. Impacts on Average Monthly Income from Earnings and Other Sources by Household During the Month Before Survey (2004 Dollars)



Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 502 (309 program group members and 193 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

group members had household income less than 50 percent of the poverty level at the time of the 30-month followup, compared to 27 percent of control group members.

Home ownership is another important measure of family stability and well-being. About 16 percent of program group members owned their homes at the time of the 30-month followup, a significantly greater rate of home ownership than the 9 percent of control group members (not shown).

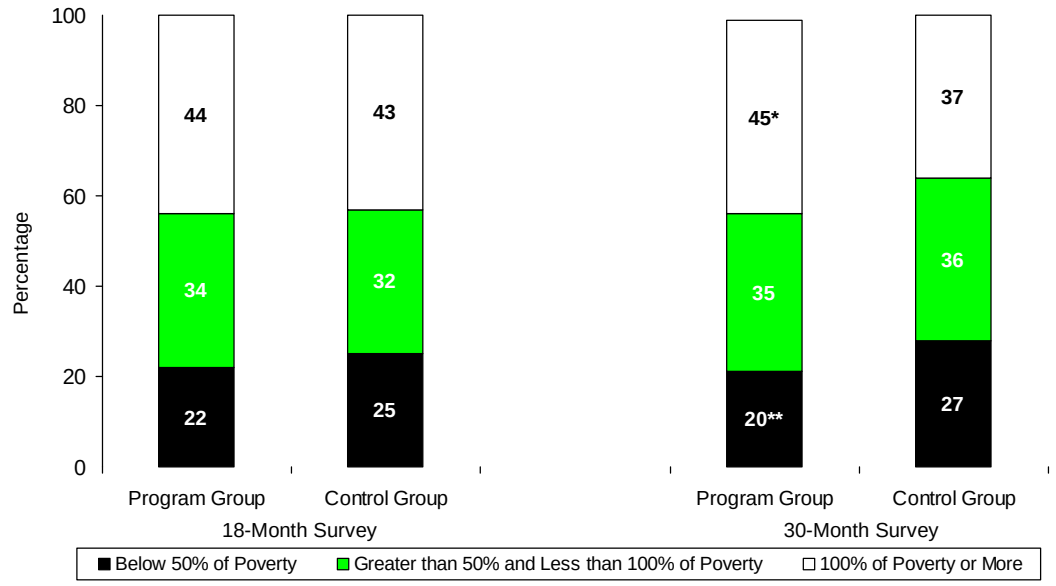
- ***BNF had no effect on marital status.***

BNF clients were not significantly more likely than control group members to be married and living with their spouse at the time of either the 18- or 30-month follow-up surveys. At the time of the interim followup, 21 percent of program group members and

(*continued*)
thresholds are used (59 versus 65 percent in poverty; 20 versus 28 percent in severe poverty); however, the difference for the Census based poverty rate is not statistically significant. (p = .13).

17 percent of control group members were married and living with a spouse (not shown). At the time of the 30-month survey, these rates were 21 percent for program group members and 22 percent for control group members (not shown). In a related finding, BNF did not increase the probability that participants who were single at baseline became married during the followup. Less than 15 percent of program and control group members who were single at the time of random assignment were married and living with a spouse at the time of the 30-month follow-up interview (not shown).

Figure V.8. Households Living Above and Below Poverty at 18- and 30-Month Followups (Percentage)



Source: Rural WtW 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 502 (309 program group members and 193 control group members).

Note: Poverty levels are based on DHHS federal poverty guidelines for the year 2004. All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

IMPACTS ON HARDSHIPS AND SELF-CONCEPT

In this section, we investigate impacts on outcomes that reflect hardships and difficulties experienced by sample members during the follow-up period, such as health problems, housing problems, and food availability. We also look at program effects on aspects of self-concept, such as self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy.

- ***There were few differences in exposure to hardship near the end of the 30-month follow-up period, although there is some evidence that BNF participants experienced greater hardship around the time of the interim followup.***

By helping clients improve life skills and family functioning, BNF could have affected a wide array of obstacles and hardships. We categorized these obstacles and hardships as one of five types of problems: (1) health problems or issues, (2) personal challenges that hindered work, (3) lack of health insurance coverage, (4) housing issues, and (5) food availability. More than 95 percent of sample members in both the program and control groups experienced at least one of these types of obstacles during the follow-up period (not shown). Thus, there was a high level of need and hardship among all sample members.

In general, program and control group members had small differences in exposure to hardship and obstacles, particularly at the end of the 30-month follow-up period. At the time of the 18-month followup, the specific obstacles that BNF participants were significantly more likely to report were being in fair or poor health, lacking access to a vehicle, lacking support for employment from friends and family, having a utility turned off, and having food availability problems (Table V.6). However, BNF participants were less likely to self-report having activity-inhibiting mental health problems and less likely to have children not covered by health insurance. By the time of the 30-month followup, there were fewer specific obstacles that showed significant differences for program and control group members. At that time, BNF participants were more likely than control group members to have children not covered by health insurance and more likely to have food availability problems (Table V.6).

- ***Although scores on measures of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation were generally positive for both program and control group members, scores for the program group were significantly lower than those of the control group.***

Designers of the BNF program expected that its services would help enhance participants' self-confidence and their ability to manage their lives, thereby preparing them to search for and maintain employment. BNF had the potential to produce positive impacts on such aspects of self-concept as self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy through its focus on clients' personal development. We used several standard measures to assess whether BNF had an effect on clients' self-esteem and other measures of self-concept. The 18-month follow-up survey included questions drawn from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to examine self-esteem (Rosenberg 1989). It also included questions drawn from the Pearlin Mastery Scale to measure self-efficacy (individuals' sense of their ability to control their lives and manage the responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities they face) (Pearlin and Schooler 1978). The survey also included three questions related to attitudes toward the future, which we pooled to develop a measure of sample members' "future orientation."

Overall, the scores of both program and control group members on these self-concept measures suggest generally positive responses in self-esteem, sense of self-efficacy, and future orientation. Most respondents in both groups indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with most items stated positively, such as "What happens to me in the future depends on me" and disagreed or strongly disagreed with most items stated negatively, such as "I have little control over the things that happen to me."

Table V.6. Differences in the Prevalence of Obstacles and Hardships at the 18- and 30-Month Follow-up Surveys (Percentages)

Characteristic	18-Month			30-Month		
	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate
Health Problems or Issues[a]						
Overall health is fair or poor	34.2	27.2	7.0*	36.1	42.5	-6.4
Poor health inhibits work, training, or school	31.8	27.8	4.0	25.7	29.1	-3.4
Physical disability or illness	24.2	21.9	2.3	18.9	23.1	-4.2
Mental health problem inhibits work, training, or school	26.5	35.3	-8.8**	31.4	29.5	1.9
Any health problems	60.4	61.5	-1.0	55.2	56.9	-1.7
Challenges That Hindered Work[b]						
Transportation problems	36.4	32.3	4.1	36.7	34.1	2.6
Child care problems	46.8	43.2	3.6	22.3	19.6	2.7
Lack of support or resistance to working from family/friends	13.6	5.8	7.9***	18.5	14.1	4.3
Physical abuse by spouse or partner	8.0	9.1	-1.1	4.5	10.9	-6.4**
Drug or alcohol problems	3.6	4.2	-0.7	3.3	4.3	-1.0
Any challenges that hindered work	63.5	57.6	5.9		51.2	3.6
Lack of Health Insurance Coverage						
Uninsured at followup	34.4	31.6	2.8	54.8 36.7	35.2	1.4
Sometimes uninsured during follow-up period	54.3	54.7	-0.4	73.7	71.9	1.8
Children uninsured at followup	3.3	6.8	-3.5*	7.0	2.5	4.5**
Children sometimes uninsured during follow-up period	10.6	16.5	-5.9*	19.6	23.9	-4.3
Any health insurance coverage issue	58.6	56.2	2.4		73.0	1.5
Housing Issues[c]						
Lived in public or subsidized housing	27.3	25.4	2.0	74.5	23.2	-3.5
Could not pay rent or mortgage	46.9	47.2	-0.3	56.6	55.2	1.3
Evicted from home or apartment	15.8	15.0	0.8	23.4	23.5	-0.1
Could not pay utility bill	54.4	51.0	3.4	19.8 63.2	57.2	6.0
Had utility turned off	30.5	23.1	7.4*	36.4	34.9	1.5
Homeless or lived in a shelter	13.2	10.2	3.0		14.4	4.0
Any housing issue	77.0	74.9	2.0	81.8	80.8	1.0
Food Availability[d]				19.0		
Food was often or sometimes not available	54.6	43.5	11.1**	71.1	59.1	12.0***
Sample Size	**313**	**212**		**309**	**193**	

Table V.6 *(continued)*

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]The health measures represent sample members' self-reported health status at the time of the survey. A measure of the prevalence of major depression during the past 12 months was collected in the 18-month survey but not in the 30-month survey.

[b]Challenges that hindered work were those that, in the six months before the survey, sample members said made it difficult for them to find and keep a job or participate in work-related activities. Clients' access to a vehicle or possession of a driver's license was measured at the time of the follow-up surveys. In particular, for child care problems, sample members were asked at 18 months if they had any of five different types of problems or concerns during the past six months that made it difficult for them to work or prevented them from working. (At 30 months, however, only one question related to child care was asked of respondents).

[c]Housing issues were those occurring at any time during the 18-month follow-up period. Clients with any serious housing problem had at least one of the following problems during the 18-month follow-up period: evicted from home or apartment, had utility turned off, or had been homeless or lived in a shelter.

[d]Food availability issues were those occurring at any time during the 18-month follow-up period. In particular, food availability was measured by how frequently "the food that (a sample member's household) bought did not last and (they) did not have money to get more."

*/**/*** Differences between the program and control groups are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Program group members responded less positively than control group members to questions regarding self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation (Table V.7). On questions assessing self-esteem, the overall score for the program group was significantly lower than that of the control group. Program group members were less apt than control group members to feel, for example, that "I am able to do things as well as other people" and tended to agree more strongly with the statement "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure." Overall scores on measures of self-efficacy and future orientation also showed negative impacts, though these were only marginally significant.

These counterintuitive findings were measured before most of the positive impacts on employment and income were observed. In addition, participation in BNF required that clients realistically appraise their strengths and weaknesses to establish an educational plan and personal goals. It is possible that this process led to differences in the way that program and control group members appraised their personal circumstances.[10]

[10] An additional 14 items on the 18-month survey assessed sample members' confidence in their ability to engage in positive behaviors and connect with family, friends, and community (see Appendix Table E.10). Overall, clients in both the program and control groups were mostly confident in their ability to perform various activities. Program group members generally responded somewhat less positively than control group members, although most of the responses between the two groups were not significantly different.

Table V.7. Clients' Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Future Orientation at the Time of the 18-Month Follow-Up Survey

Characteristic[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate
Self-Esteem (Out of 12)	8.9	9.4	-0.4***
I am able to do things as well as most people	3.2	3.3	-0.1**
I certainly feel useless at times	2.7	2.8	-0.1
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	3.2	3.3	-0.2***
Self-Efficacy or Sense of Control (Out of 28)	21.1	21.6	-0.5*
There is no way I can solve some of the problems I have	2.7	2.8	-0.0
I feel that I am being pushed around in life	2.9	2.9	-0.0
I have little control over the things that happen to me	3.0	3.1	-0.1*
I can do anything I set my mind to	3.3	3.3	-0.0
I feel helpless in dealing with the problems in my life	2.9	2.9	0.0
What happens to me in the future depends on me	3.4	3.5	-0.1**
There is little I can do to change the important things in my life	3.0	3.1	-0.1
Future Orientation (Out of 12)	9.7	9.9	-0.2*
I have a plan for the future	3.1	3.2	-0.1**
I am confident that I will be able to reach my goals	3.1	3.2	-0.1*
I feel I am responsible for my future and my child(ren)'s future	3.5	3.5	0.0
Sample Size	**313**	**212**	

Source: Rural WtW 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]All of the characteristics are based on Lickert scales that measured whether sample members "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" with each statement. Each statement has a maximum value of 4. For consistency, each statement was scored in a positive manner. For example, a score of 3.0 for the statement "I feel that I am being pushed around in life" means that the average client "disagrees" with this statement. In contrast, a score of 3.0 for the statement "I can do anything I set my mind to" means that the average client "agrees" with the statement. The statements were then summed to calculate the aggregate measures for self-efficacy, self-esteem, and future orientation.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

CHAPTER VI

IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AND WELL-BEING FOR THE MORE DISADVANTAGED CLIENTS AND OTHER SUBGROUPS

Was BNF more effective for certain subgroups of the target population? To address this question, we focused on four key subgroups, defined by (1) sample members' level of employability (or disadvantage), (2) time of random assignment, (3) type of family, and (4) population density of the BNF service area. We believed that separate analyses for clients who were relatively more or less disadvantaged might be useful in understanding how to target future program services. We also reasoned that a subgroup analysis by time of random assignment might help isolate the effects of the implementation improvements that occurred during the program's second year. In addition, we considered that BNF may have had different effects for single-parent families than for other types of families because of differences in families' situations and needs, as well as BNF's focus on each client's specific family situation. Finally, we assessed whether BNF had different impacts, depending on the population density of the area being served. Overall, our findings indicate that the program was highly effective for more disadvantaged clients; we find very large impacts on outcomes related to employment, earnings, and government assistance receipt for this subgroup.

MORE AND LESS DISADVANTAGED SUBGROUPS

We hypothesized that impacts on key outcomes might be different for people who, at the time of their enrollment, were relatively more or less disadvantaged. Because BNF targets TANF recipients with serious obstacles and skill deficiencies and relatively low personal functioning, all sample members can be considered disadvantaged. We characterized sample members as "more disadvantaged" if they met two or more of five criteria when they enrolled in BNF: (1) did not have a high school diploma or GED, (2) had

a self-reported health condition that limited their activity, (3) had a transportation barrier, (4) had no earnings in the prior year, or (5) had received TANF or AFDC for two or more years in their lifetime.[1] In contrast, less disadvantaged clients met at most one of these criteria. Approximately 40 percent of both the program and control group samples were considered more disadvantaged, while approximately 60 percent were less disadvantaged.[2] Because the more disadvantaged sample members face greater obstacles to employment and self reliance than the less disadvantaged sample members, more disadvantaged sample members may have had the most to gain from the BNF education and support. In general, we find strong impacts on the employment, earnings, income, and poverty status of more disadvantaged clients, but no impacts on the outcomes of less disadvantaged clients.

Impacts on Employment and Earnings

In this section, we summarize program impacts on employment and earnings outcomes during the 30-month follow-up period after clients were randomly assigned to the BNF program or the control group. We find that, for more disadvantaged clients, BNF improved a variety of outcomes.

- ***BNF increased the amount of time that more disadvantaged clients were engaged in work during the later part of the follow-up period, both in number of months employed and monthly hours worked.***

By most measures, BNF had significant positive impacts on the employment of more disadvantaged clients, but not until the final 18 months of the 30-month follow-up period after most program group members were no longer enrolled in BNF. As shown in the monthly profile of employment presented in Figure VI.1, the employment rates of more disadvantaged program and control group members were similar during the first 12 months following random assignment. After that point, employment rates for these groups diverged somewhat, with more disadvantaged program group members experiencing significantly greater employment than more disadvantaged control group members during three months of the second year following random assignment, and in four of the final six months of the follow-up period.

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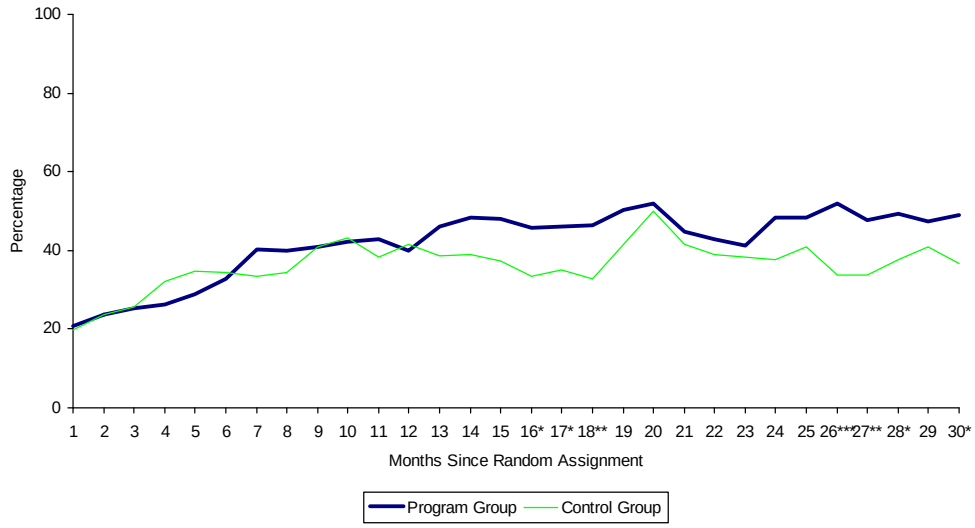
[1] Clients with a health condition that limited their activity were those who responded at baseline that (1) they currently had a health problem that limited the kind or amount of work, training, or schoolwork that they could do (including problems such as a preexisting medical condition, a physical disability, an emotional or mental condition, or drug or alcohol use); or (2) someone else in their household had a disability or serious health problem that made it difficult for them (the sample member) to work, attend training, or go to school. Clients with a transportation barrier were those who responded at baseline that they did not have a driver's license or that they did not own or have access to a vehicle on a daily basis.

[2] About one-third of sample members did not have a high school diploma or GED, 38 percent had a health condition that limited their activity, 33 percent had a transportation barrier, 19 percent had no earnings in the prior year, and 20 percent had received TANF or AFDC for two or more years (not shown). More than three-quarters of sample members met at least one of these conditions, 42 percent met at least two, 16 percent met at least three, and 4 percent met at least four (not shown).

Figure VI.1. Employment Rates for More Disadvantaged Sample Members, by Month After Random Assignment (Percentage)



Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 211 (128 program group members and 83 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. Data are presented in tabular format in Appendix Table F.1.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Summary statistics related to the final 18 months of the follow-up period confirm the visual impression of the monthly employment profile. During the second year of the follow-up period, more disadvantaged BNF clients worked for 5.5 months on average, 22 percent more than the 4.5 months worked by more disadvantaged control group members (Table VI.1). Similarly, during the final 6 months of the followup, more disadvantaged program group members worked 32 percent longer than did more disadvantaged control group members (2.9 versus 2.2 months). In addition, more disadvantaged program group members worked for significantly more hours per month during each of the later two time periods (the second year and the final six months). The numbers of jobs worked by more disadvantaged program and control group members were not significantly different (2.5 versus 2.1 jobs; not shown).

Although there were substantial employment impacts for more disadvantaged BNF clients, there were no significant employment impacts for less disadvantaged clients. Important measures of employment for less disadvantaged program and control group members were statistically indistinguishable for the full follow-up period and for each of the three parts of the follow-up period (Table VI.1). In fact, there are very few significant impacts on any important outcomes for the less disadvantaged subgroup. The rest of our discussion notes any exceptions to this pattern, but otherwise focuses on the more disadvantaged subgroup.

Table VI.1. Employment During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage, Unless Specified Otherwise)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	86.6	78.7	7.9	0.11	95.4	94.5	0.9	0.73
Number of months employed	12.5	10.9	1.6	0.22	17.9	18.2	-0.3	0.79
Monthly hours worked	58.8	49.3	9.5	0.20	83.9	86.6	-2.7	0.69
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	61.9	53.3	8.6	0.17	70.5	78.6	-8.1	0.14
Number of months employed	4.0	3.9	0.2	0.80	6.0	6.3	-0.4	0.56
Monthly hours worked	43.0	43.2	-0.1	0.99	67.1	78.1	-11.0	0.20
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	68.7	71.5	-2.7	0.64	90.7	90.0	0.7	0.85
Number of months employed	5.5	4.5	1.0*	0.09	8.2	8.0	0.1	0.84
Monthly hours worked	67.3	50.0	17.3**	0.04	94.6	91.6	3.0	0.70
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	63.1	52.4	10.7	0.11	82.6	82.7	-0.1	0.99
Number of months employed	2.9	2.2	0.7*	0.07	4.1	3.9	0.2	0.56
Monthly hours worked	75.1	56.3	18.8*	0.10	99.2	99.2	0.0	0.99
Sample Size	**128**	**83**			**174**	**106**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

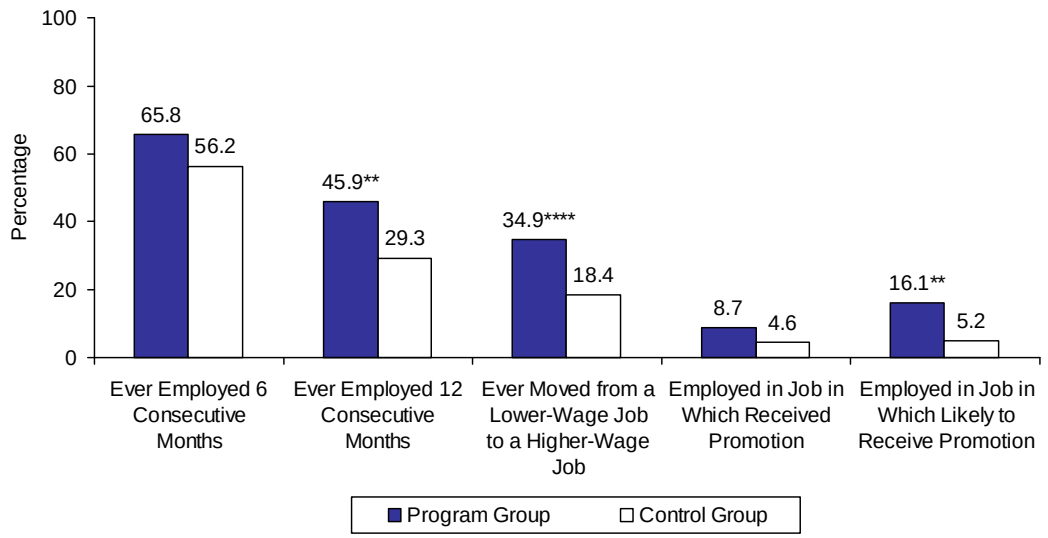
- ***In addition to increasing levels of employment among more disadvantaged clients, BNF improved these clients' ability to retain employment and to move to higher paying jobs.***

We investigated two measures of employment retention: (1) whether the sample member was ever employed for 6 consecutive months during the follow-up period, and

(2) whether the sample member was ever employed for 12 consecutive months. More disadvantaged program group members were not significantly more likely to sustain employment for at least six months during the followup compared to more disadvantaged control group members (Figure VI.2). However, the impact on longer-term employment retention was large and statistically significant; more disadvantaged program group members were two-thirds more likely to sustain employment for at least 12 months than their control group counterparts (46 versus 29 percent).

Workers can experience job advancement in two ways: (1) an employee may leave a job for a higher-paying one, or (2) an employee may receive a wage increase from their current employer. We found that BNF increased the likelihood that more disadvantaged clients would move to a better job, but that it did not affect job advancement with a given employer. In particular, BNF increased the likelihood that more disadvantaged clients would move directly from a lower-wage job to a higher-wage one at some point during the follow-up period; 35 percent of more disadvantaged program group members, compared to 18 percent of more disadvantaged control group members, experienced this event (Figure VI.2). However, the percentage of more disadvantaged program group members who were working in a job in which they had received a raise or a promotion was not significantly different than that of more disadvantaged control group members (9 versus 5 percent). Still,

Figure VI.2. Employment Retention and Job Advancement for More Disadvantaged Sample Members During the Follow-Up Period (Percentage)



Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 211 (128 program group members and 83 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

more disadvantaged BNF clients were more likely to report working in a job in which they would likely receive a promotion—16 percent, versus 5 percent of more disadvantaged control group members. As noted in the previous chapter, this is a subjective measure, but indicates that BNF at least had a positive impact on more disadvantaged clients' optimism about their work skills and employment prospects. BNF increased the likelihood that more disadvantaged clients would be working in higher-paying jobs with better benefits 30 months after random assignment.

- ***BNF increased the likelihood that more disadvantaged clients would be working in higher-paying jobs with better benefits 30 months after random assignment.***

In addition to assessing BNF impacts on whether clients found employment and on employment retention and advancement, we examined whether BNF affected the types of jobs in which clients were employed. This impact is important, both because insurance coverage is important to family well-being and because health insurance coverage is a strong indicator of job quality and future economic success (Moore et al. 2007).

BNF had a positive impact on the quality of the jobs in which more disadvantaged clients were working at the time of the 30-month follow-up survey. For example, more disadvantaged program group members were more than twice as likely as more disadvantaged control group members to be employed in jobs offering hourly wages greater than $8 (20 versus 9 percent; Table VI.2). During the follow-up period, more disadvantaged program group members worked in higher-wage jobs for 4 months on average, compared to 2.5 months for the more disadvantaged control group members; this difference is statistically significant at the five percent level (not shown). At the time of the 30-month followup, the more disadvantaged BNF clients were also more likely to work in a full-time job, to have been employed in their job for at least six months, and to be working in regular daytime shift jobs (Table VI.2). The BNF clients' jobs were more likely to offer important benefits such as health insurance, paid vacation, and retirement plans. In addition, more disadvantaged BNF clients were significantly more likely than their control group counterparts to have been self-employed at some point during the follow-up period (23 versus 11 percent, respectively), though they were not more likely than more disadvantaged control group members to be self-employed at the time of the 30-month survey (not shown). There were no significant impacts on working in temporary or seasonal jobs, or in jobs that provide sick leave.

Employed program group members were working in jobs that offered higher wages than employed control group members, although the average wages of both groups were quite low. Employed program group members earned $7.26 per hour, significantly greater than the $6.12 control group members earned (Table VI.3). As discussed in Chapter V, the difference in wages between employed program group members and employed control group members should not be regarded as a program impact, because BNF affected

Table VI.2. Employment in Jobs with Specific Characteristics at the Time of the 30-Month Follow-Up Survey, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Outcome[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Job Characteristic (%)								
Offers hourly wage greater than $8	20	9	11.2**	0.03	24	25	-1.4	0.79
Is full-time	29	19	9.9*	0.09	39	39	-0.2	0.97
Employed in job at least 6 months	32	22	10.5*	0.08	41	41	-0.1	0.99
Is temporary or seasonal	4	1	2.7	0.27	5	2	3.0	0.23
Is regular daytime shift	33	18	14.9**	0.01	39	37	2.0	0.73
Job Benefit (%)								
Provides health insurance	20	6	14.0***	0.01	35	31	4.5	0.43
Provides sick leave	12	7	5.4	0.20	22	26	-3.7	0.50
Provides paid vacation	20	8	12.3**	0.02	35	30	5.4	0.34
Provides retirement plan	14	6	8.7**	0.05	26	25	1.5	0.78
Sample Size	**128**	**83**			**174**	**106**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. Analogous 18-month measures are presented in Appendix Table F.2.

[a]The sample for these job characteristic variables includes both sample members who were working and those who were not. If the sample were limited only to those who were working, impact estimates would not be valid; see text for more discussion on this point.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table VI.3. Characteristics of the Current or Most Recent Job, for Sample Members Who Were Employed During the Follow-Up Period, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage, Unless Specified Otherwise)

	More Disadvantaged		Less Disadvantaged	
Job Characteristic[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Program Group	Control Group
Hourly Wage Rate (Dollars)	$7.26	$6.12**	6.62	6.20
Number of Months on Job (Months)	7	7	9	8
Usual Hours Worked per Week (Hours)	33	31	34	35
Commute Time to Work (Minutes)	18	14	14	14
Occupation				
Administrative support/clerical	7	11	7	10
Sales/retail	13	14	20	15
Health services	14	21	8	14
Food services	15	23	17	15
Cleaning services	10	13	5	10
Other services	14	4**	14	9
Production/trade	17	10	12	8
Manager/professional/technical	7	2	14	14
Other	3	2	3	6
Sample Size	**112**	**62**	**165**	**98**

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. Analogous 18-month measures are presented in Appendix Table F.3

[a]Because sample members who did not work are not included in the table, program-control group differences may reflect factors other than the effects of the program. Thus, these differences should not be interpreted as program impacts. To highlight this point, we do not show program-control group differences in a separate column, but we do report the significance of differences between workers in the program and control groups.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

employment, and, thus, differences between *employed* members of the two groups may not accurately measure the impact of the program.[3]

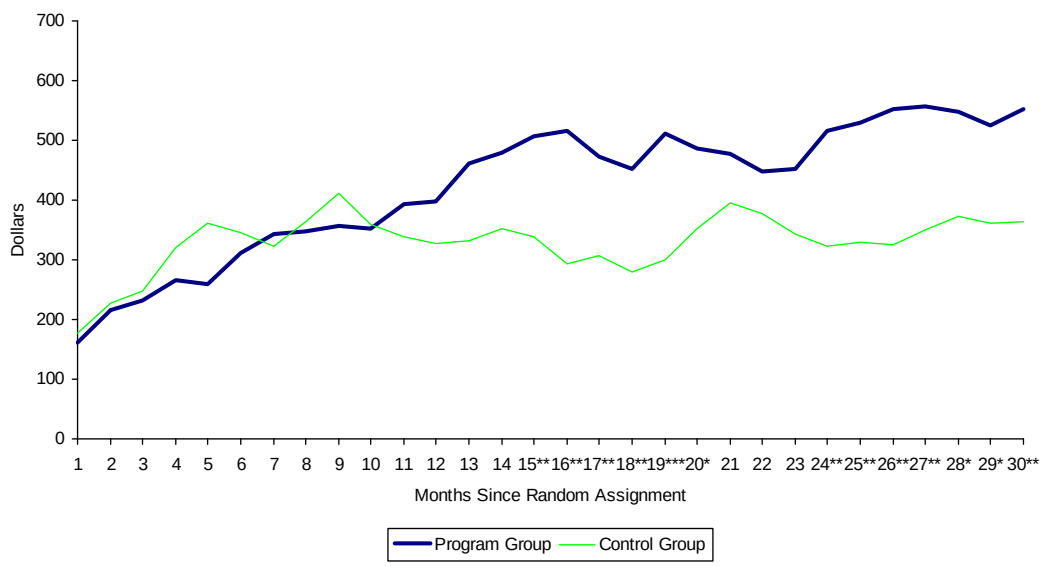
[3] Results related to employment in higher wage jobs (presented in Table VI.2) can be regarded as experimental impacts since this outcome is defined for all sample members, not just employed sample members.

- ***The increased employment and higher wages for more disadvantaged program group members led to significant improvements in earnings for this group. The magnitude of the earnings impacts grew larger over time.***

Positive impacts on employment and on job quality for more disadvantaged BNF clients translated into large impacts on earnings. As the monthly earnings profile shows, monthly earnings had a strong upward trend for more disadvantaged members of both the program and control groups (Figure VI.3). Earnings increased much faster for more disadvantaged program group members than for their control group counterparts. Across the full 30-month follow-up period, the average earnings increase within the more disadvantaged program group was $365, more than twice the $159 increase experienced by the more disadvantaged control group; this difference is statistically significant at the five percent level (not shown). Moreover, average monthly earnings were significantly higher for more disadvantaged program group members than more disadvantaged control group members in all months after month 10 of the follow-up period; these impacts were significantly higher in 13 of the final 18 months of the follow-up period (Figure VI.3).

Summary statistics confirm the patterns of growing earnings impacts for the more disadvantaged subgroup that are suggested by the monthly earnings profile. For the first

Figure VI.3. Monthly Earnings for More Disadvantaged Sample Members, by Month After Random Assignment (2004 Dollars)



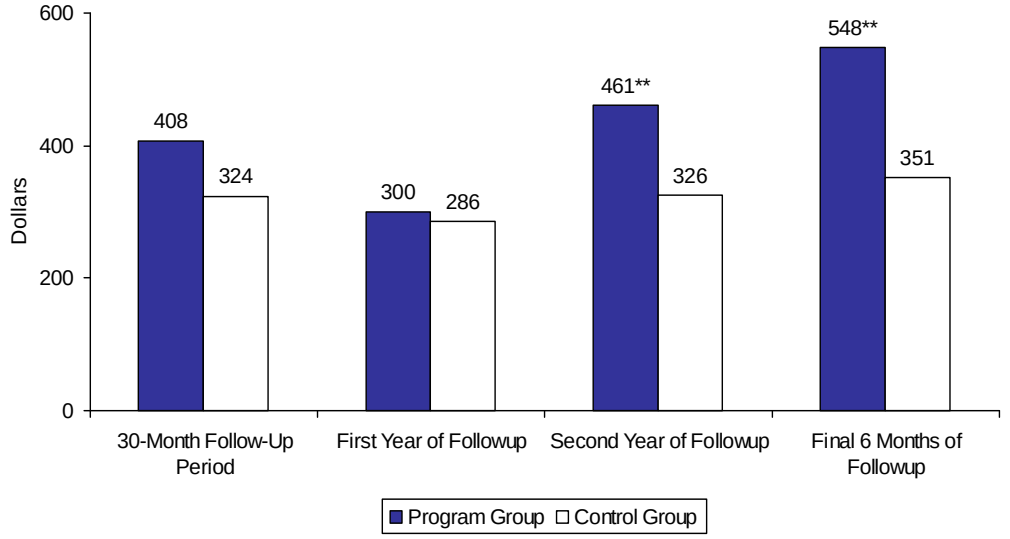
Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 211 (128 program group members and 83 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. Data are presented in tabular format in Appendix Table F.4.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

12 months of the follow-up period, there was no significant difference in the average monthly earnings of more disadvantaged program and control group members. However, average earnings were significantly greater for more disadvantaged program group members during the second year of the followup, and greater still during the final 6 months of the followup (Figure VI.4).[4] In particular, during the second year of the followup, more disadvantaged BNF clients earned $461 per month on average, or 41 percent more than the $326 more disadvantaged control group members earned. During the final six months of the

Figure VI.4. Average Monthly Earnings During the Follow-Up Period for More Disadvantaged Sample Members (2004 Dollars)



Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 211 (128 program group members and 83 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

[4] To verify that BNF's earnings impacts are truly larger for more disadvantaged clients, we tested whether the earnings impacts for more disadvantaged clients were statistically different than those for less disadvantaged clients. The impacts for the more disadvantaged clients on average monthly earnings were statistically different from those of the less disadvantaged subgroup for the full follow-up period (with *p*-value of .0863), for the final 18 months of the followup (with a *p*-value of .0639), and for the final six months of the followup (with a *p*-value of .0386). In addition, the difference between the more and less disadvantaged subgroups' impacts on average monthly earnings was on the cusp of statistical significance for the second year of the followup (with a *p*-value of .1045). Overall, these findings strengthen our confidence that the strong earnings impacts for the more disadvantaged subgroup reflect the effectiveness of BNF for this subgroup and are not spurious.

followup, more disadvantaged program group members earned $548 per month on average, 56 percent more than the $351 more disadvantaged control group members earned.[5]

The pattern of earnings impacts that emerges from administrative Unemployment Insurance (UI) records differs somewhat from the earnings impacts found in the survey data. For the full follow-up period, we found strong positive impacts on earnings; average monthly earnings in jobs covered by UI were $248 for more disadvantaged BNF program group members, 38 percent more than the $180 of more disadvantaged control group members (Appendix Table B.4). However, earnings impacts based on administrative records were positive and significant in the first and second years of the followup, but not in the final six months. This contrasts with the survey-based findings, in which earnings impacts became larger over time. One source of the difference in the timing of the administrative and survey-based earnings impacts is that not all jobs are covered by UI, such as those that are informal, based on self-employment, or through an out-of-state employer. Thus, administrative data may not contain information on all jobs included in the survey data. Indeed, toward the end of the followup, employment rates in the survey data are much higher than those in the administrative data. This finding is consistent with the exclusion of some types of employment from administrative records. For example, according to administrative records, 42 percent of more disadvantaged program group members and 41 percent of more disadvantaged control group members were employed at some point during the final six months of the followup (Appendix Table B.3). According to survey data, these figures were 63 and 52 percent, respectively (Table VI.1). A more detailed comparison of administrative and survey-based findings is provided in Appendix B.

Changes in Welfare Dependence, Self-Sufficiency, and Well-Being

BNF was designed to reduce the welfare dependence and improve the self-sufficiency of its clients by helping them improve their basic life skills, address challenges in their lives, and support their efforts toward employment and ongoing labor market success. In this section, we summarize program impacts on public assistance, family income, and self-sufficiency during the 30-month follow-up period after clients were randomly assigned to the BNF program or the control group. This analysis focuses both on survey reports of outcomes in the month before the time of the 30-month follow-up survey and on administrative TANF and food stamp records covering the full follow-up period. In general, we find that, in addition to improving employment-related outcomes for more disadvantaged clients, BNF reduced the welfare dependence and increased the family income of these clients.

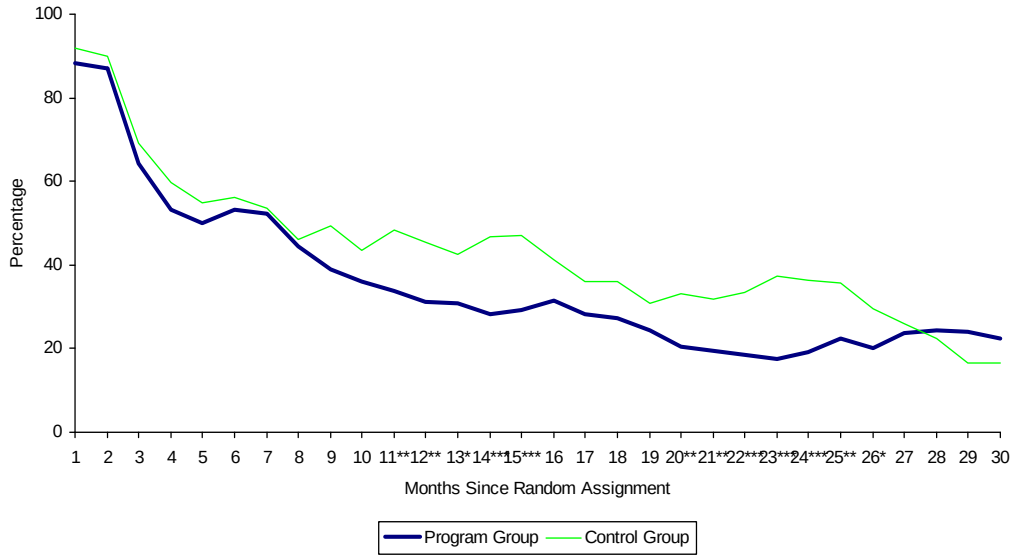
[5]In terms of impacts on the *rate of growth* in earnings, we found that, while there was a significant difference between the program and control groups across the full follow-up period ($365 versus $159, as noted above), there were not impacts on the rate of growth in earnings for each of the three subperiods within the followup. That is, although the rate of growth in earnings was greater for the program than the control group in the first year, in the second year, and in the final six months of the followup, the difference between the groups for each of these periods was not significant, and it narrowed over time (not shown). Nevertheless, the magnitude of the impacts on actual earnings was growing across the 30-month period, and was greatest during the last 6 months of the period.

- ***BNF clients left TANF more quickly than control group members and received less TANF income during the followup. However, by the end of the followup, levels of TANF receipt were similar for the two groups.***

Based on administrative records data, we can examine sample members' monthly TANF receipt. These data show that levels of TANF receipt dropped quickly for more disadvantaged sample members in both the program and control groups; approximately 9 in 10 sample members were on TANF in the first month after random assignment, while only 1 in 5 were on TANF 30 months later (Figure VI.5). Overall, the pattern of declining rates of TANF receipt is not unexpected, because many sample members would have faced increased pressure to leave TANF due to Nebraska's two-year time limit on spells of cash assistance. However, more disadvantaged BNF clients left TANF more quickly than did more disadvantaged control group members, resulting in significantly lower levels of TANF receipt in 12 of the months during the middle of the 30-month followup period. By the end of the followup, though, more disadvantaged control group members had TANF receipt rates that were similarly low to those of more disadvantaged program group members.

The result of this pattern of TANF receipt is that, for the full follow-up period, more disadvantaged BNF clients received TANF for fewer months during the followup than did more disadvantaged control group members (10.6 versus 13.1 months; Table VI.4). In

Figure VI.5. TANF Receipt for More Disadvantaged Sample Members, by Month After Random Assignment (Percentage)



Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation. Based on a sample size of 252 (149 program group members and 103 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. Data are presented in tabular format in Appendix Table F.5.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

addition, more disadvantaged program group members had lower average levels of monthly TANF receipt than did more disadvantaged control group members. Across the full followup, more disadvantaged program group members collected $120 per month on average compared to $149 for more disadvantaged control group members. These differences were driven by differences in the middle of the followup. Program impacts on number of months of TANF receipt and average monthly TANF receipt were significant for the second year of the followup, but not the first year or for the final six months (Table VI.4).

Table VI.4. TANF and Food Stamp Receipt During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period, by Degree of Disadvantage

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	10.6	13.1	-2.5**	0.02	10.4	9.9	0.5	0.51
Monthly TANF receipt (dollars)	120	149	-29**	0.02	117	104	13	0.17
Number of months received FS	20.8	22.7	-1.9	0.10	21.5	20.1	1.4	0.16
Monthly FS receipt (dollars)	215	247	-31**	0.05	229	214	15	0.27
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	6.3	7.1	-0.8	0.11	6.1	6.0	0.1	0.77
Monthly TANF receipt (dollars)	181	204	-23	0.12	168	159	9	0.46
Number of months received FS	9.4	10.1	-0.7*	0.09	9.6	9.0	0.6	0.13
Monthly FS receipt (dollars)	247	276	-29*	0.07	257	240	18	0.20
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	2.9	4.5	-1.6***	0.00	3.2	2.7	0.5	0.25
Monthly TANF receipt (dollars)	81	127	-46***	0.00	94	72	22*	0.08
Number of months received FS	7.8	8.6	-0.8	0.17	8.0	7.3	0.7	0.17
Monthly FS receipt (dollars)	202	236	-35*	0.08	214	200	15	0.38
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	1.4	1.5	-0.1	0.69	1.1	1.1	-0.1	0.73
Monthly TANF receipt (dollars)	75	84	-8	0.61	60	56	4	0.72
Number of months received FS	3.5	3.9	-0.4	0.28	3.9	3.8	0.1	0.62
Monthly FS receipt (dollars)	179	209	-30	0.16	201	191	11	0.55
Sample Size	**149**	**103**			**201**	**134**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

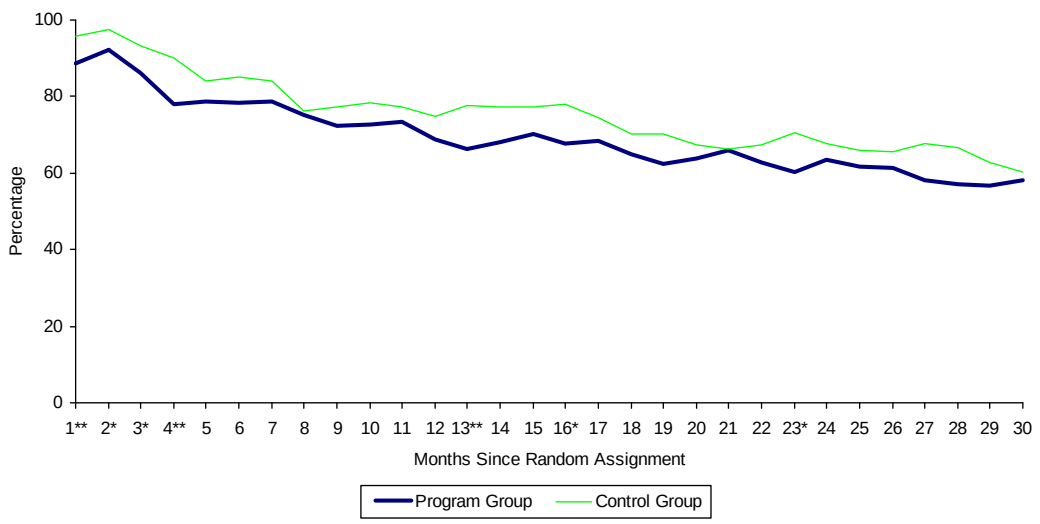
Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

- ***More disadvantaged BNF clients also received less food stamp income than their control group counterparts, though the impacts on food stamp receipt were smaller than those on TANF receipt.***

There is evidence that BNF had a modest impact on food stamp receipt of the more disadvantaged clients in the middle of the follow-up period and no effect toward the end of it. Food stamp receipt dropped steadily during the follow-up period for more disadvantaged members of both the program and control groups (Figure VI.6). This decline was less dramatic than the decline in TANF receipt, as would be expected, because food stamps are available at higher income levels and are not time-limited. Rates of food stamp receipt were lower for more disadvantaged program group members than for more disadvantaged control group members in every month of the followup, although these differences were only significant in 7 of the 30 months. Across the full followup, more disadvantaged BNF clients received food stamp benefits for 20.8 months on average, compared to 22.7 months for more disadvantaged control group members; this difference is on the cusp of statistical significance with a *p*-value of .102. For the full followup, the average monthly income from food stamps was $215 for more disadvantaged BNF clients, significantly less than the $247 of more disadvantaged control group members. This difference was driven by significant differences in the number of months and dollar value of food stamp receipt in the first year of the followup, and in the amount of food stamp receipt in the second year of the followup.

Figure VI.6. Food Stamp Receipt for More Disadvantaged Sample Members, by Month After Random Assignment (Percentage)



Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation. Based on a sample size of 252 (149 program group members and 103 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights. Data are presented in tabular format in Appendix Table F.7.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

- ***BNF did not affect the receipt of income from other forms of public assistance, such as WIC, SSI, or UI for either the more or less disadvantaged subgroups.***

We relied on survey data pertaining to the month before the follow-up surveys for information on public assistance programs other than TANF and food stamps. These data show that at the time of the 30-month followup, there were no statistically significant differences between more disadvantaged program and control group members in the average (self-reported) amount of income received from TANF, food stamps, WIC, SSI, Social Security, UI, or other governmental assistance (Table VI.5).[6] Moreover, the total public assistance income was not significantly different for the more disadvantaged program and control groups; this income amounted to $496 on average for more disadvantaged BNF clients and to $430 for their control group counterparts.

- ***More disadvantaged BNF clients were more likely than their control group counterparts to receive the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).***

We examined whether there were differences in the fraction of sample members who claimed the federal EITC, an important source of income for working families. Through an analysis based on several survey questions, we estimated that 91 percent of more disadvantaged program group members had received, or were likely to have received, the EITC at some point during the follow-up period, a significantly greater rate than the 79 percent of more disadvantaged control group members (not shown).[7] Factors driving this difference could include program impacts on employment (which is necessary to receive the credit), and BNF's emphasis on connecting clients to services. Because we do not have reliable information on the amount of EITC received, this income is not included in total family income or in poverty status calculations.

- ***BNF did not affect income received from most private sources other than sample members' own earnings. However, the program did lead to a significant increase in the amount of income sample members received from child support.***

Overall, more disadvantaged program and control group members received similar amounts of income from private sources other than their own earnings, such as earnings from a spouse or partner, earnings from other income, and earnings from informal jobs (Table VI.5). As found for the full sample, child support income was significantly greater

[6] For the full sample, we observed significant impacts on income received from SSI and from Social Security. We did not find significant differences in these public assistance sources for either the more disadvantaged or the less disadvantaged group, although impacts approach significance at the .10 level for the more disadvantaged group.

[7] As noted in Chapter V, we considered a sample member likely to have received the federal EITC if that sample member reported receiving, or applying to receive it, or if three conditions were met: (1) the estimated annual household earnings of the sample member were below the EITC limit, factoring in differences by family size; (2) someone else had prepared the sample member's tax return; and (3) the sample member had received a federal refund.

Table VI.5. Impacts on Monthly Income in the Month Before the 30-Month Follow-Up Survey, by Degree of Disadvantage

Total Income from Source (2004 Dollars)[a]	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Own Earnings	508	295	213***	0.01	642	668	-26	0.76
Other Private Income Sources	668	525	143	0.31	758	704	55	0.70
Spouse or partner's earnings	396	334	63	0.57	519	436	84	0.50
Other household members' earnings	227	189	38	0.70	204	243	-40	0.61
Earnings from informal/odd jobs[b]	6	4	1.5	0.76	6	15	-9	0.24
Child support	43	15	27*	0.08	38	33	4	0.78
Other private income sources	23	4	19	0.16	0	19	-19**	0.01
Total Public Assistance	496	430	66	0.24	384	343	42	0.37
TANF	74	78	-4	0.86	55	58	-3	0.86
Food stamps	225	230	-5	0.85	208	210	-2	0.94
WIC	14	15	0	0.98	25	24	1	0.85
SSI	140	83	56	0.14	60	44	16	0.49
Social Security	21	5	6	0.18	19	1	17	0.28
Unemployment Insurance	5	10	-5	0.55	15	6	9	0.31
Other governmental assistance	22	10	12	0.43	3	2	2	0.67
Total Income (All Sources)	1,670	1,234	436***	0.01	1,774	1,715	59	0.70
Sample Size	**128**	**83**			**174**	**106**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]By household, during the month before the 18-month follow-up survey. The month before the survey represented a different number of months after random assignment for different clients. For example, for some clients, the month before the survey represented 18 months after random assignment. For others, it represented from 19 to 24 months after random assignment.

[b]Earnings from informal or odd jobs may have been jobs held by either the sample member or another adult household member.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

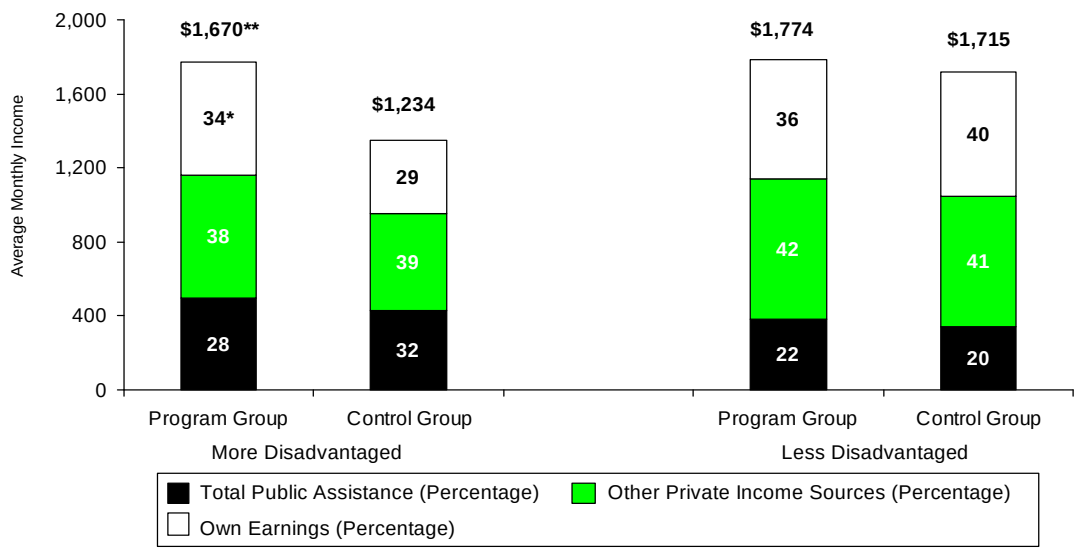
SSI = Supplemental Security Income; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

on average for more disadvantaged program than more disadvantaged control group members in the month before the 30-month followup ($43 versus $15; Table VI.5). However, more disadvantaged program group members were not more likely to have received child support than their control group counterparts (not shown). Child support income represents an important component of income among those who receive it; more disadvantaged program group members who received child support received $384 on average in the month before the 30-month survey, which represented 28 percent of their total family income. This amount is significantly more than the $120 received by more disadvantaged control group members who received child support. The impact on the receipt of income from child support is not unexpected, given the type of mentoring and assistance that BNF educators provided to clients. As noted in Chapter II, educators often assisted clients with logistical challenges, which sometimes included helping them complete the administrative steps required to obtain child support benefits.

- ***BNF improved total family income for the more disadvantaged subgroup by more than a third.***

More disadvantaged BNF program group members had incomes that were significantly greater than those of more disadvantaged control group members in the month before the 30-month follow-up survey (Figure VI.7). More disadvantaged program group members had

Figure VI.7. Impacts on Average Monthly Income and Income Sources, by Household During the Month Before Survey (2004 Dollars)



Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 211 (128 program group members and 83 control group members).

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

an average monthly household income of $1,670—35 percent more than the $1,234 of more disadvantaged control group members. The difference in more disadvantaged program and control group members' total income was driven primarily by differences in their own earnings, which represented about half of the total difference in income (Table VI.5). Differences in other private income sources represented about a third of the total difference in income, while the rest was made up of differences in public assistance income.

On average, more disadvantaged program group members' own earnings represented slightly more than a third of total income during the month before the 30-month follow-up survey, a significantly greater percentage than the 29 percent of income represented by own earnings for more disadvantaged control group members (Figure VI.7). The largest component of income for both groups at the time of both surveys was from private income sources other than own earnings (such as earnings of a spouse, partner, or another adult in the household), which comprised about 40 percent of total income for both groups. Approximately 30 percent of the average monthly income for more disadvantaged members of both the program and control groups came from different forms of public assistance.

- ***Poverty and extreme poverty were significantly less common among more disadvantaged BNF participants than their control group counterparts.***

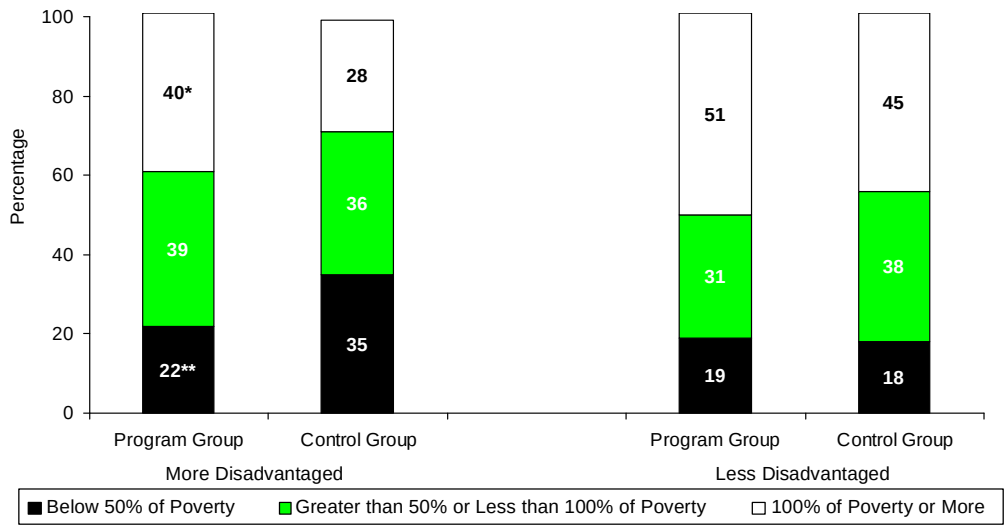
BNF had strong impacts on poverty and extreme poverty, two key measures of family well-being. Although poverty rates were high at the time of the 30-month followup for both groups of more disadvantaged sample members, the more disadvantaged BNF clients were much less likely to be in poverty than were their control group counterparts. In the month before the 30-month survey, about 60 percent of more disadvantaged BNF clients, compared to 72 percent of more disadvantaged control group members, had household income that was below the federal poverty threshold for the size of their household (Figure VI.8).[8] Moreover, less than one-quarter of more disadvantaged program group members were living in extreme poverty (or had incomes that were less than 50 percent of the poverty threshold), while 35 percent of more disadvantaged control group members were in extreme poverty.

- ***BNF had no effect on marital status for more disadvantaged clients.***

As was the case for the full sample, more disadvantaged BNF clients were not significantly more likely than more disadvantaged control group members to be married and living with their spouse. At the time of the 30-month followup, 17 percent of more disadvantaged program group members and 18 percent of more disadvantaged control group members were married and living with a spouse (not shown). Moreover, BNF did not

[8] These poverty rates, as well as those highlighted later in the chapter for other subgroups, are based on the 2004 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines for the size of the sample members' households. Poverty rates are similar using the U.S. Census Bureau poverty thresholds (62 versus 73 percent), as are severe poverty rates (23 versus 36 percent). For the other subgroups, described below, poverty rates were also similar using the two definitions.

Figure VI.8. Households Living Above and Below Poverty at 30-Month Followup, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage)



Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Based on a sample size of 211 (128 program group members and 83 control group members).

Note: Poverty levels are based on DHHS federal poverty guidelines for the year 2004. All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

increase the probability that more disadvantaged participants who were single at baseline became married during the followup. Less than 10 percent of both groups who were single at the time of random assignment were married and living with a spouse at the time of the 30-month follow-up (not shown).

- ***More disadvantaged BNF clients were half as likely as control group members to be separated from their minor children 30 months after random assignment.***

An important measure of family functioning and well-being is whether parents are living with their children. Having children removed from the home by the child welfare system was a concern expressed by several BNF clients in the focus groups. Moreover, during the site visit interviews, most of the educators mentioned that some of their clients had been concerned about having their children removed from their home, or more generally, that clients were concerned about not being able to care adequately for their children. BNF had a significant impact on the likelihood that more disadvantaged clients would not be separated from their children at the time of the follow-up interview. About 10 percent of more disadvantaged program group members were separated from their children 30 months after random assignment, compared to 21 percent of their control group counterparts (not shown). This finding may suggest that BNF's education and services, as intended, did help to improve clients' ability to manage their lives and perform their parenting responsibilities.

Impacts on Hardships and Self-Concept

In this section, we investigate impacts on outcomes that reflect hardships and difficulties experienced by more disadvantaged sample members during the follow-up period, such as health problems, housing problems, and food availability. We also look at program effects on aspects of self-concept, such as self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy.

- ***More disadvantaged BNF clients were less likely than their control group counterparts to experience health problems at the end of the follow-up period, but more likely to experience housing and food availability problems.***

BNF could affect a wide array of obstacles and hardships faced by more disadvantaged clients in two ways. By helping clients improve life skills and family functioning, BNF could provide clients with the ability to address hardships they may have faced. However, because BNF had large impacts on employment, there may have been indirect effects related to the financial and other costs of working. That is, the added pressures that working can create for a household could have led to a greater prevalence of hardships. We find evidence of both of these types of effects on hardships. For more disadvantaged clients, BNF reduced reports of obstacles related to physical and mental health. However, the program increased reports of obstacles related to certain housing issues and to food availability.

At the time of the 30-month followup, more disadvantaged BNF clients were significantly less likely than more disadvantaged control group members to report having any of the four types of health problems we examined; 56 percent of program group members experienced a health problem, compared to 71 percent of their control group counterparts (Table VI.6). The specific health problems driving this difference were whether overall health was fair or poor, and whether a mental health problem inhibits work, training, or school activities. The increased employment experienced by more disadvantaged BNF clients may be related to these findings, because these clients were more likely to have health insurance through their jobs. There may also be positive emotional benefits associated with working.

In addition to reduced health problems, more disadvantaged BNF clients were less than half as likely as more disadvantaged control group members to report having been the victim of physical abuse by their spouse during the six months before the 30-month survey; 6 percent of program group members reported domestic abuse, compared to 15 percent of their control group counterparts (Table VI.6). More disadvantaged BNF clients were also four times less likely to report drug or alcohol problems (2 versus 9 percent).

More disadvantaged BNF clients were also less likely to be living in public or government-subsidized housing at the time of the 30-month survey (18 versus 29 percent—Table VI.6). While this result may point toward an improvement in housing situation and increased self-sufficiency for BNF clients, moving away from public housing could lead to increased housing costs.[9] Indeed, we found that more disadvantaged program group

[9] Average housing costs for sample members living in public housing were $371, compared to $648 for those living in other types of housing.

Table VI.6. Differences in the Prevalence of Obstacles and Hardships at the 30-Month Follow-Up Survey, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentages)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Characteristic	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Health Problems or Issues[a]								
Overall health is fair or poor	37	54	-16.9**	0.01	29	36	-7.4	0.16
Poor health inhibits work, training, or school	29	35	-6.6	0.25	22	26	-4.2	0.40
Physical disability or illness	24	26	-2.2	0.69	15	21	-6.7	0.15
Mental health problem inhibits work, training, or school	14	23	-8.3*	0.10	29	25	4.3	0.43
Any health problems	56	71	-15.2**	0.02	48	49	-1.2	0.84
Challenges That Hindered Work[b]								
Transportation problems	42	47	-4.9	0.48	30	23	7.1	0.19
Child care problems	23	18	4.1	0.45	19	21	-1.6	0.74
Lack of support or resistance to working from family/friends	20	14	5.0	0.35	16	14	1.3	0.77
Physical abuse by spouse or partner	6	15	-8.3*	0.06	3	8	-5.5*	0.06
Drug or alcohol problems	2	9	-6.4*	0.07	3	2	1.3	0.51
Any challenges that hindered work	57	57	-0.2	0.98	51	47	3.8	0.54
Lack of Health Insurance Coverage								
Uninsured at followup	34	29	-5.3	0.42	40	31	9.5	0.11
Sometimes uninsured during follow-up	74	72	2.1	0.73	75	74	0.8	0.87
Children uninsured at followup	7	3	3.7	0.27	8	2	6.5**	0.04
Children sometimes uninsured during follow-up	21	20	1.5	0.80	23	25	2.1	0.68
Any health insurance coverage issue	75	72	3.2	0.59	76	76	0.0	0.99
Housing Issues[c]								
Lived in public or subsidized housing	18	29	-10.6*	0.08	18	18	0.7	0.88
Could not pay rent or mortgage	57	47	10.1	0.13	56	63	-7.0	0.25
Evicted from home or apartment	26	28	-2.2	0.71	23	19	4.2	0.39
Could not pay utility bill	61	50	11.6*	0.08	66	64	2.1	0.72
Had utility turned off	44	30	13.5**	0.05	32	42	-9.9*	0.08
Homeless or lived in a shelter	27	16	10.4*	0.07	13	13	-0.1	0.99
Any housing issue	81	81	-0.2	0.98	82	80	1.8	0.72
Food Availability[c]								
Food was often or sometimes not available	74	61	13.6**	0.04	67	56	11.3*	0.06
Sample Size	**128**	**83**			**174**	**106**		

TABLE VI.6 *(continued)*

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-Month Follow-Up Survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]The health measures represent sample members' self-reported health status at the time of the survey or in the six months before the survey.
[b]These measures are based on self-reports pertaining to the six months before the survey.
[c]These measures refer to obstacles experienced any time during the follow-up period.

members had average monthly housing costs of $638, significantly greater than the $492 of more disadvantaged control group members (not shown).

Although BNF reduced the incidence of some types of problems among disadvantaged clients, it increased the reports of other types of problems. In particular, more disadvantaged program group members were more likely than their control group counterparts to report that they could not pay a utility bill, that they had a utility turned off, or that they had been homeless or lived in a shelter at some point during the 30-month follow-up period (Table VI.6). More disadvantaged program group members were also more likely to report having times where food was not available at some point during the 30-month followup. These findings are somewhat surprising, given the large positive impacts on family income for more disadvantaged BNF clients. However, the measures of family income and poverty, described above, are based on gross family income, and do not factor in differences in sample members' expenditures. It is possible that the impacts on food and housing hardships reflect increased time and resource costs associated with employment, as well as the increased housing costs discussed above.

- ***Scores on measures of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation were positive for both program and control group members in the more disadvantaged subgroup***.

As with the full sample, the scores of more disadvantaged members of both the program and control groups on self-concept measures suggest generally positive responses in self-esteem, sense of self-efficacy, and future orientation. Most respondents in both groups indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with most items stated positively, such as "What happens to me in the future depends on me" and disagreed or strongly disagreed with most items stated negatively, such as "I have little control over the things that happen to me." Unlike the full sample, there is little evidence that more disadvantaged program group members responded less positively than control group members to questions regarding self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation (Table VI.7). Overall scores on measures of self-esteem, self-efficacy and future orientation showed no significant impacts. In terms of individual items, more disadvantaged program group members were less likely to feel that "What happens to me in the future depends on me," however no other items had significantly different responses.

In general, impacts on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientations for less disadvantaged sample members were more similar to those for the overall sample (Table VI.7). Less disadvantaged program group members responded significantly less positively than control group members to questions regarding self-esteem. Differences in overall

Table VI.7. Clients' Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Future Orientation at the Time of the 18-Month Follow-Up Survey, by Degree of Disadvantage

	More Disadvantaged			Less Disadvantaged		
Characteristic[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate
Self-Esteem (out of 12)	8.7	9.0	0.3	9.1	9.6	-0.5***
I am able to do things as well as most people	3.1	3.2	-0.1	3.2	3.4	-0.2***
I certainly feel useless at times	2.6	2.6	0.0	2.7	2.8	-0.1
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	3.1	3.2	-0.1		3.4	-0.2***
Self-Efficacy or Sense of Control (out of 28)	20.2	21.0	-0.8	3.2 21.7	22.1	-0.3
There is no way I can solve some of the problems I have	2.6	2.7	-0.1	2.9	2.8	0.0
I feel that I am being pushed around in life	2.7	2.7	0.0	3.0	3.0	-0.1
I have little control over the things that happen to me	2.8	3.0	-0.2	3.1	3.2	-0.1
I can do anything I set my mind to	3.2	3.2	0.0		3.3	0.0
I feel helpless in dealing with the problems in my life	2.8	2.8	0.0	3.0	3.0	0.0
What happens to me in the future depends on me	3.4	3.5	-0.1*	3.3 3.4	3.5	-0.1*
There is little I can do to change the important things in my life	2.9	3.1	-0.1		3.1	-0.1
Future Orientation (out of 12)	9.5	9.9	-0.3	3.1 9.8	9.9	-0.1
I have a plan for the future	3.0	3.1	-0.1	3.1	3.2	-0.1
I am confident that I will be able to reach my goals	3.0	3.2	-0.1	3.2	3.2	-0.1
I feel I am responsible for my future and my child(ren)'s future	3.5	3.6	-0.1		3.5	0.0
Sample Size	**130**	**85**		3.5 **176**	**122**	

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]All of the characteristics are based on Lickert scales that measured whether sample members "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" with each statement. Each statement has a maximum value of four. For the sake of consistency, each statement was scored in a positive manner. For example, a score of 3.0 for the statement "I feel that I am being pushed around in life" means that the average client "disagrees" with this statement. In contrast, a score of 3.0 for the statement "I can do anything I set my mind to" means that the average client "agrees" with the statement. The statements were then summed to calculate the aggregate measures for self-efficacy, self-esteem, and future orientation.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

scores for self-efficacy and future orientation were also negative, although these differences were not statistically significant.[10]

IMPACTS FOR EARLY AND LATE RANDOM ASSIGNMENT

Because of the implementation improvements made during the demonstration, we hypothesized that outcomes would be better for program group members who were randomly assigned and served during the second half of the demonstration. However, we found only modest evidence that the outcomes of program participants assigned in the second half of the demonstration were superior to those of their control group counterparts.

- ***BNF clients randomly assigned in the second year of the demonstration were more likely to work toward the end of the followup; however, there were no significant differences for other employment and earnings outcomes.***

BNF participants assigned in the second half of the demonstration were significantly more likely to have been employed during the final six months of the follow-up period—79 percent, compared to 68 percent of control group members assigned in the second half of the demonstration (Table VI.8). However, late assignment program group members did not work for a greater number of months than their control group counterparts either during the full 30-month follow-up period or for any of the three follow-up subperiods. Moreover, there were no significant impacts on monthly earnings during the followup for this subgroup.

There also is little evidence that participants assigned in the first half of the demonstration were more likely to be employed or have higher earnings than control group members assigned in the first half of the demonstration (Table VI.8). Program group members in this group were less likely to be employed during the second year of the followup than their counterpart control group members, but other outcomes on employment and earnings showed no significant differences between the program and control group members in the early assignment group.

- ***There is no evidence that BNF reduced government assistance receipt for program participants assigned either during the first or second year of the demonstration.***

For both those assigned in the first half and in the second half of the demonstration,

[10] An additional 14 items on the 18-month survey assessed sample members' confidence in their ability to engage in positive behaviors and connect with family, friends, and community. (See Appendix Table F.9) Overall, both the more and less disadvantaged clients from both the program and control groups were mostly confident in their ability to perform various activities. For both subgroups, program group members generally responded somewhat less positively than control group members, although most of the responses between the program and control groups were not significantly different.

Table VI.8. Subgroup Impacts on Employment and Earnings, by Time of Random Assignment

	Early Assignment Period				Late Assignment Period			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	88.2	86.1	2.1	0.58	93.7	85.6	8.1*	0.43
Number of months employed	13.9	14.2	-0.3	0.81	16.7	14.9	1.8	0.53
Monthly hours worked	62.8	64.8	-1.9	0.75	80.4	72.8	7.6	0.64
Monthly earnings (dollars)	430	472	-42	0.39	569	544	25	0.96
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	63.3	65.8	-2.5	0.63	66.6	67.9	-1.3	0.84
Number of months employed	4.6	5.1	-0.5	0.35	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.99
Monthly hours worked	52.7	58.7	-6.0	0.43	56.9	66.1	-9.2	0.32
Monthly earnings (dollars)	357	418	-61	0.29	417	488	-71	0.35
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	71.9	81.5	-9.6**	0.04	84.7	81.9	2.8	0.55
Number of months employed	8.2	8.0	0.1	0.84	7.7	6.3	1.4	0.79
Monthly hours worked	67.9	67.7	0.2	0.97	92.8	75.0	17.8*	0.06
Monthly earnings (dollars)	468	500	-31	0.59	650	560	90	0.25
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	71.0	65.8	5.3	0.32	79.0	67.9	11.1*	0.08
Number of months employed	3.3	2.9	0.4	0.19	3.8	3.3	0.5	0.20
Monthly hours worked	75.9	73.8	2.2	0.80	100.6	86.0	14.6	0.25
Monthly earnings (dollars)	521	541	-21	0.76	721	619	102	0.33
Sample Size	**179**	**118**			**130**	**74**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

program participants did not receive TANF or food stamp benefits for fewer months than control group members, nor did they receive smaller amounts of these benefits (Table VI.9). For example, early assignment program group members received TANF benefits for about six and one-half months during the 30-month follow-up period, which is not significantly different than the months of benefit receipt for early assignment control group members. Late assignment program and control group members also received TANF for slightly more than six months on average.

- ***BNF clients assigned in the second half of the demonstration did not have significantly higher incomes than their control group counterparts; however, their poverty rates were lower.***

Total monthly income for the average program group member assigned in the second half of the demonstration was $1,706, compared to $1,510 for the average control group member assigned in the second half of the demonstration (Table VI.9). This difference in total income was not significant. However, BNF did lift some late assignment program group members out of the lowest end of the income distribution—late assignment program group members were less likely than their control group counterparts to be in poverty. Nearly half of those assigned to the BNF program in the second half of the demonstration were in poverty 30 months after random assignment, compared to close to two-thirds of late assignment control group members.

IMPACTS FOR OTHER SUBGROUPS

In addition to examining impacts by degree of disadvantage and by the time of random assignment, we investigated impacts based on type of family and local population density. This section discusses these findings.

- ***Impacts related to employment, income, and hardships varied somewhat by whether the BNF client was in a single-parent family at baseline or in a family with a married or cohabiting head or other multiple adults.***

It is possible that BNF had different impacts for single parent families and other types of families both because of differences in these types of families' needs and because of BNF's focus on each client's specific family situation. Therefore, we investigated whether impacts differed for single-parent families compared to other types of families (Tables VI.10 and VI.11). The patterns that emerged from this subgroup analysis are not as clear as those from the other subgroup analyses discussed above. There is some evidence of employment impacts for single-parent clients; these clients were significantly more likely than their control group counterparts to be employed at some point during the full follow-up period and during the final six months of the followup. However, there were no impacts on earnings, income, or poverty for single-parent families. Moreover, BNF clients in single-parent families experienced greater incidence of some types of housing problems, such as not being able to pay utility bills and being homeless or living in a shelter. As discussed in the degree of disadvantage subgroup section, these increased hardships may be related to increased time and resource costs of working.

Table VI.9. Subgroup Impacts on Government Assistance Receipt and Income, by Time of Random Assignment

Outcome	Early Assignment Period				Late Assignment Period			
	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Government Assistance Receipt								
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	11.0	11.3	-0.3	0.75	10.3	11.5	-1.1	0.22
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	124	132	-8	0.48	114	119	-5	0.66
Number of months received FS	20.8	20.1	0.7	0.52	21.6	22.5	-0.9	0.38
Average amount of FS (dollars)	212	225	-13	0.35	231	235	-4	0.78
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	6.5	6.6	-0.1	0.79	6.1	6.4	-0.4	0.38
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	179	189	-10	0.44	170	173	-3	0.84
Number of months received FS	9.3	9.0	0.3	0.50	9.8	10.0	-0.3	0.51
Average amount of FS (dollars)	231	249	-18	0.21	270	266	4	0.78
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	3.3	3.4	-0.2	0.72	3.0	3.7	-0.8	0.13
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	94	103	-9	0.50	84	95	-11	0.45
Number of months received FS	7.6	7.4	0.3	0.60	8.1	8.5	-0.4	0.44
Average amount of FS (dollars)	201	212	-12	0.50	212	224	-12	0.50
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	1.3	1.3	0.0	0.99	1.3	1.3	0.0	0.93
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	76	76	0.0	0.99	65	61	4	0.76
Number of months received FS	3.8	3.7	0.1	0.61	3.7	3.9	-0.2	0.52
Average amount of FS (dollars)	195	203	-8	0.67	191	195	-4	0.86
Income and Poverty								
Total monthly income (dollars)	1,733	1,459	274*	0.07	1,706	1,510	196	0.21
Income below poverty	62.5	61.7	0.9	0.88	48.2	63.9	-15.8**	0.02
Sample Size	**200**	**147**			**158**	**95**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.; and administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

FS = food stamps; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Table VI.10. Subgroup Impacts on Employment and Earnings, by Type of Family

	Single-Parent				Other Household			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	95.3	85.6	9.7***	0.01	85.2	85.9	-0.7	0.27
Number of months employed	16.0	15.2	0.8	0.51	14.7	13.8	0.9	0.94
Monthly hours worked	74.6	71.7	2.8	0.60	70.4	63.2	7.2	0.63
Monthly earnings (dollars)	508	508	-1	0.93	512	485	27	0.98
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	69.9	68.5	1.4	0.79	61.5	63.9	-2.4	0.67
Number of months employed	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.95	4.8	5.1	-0.3	0.66
Monthly hours worked	59.3	64.0	-4.7	0.59	52.8	58.7	-6.0	0.47
Monthly earnings (dollars)	405	449	-43	0.51	400	430	-30	0.66
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	82.5	80.5	2.0	0.65	75.5	81.1	-5.7	0.22
Number of months employed	7.1	6.6	0.5	0.73	6.7	5.8	1.0	0.21
Monthly hours worked	82.5	75.4	7.2	0.38	80.9	63.5	17.4**	0.03
Monthly earnings (dollars)	561	538	23	0.72	581	497	85	0.25
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	81.0	69.0	11.9**	0.02	65.2	66.6	-1.5	0.80
Number of months employed	3.8	3.2	0.6*	0.09	3.2	3.0	0.2	0.50
Monthly hours worked	88.4	81.9	6.5	0.51	86.7	73.3	13.4	0.19
Monthly earnings (dollars)	602	562	41	0.60	636	575	61	0.50
Sample Size	**156**	**89**			**140**	**99**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc..

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table VI.11. Subgroup Impacts on Government Assistance Receipt and Income, by Type of Family

	Single-Parent				Other Household			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Government Assistance Receipt								
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	11.2	11.9	-0.7	0.43	9.9	10.8	-0.9	0.36
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	127	132	-5	0.66	112	117	-5	0.66
Number of months received FS	21.9	22.4	-0.5	0.62				
Average amount of FS (dollars)	228	238	-9	0.49	212	221	-10	0.53
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	6.7	6.9	-0.2	0.69	5.8	6.0	-0.2	0.63
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	189	192	-2	0.86	161	165	-4	0.78
Number of months received FS	10.0	9.9	0.0	0.99	9.0	9.1	-0.2	0.68
Average amount of FS (dollars)	261	264	-3	0.84	237	251	-13	0.40
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	3.2	3.7	-0.6	0.20	2.9	3.6	-0.7	0.18
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	86	92	-7	0.38	79	85	-6	0.40
Number of months received FS	8.1	8.3	-0.2	0.64	7.5	7.6	-0.1	0.88
Average amount of FS (dollars)	207	221	-14	0.42	194	202	-8	0.52
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	1.4	1.3	0.0	0.84	1.2	1.2	0.0	0.98
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	76	72	4	0.75	69	61	8	0.57
Number of months received FS	3.9	4.1	-0.3	0.41	3.6	3.5	0.2	0.64
Average amount of FS (dollars)	195	209	14	0.47	189	187	2	0.91
Income and Poverty								
Total monthly income (dollars)	1,590	1,454	136	0.32	1,878	1,502	376**	0.03
Income below poverty	56.8	60.3	-3.5	0.55	52.4	65.7	-13.2**	0.03
Sample Size	**189**	**122**			**165**	**117**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.; and administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

FS = food stamps; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

In contrast to single-parent families, among BNF clients in families with married or cohabiting heads or other multiple adults, there is no evidence that BNF increased the likelihood of employment or the amount of earnings among sample members. However, BNF did significantly improve family income and reduce poverty among this subgroup. For BNF clients in families with married or cohabiting heads, total family income in the month

before the final follow-up survey was $1,878, while income for their control group counterparts was $1,502. This difference was driven almost entirely by differences in income from private sources other than own earnings, in particular by the earnings of the sample member's spouse or partner. In addition to having higher income, program group members in families with married or cohabiting heads were less likely to experience some types of health problems. In particular, they were significantly less likely to report being in fair or poor health, to have a health problem that inhibited work or school activities, or to report having a physical disability (not shown).

- ***Impacts did not vary in important ways by sample members' local population density.***

We also examined the outcomes of clients living in areas of Nebraska with different levels of population density (Tables VI.12 and VI.13). Although all the areas that BNF targets can be considered rural, we hypothesized that sample members living in very remote and sparsely populated rural areas might have more to gain from the BNF program than those living in more densely populated areas in or near small- to mid-size towns.[11] However, we found no evidence of employment or earnings impacts for either degree of rurality subgroup. There were also few significant program impacts for outcomes related to public assistance receipt, total income, or poverty rates in either less or more rural counties. One exception is that BNF clients in less rural areas received TANF benefits for fewer months during the full follow-up period and during the second year of the followup. On the whole, there is little evidence that BNF has different impacts depending on the degree of rurality of the population served.

[11]We characterized sample members as living in more rural areas if the population density of the primary county in their BNF service area was less than the average population density of BNF's target counties. The average population density of the BNF counties was 16.3 people per square mile of land area. The most dense county in BNF's target area had a density of 98, while the least dense had a density of 1. The county-level population density data are from the U.S. Census, Data on Population, Housing Units, Area, and Density, 2000.

Table VI.12. Subgroup Impacts on Employment and Earnings, by Population Density

Outcome	More Rural				Less Rural			
	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	89.6	88.0	1.6	0.67	89.2	89.2	-0.1	0.98
Number of months employed	14.6	15.1	-0.5	0.66	14.9	15.0	-0.1	0.92
Monthly hours worked	71.2	73.8	-2.6	0.74	68.7	67.7	1.0	0.89
Monthly earnings (dollars)	499	521	-21	0.74	481	501	-20	0.72
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	62.8	67.2	-4.4	0.43	64.2	68.8	-4.6	0.41
Number of months employed	5.1	5.8	-0.7	0.26	4.7	5.0	-0.3	0.57
Monthly hours worked	61.2	74.7	-13.5	0.13	48.0	54.8	-6.7	0.38
Monthly earnings (dollars)	462	503	-41	0.58	332	414	-82	0.18
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	78.4	85.3	-6.9	0.12	76.4	80.5	-4.0	0.39
Number of months employed	6.8	6.2	0.6	0.41	6.9	6.2	0.7	0.36
Monthly hours worked	82.1	71.0	11.1	0.18	76.7	73.4	3.3	0.68
Monthly earnings (dollars)	594	526	69	0.33	525	539	-15	0.82
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	71.1	65.1	6.0	0.29	75.2	70.4	4.8	0.39
Number of months employed	3.1	3.1	0.0	0.98	3.8	3.2	0.5	0.11
Monthly hours worked	79.8	78.9	0.9	0.93	91.2	80.3	10.9	0.28
Monthly earnings (dollars)	543	561	-18	0.84	657	590	67	0.43
Sample Size	**158**	**95**			**145**	**93**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table VI.13. Subgroup Impacts on Government Assistance Receipt and Income, by Population Density

	More Rural				Less Rural			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Government Assistance Receipt								
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	12.5	11.3	1.2	0.18	9.5	11.3	-1.9**	0.04
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	139	131	8	0.45	107	121	-14	0.19
Number of months received FS	21.3	20.9	0.4	0.69	21.2	21.4	-0.3	0.81
Average amount of FS (dollars)	228	244	-16	0.29	216	221	-5	0.71
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	7.1	6.8	0.3	0.52	5.7	6.3	-0.6	0.18
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	193	192	1	0.92	162	173	-10	0.44
Number of months received FS	9.5	9.5	0.0	0.99	9.7	9.5	0.2	0.56
Average amount of FS (dollars)	253	271	-18	0.23	250	247	3	0.83
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	3.8	3.3	0.5	0.25	2.7	3.7	-1.0**	0.03
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	109	99	10	0.49	76	97	-21	0.13
Number of months received FS	7.9	7.6	0.4	0.52	7.9	8.2	-0.3	0.55
Average amount of FS (dollars)	214	228	-13	0.48	199	213	-14	0.42
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Number of months received TANF	1.6	1.2	0.4	0.11	1.1	1.3	-0.3	0.24
Average amount of TANF (dollars)	89	71	18	0.24	58	67	-8	0.50
Number of months received FS	3.9	3.9	0.1	0.78	3.6	3.8	-0.2	0.62
Average amount of FS (dollars)	206	224	-18	0.36	181	185	-5	0.81
Income and Poverty								
Total monthly income (dollars)	1621	1388	233	0.14	1766	1573	193	0.20
Income below poverty	67.4	70.2	2.9	0.61	47.4	56.9	-9.5	0.13
Sample Size	**180**	**118**			**170**	**124**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.; and administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

Dollar estimates represent year 2004 dollars.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

FS = food stamps; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

CHAPTER VII

COMPARING THE BENEFITS AND COSTS OF BUILDING NEBRASKA FAMILIES

A comparison of the benefits and costs of Building Nebraska Families (BNF) tells us whether the benefits of the program appear large enough to justify an investment of public resources. In this chapter, we build upon the program impacts described previously to assess BNF's benefits and costs to society and important stakeholders. First, we introduce an overall framework for analyzing benefits and costs from several perspectives—participants, the government, and society as a whole. We then describe our approach to calculating dollar values for various types of program impacts. Finally, we present estimates of the program's net benefits for the full sample and the more disadvantaged subgroup.

Our benchmark estimates indicate that BNF's estimated costs per participant exceeded its estimated benefits to society per participant during the 30-month follow-up period, both for the full sample and the more disadvantaged subgroup. Yet the pattern of sample members' earnings suggests that positive impacts may continue after 30 months, particularly among more disadvantaged sample members. We thus extrapolate earnings impacts beyond the observation period to explore whether the program's benefits could equal or exceed its costs over time.

In addition, we test the sensitivity of our results to changes in benchmark assumptions. We find that our basic conclusion regarding whether the program creates net benefits or net costs to society is robust to these changes.

FRAMEWORK FOR THE BENEFIT-COST ANALYSIS

The benefit-cost analysis involves four main tasks: (1) itemizing benefits and costs from the perspectives of key stakeholders, (2) assigning dollar values to benefits and costs, (3) accounting for the passage of time with inflation adjustments and discounting, and (4) analyzing the sensitivity of results to changes in key assumptions. Next, we describe our basic approach to these tasks.

ITEMIZING BENEFITS AND COSTS

The starting point for the benefit-cost analysis is an itemization of the expected benefits and costs of BNF from various perspectives. BNF had many stakeholders, and the distinction between a benefit or cost depends on the perspective adopted. For example, an increase in taxes represents a cost to participants but an equal benefit to the government, while from society's perspective these benefits and costs offset each other.

We focus on the perspectives of three main groups: (1) participants, (2) government, and (3) society as a whole. Benefits and costs to society are the sum of the benefits and costs accruing to the other groups; the social perspective thus indicates how the program affects net resources in the economy. In addition to the perspectives commonly included in benefit-cost analyses, we take into account the perspective of noncustodial parents. We isolate this group only to assess impacts on child support payments; otherwise, noncustodial parents are included with taxpayers, as represented by the government perspective.

Table VII.1 summarizes BNF's expected benefits and costs and their distribution across perspectives. This accounting framework provides a tool for assessing the program's net benefits to each group.

BNF's potential benefits include:

- ***Increased Earnings and Fringe Benefits.*** A major goal of BNF was to increase earnings for participants. Positive impacts on earnings and fringe benefits are a benefit to participants and to society, because they are assumed to represent the value of increased output available to society as a whole.

- ***Increased Child Support.*** To the extent that BNF helps participants obtain child support payments, these may be viewed as a benefit to participants but a cost to noncustodial parents. Additional administrative expenses for increased child support payments would be a cost to government and society.[1]

- ***Increased Taxes.*** Higher taxes associated with increased earnings are a cost to participants, a benefit to government, and neither a benefit nor a cost to society.

[1] Child support collected on behalf of current TANF recipients would be distributed to the state and federal governments, and, as such, could be considered a benefit to the government. Because we do not have monthly data on child support receipt and thus do not know the magnitude of any impact while sample members were receiving TANF, we assume, for the benefit-cost analysis, that all impacts occurred after participants left TANF.

Table VII.1. Measured Benefits and Costs of Participating in Building Nebraska Families, by Perspective

	Participants	Noncustodial Parents	Government/ Taxpayers	Society
Potential Benefits				
Benefits from Increased Earnings				
Earnings (months 1-30)	+		0	+
Fringe benefits	+		0	+
Increased Child Support Income	+	-	0	0
Increased Taxes	-		+	0
Reduced Dependence on Transfers				
TANF	-		+	0
Food stamps	-		+	0
SSI/SSDI	-		+	0
UI	-		+	0
Transportation assistance	-		+	0
Reduced Administrative Costs	0		+	+
Reduced Use of Alternative Programs/Services				
Mental health services	0		+	+
Education services	0		+	+
Costs				
Costs of Program Services	0		-	-
Costs of Working				
Child care	0		-	-
Transportation	-		0	-

TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; SSI = Supplemental Security Income; SSDI = Social Security Disability Insurance; UI = Unemployment Insurance.

- ***Reduced Dependence on Public Assistance.*** Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, and other public assistance programs are transfers from the government to recipients. Therefore, a decrease in receipt of this assistance represents a cost to participants but a benefit to government. (In contrast, an increase in the receipt of public assistance, for example, SSI or SSDI, would represent a benefit to participants but a cost to the government.)

- ***Reduced Administrative Costs for Public Assistance.*** A reduction in the administrative cost of transfers (because of reduced receipt among beneficiaries) is a benefit to government and society.

- ***Reduced Use of Alternative Programs and Services.*** Members of the control group, who did not have access to BNF, received such services as mental health care and education from other sources. The program's effect on reducing the use of these alternative services among participants is a benefit to

government (because it would cover the cost of these services) and to society. However, to the extent the program *increased* use of education services among some participants, it created costs for the government and society.

The benefit-cost analysis is designed to capture only monetary benefits and costs. Certain intangible benefits are not incorporated because it is difficult to assign a monetary value to them—for example, the personal fulfillment participants experience through employment and improvements in the quality of life for participants and their families. In addition, the analysis does not reflect equity considerations.

BNF's main expected monetary benefits and costs are reflected in our analysis. Some program benefits may not be included, however, because we did not collect sufficient data on the relevant outcomes. For example, given the finding that BNF significantly reduced the fraction of sample members who were separated from their minor children, it is possible that the program contributed to reduced use of child welfare services. The program also significantly reduced reports of domestic violence (among both the full sample and more disadvantaged subgroup) and the receipt of public housing assistance (among the more disadvantaged). However, we do not have enough data to calculate a dollar estimate of such benefits. As a result of these omissions, the analytic approach yields a fairly conservative estimate of BNF's potential benefits during the 30-month follow-up period.

We include two kinds of costs in our analysis:

1. ***Costs of BNF Services.*** The expenses involved in operating BNF and providing services represent a cost to government and society. In the benefit-cost analysis, we use the average cost per participant (presented in Chapter II). When considering net benefits for the more disadvantaged subgroup, we use program costs specific to that group. These costs are slightly higher than those for the full sample, reflecting the longer average participation among more disadvantaged participants.

2. ***Costs of Working.*** Added child care and transportation costs that are incurred when sample members begin working represent a cost to society. For child care, we assume that as participants spend more time working they have less time to care for their children. Because child care provided by parents is a productive activity, participants' increased productivity in paid employment should be offset by the cost of paid child care. Since Nebraska subsidizes child care for low-income working parents, these costs represent a cost to government, and hence, an overall increase in the cost to society. For transportation, sample members typically incur commuting expenses when they work. Without a government subsidy, as would be the case for former TANF recipients in Nebraska, there is no added cost to the government, but the added cost to participants yields a net cost to society. Although participants may incur other job-related expenses (such as work clothes and supplies), these expenses are likely to be much smaller and are not included in our analysis.

As with benefits, there are intangible costs that the analysis does not incorporate. Specifically, participants who work may perceive the time they lose for leisure or taking care of their families as a cost. These costs are not reflected in our assessment.

Estimating Dollar Values for Benefits and Costs

Estimates of program impacts on earnings, receipt of public assistance and child support, and service use are the starting point for measuring the benefits of BNF. We base our estimates largely on data from the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys; administrative data are used to estimate benefits or costs related to receipt of TANF and food stamps.

For some benefits, such as earnings, we use estimates of program impacts that are based on data reported directly in monetary values. In other cases, we combine estimates of program impacts with information from external sources to calculate a dollar value for the impact. In addition, because the benefits of BNF could potentially extend beyond the evaluation's 30-month follow-up period, we project some benefits into the future. Our aim is to estimate how many months beyond the observation period it would take for the program to produce positive net benefits to society, using our best assumptions regarding how benefits change over time. In the next section, we describe our methods for assigning dollar values to various benefits and costs and for projecting benefits.

We measure benefits using the relevant impact estimate even if the estimate is not significantly different from zero at conventional statistical significance levels. The impact estimate is unbiased, due to the evaluation's random assignment design, and thus represents our best estimate of the program's effects, given the data available. However, we test the sensitivity of our results to changes in the estimates, as described below.

Calculations for the benefit-cost analysis are based on estimates of the program impacts per participant—a sample member who was assigned to the treatment group *and* participated in BNF (in contrast to treatment group members who received no services or contacts, and for whom no costs were incurred).[2] This approach allows us to compare estimated benefits per participant with the estimate of costs per participant presented in Chapter II. We adjust estimates of program impacts for the full sample to arrive at estimates of impacts for program participants using the method developed by Bloom (2006).[3]

Comparing Benefits and Costs That Occur at Different Times

Because some benefits and costs occur at different times, we make two adjustments when aggregating them. First, we correct for inflation by measuring all benefits and costs in constant 2004 dollars. Second, we apply a discount rate to benefits and costs that occur

[2] Chapter III presents data on program participation.

[3] The "Bloom adjustment" assumes that program group members who did not participate in the program were unaffected by their assignment to the program group. The adjustment is made by dividing the impact estimate by the program participation rate (Bloom 2006).

after the first year of the follow-up period. This adjustment takes into account the fact that a dollar in the first year is worth more than a dollar in a later year because it can be invested and earn interest. Following the General Accounting Office's recommendation of using the Treasury borrowing rate, we use a discount rate of 3.5 percent, approximately the average real rate of return on 30-year Treasury bonds in the past 10 years (U.S. General Accounting Office 1991). To examine the extent to which the findings are sensitive to our choice of discount rate, we also perform our analysis using alternative rates.

Testing Key Assumptions

Our estimates of BNF's benefits and costs are based on assumptions with varying degrees of uncertainty. The major sources of uncertainty are (1) statistical variability in impact estimates of earnings, TANF receipt, and food stamps receipt; (2) the valuation of some impact estimates, such as the value of fringe benefits, child support, and alternative programs and services; (3) the costs of work; (4) the discount rate; and (5) the extrapolation of benefits in the post-observation period.

We present benchmark estimates of BNF's net benefits, based on the best available data and, in our judgment, the most appropriate assumptions. However, we also test the sensitivity of the results—from the perspective of society, in particular—to alternative estimates and assumptions. To test the sensitivity of our findings to variations in the magnitude of the impact estimates, we calculate net benefits or costs under the assumptions that impacts on earnings, TANF, and food stamps were two standard errors above the point estimates or two standard errors below them—the approximate ends of a 95 percent confidence interval. We also test the sensitivity of our findings to changes in other key assumptions.

MEASURING BENEFITS AND COSTS

In this section, we describe our specific methods for valuing the benefits and costs of BNF, including those associated with working, child support and transfer programs, and the use of alternative services.

Benefits and Costs of Working

The measured benefits and costs of working include:

Earnings. Our benchmark estimate of the benefits of increased earnings is based on estimates of earnings impacts as reported in survey data. To facilitate accurate discounting, we use impacts on total income for months 1-12, 13-24, and 25-30 after random assignment. We use survey data because we believe they provide the most reliable estimates of these impacts, as described earlier in this report.[4]

[4] Impacts used in our analysis may differ from those presented in earlier chapters due to our application of the Bloom adjustment.

Fringe Benefits. Although sample members reported whether they received fringe benefits at their jobs, we did not collect data on the monetary value of these benefits. We estimated the average value of three types of fringe benefits for our sample—health insurance, retirement and savings, and legally required benefits (such as Social Security and Unemployment Insurance)—using data from our survey and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

BLS publishes data on employer costs for employee compensation, based on periodic surveys of employers. We estimated the average cost of fringe benefits for employers of working sample members by assuming that the average cost as a percentage of earnings of each fringe benefit offered to our sample was the same as the average cost of that benefit nationally.[5] We also assume that paid leave and supplemental pay are included in earnings reported by sample members, because these benefits are typically paid directly to employees.

We calculated an estimate of the average value of fringe benefits for all employees in our program and control groups by multiplying (1) the proportion of all employees in each group who were offered the fringe benefit at their most recent job by (2) estimates of the average cost to employers of the fringe benefit as a percentage of earnings for all U.S. employees who are offered the benefit.[6] For example, the value of health insurance for all participants (3.8 percent of earnings) was estimated by multiplying the proportion of participants who were offered health insurance (27.7 percent) by the estimate of the cost of health insurance for those who were offered it (13.6 percent of earnings).

We found that the fringe benefit package for the full sample cost an estimated 16.1 percent of earnings for participants and 14.3 percent for the control group (Table VII.2). Among the more disadvantaged group, our estimate of benefit costs was 17.6 percent of earnings for participants and 15 percent for the control group (not shown). The difference between the two groups reflects the greater availability of fringe benefits for the program group and is a benefit to participants and society in our analysis.

Taxes. We assume all sample members paid 12.2 percent of their earnings in taxes. This tax rate is the sum of effective federal income tax rates reported by the Congressional Budget Office (2006) and consumption, property, and income tax rates for the state of Nebraska reported by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (McIntyre et al. 2003).[7]

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[5] If, in fact, the cost of fringe benefits as a percentage of earnings is higher than average for our sample members because their earnings are low, we underestimate the cost of the fringe benefits and their value to participants and society.

[6] BLS reports the average cost of benefits for all employees. Using BLS data on benefit incidence, we calculated the average cost of benefits for employees *who are offered the benefit* by dividing the cost of the benefit as a percentage of earnings for all employees by the percentage of employees offered the benefit. For this calculation, we included the BLS categories of wages and salaries, paid leave, and supplemental pay in earnings.

[7] We use 2002 tax rates for Nebraska, because these are the basis for the ITEP's most recent analysis of incidence.

Table VII.2. Estimates of the Cost of Fringe Benefits as a Percentage of Earnings for the Full Research Sample

Fringe Benefit	Cost of Fringe Benefit as a Percentage of Earnings, All Employees for Whom Benefit Is Available	Percentage Offered Fringe Benefit		Estimated Cost of Fringe Benefit as a Percentage of Earnings for All Employees	
		Program Group	Control Group	Program Group	Control Group
Health Insurance	13.6	27.7	18.4	3.8	2.5
Retirement and Savings	9.0	20.1	14.7	1.8	1.3
Legally Required Benefits	10.5	100.0	100.0	10.5	10.5
Total				**16.1**	**14.3**

In estimating federal and state taxes, we use tax rates reported for the lowest quintile of household income, because average household incomes for members of the research sample fall into this category.

Child Care. To calculate average costs of child care, we use two pieces of information from survey data: (1) the average number of months program and control group members were employed during the follow-up period, and (2) the average number of days per week program and control group members spent at their current or most recent job.[8] We make three assumptions in our calculation:

1. That 68 percent of sample members use paid, nonrelative care, similar to the proportion reported for other rural families with preschool-age children (Smith 2006).

2. That sample members have one preschool-age child needing child care. (Although sample members had an average of two children at baseline, we assume that one child is in school and does not require child care.)

3. That all child care is paid by the state at its average daily reimbursement rate for a child older than an infant, or $16.50 per day.[9] This assumption stems from

[8] We calculate the average number of days per week worked by averaging (separately for the program and control groups) reports at 18 and 30 months of the number of hours per week worked at the current or most recent job. We then divide this average by eight hours, the length of a typical work day.

[9] The state of Nebraska offers different reimbursement rates for care provided by unlicensed family child care homes, licensed homes, and centers. The average of these rates is $16.50 per day.

Nebraska's policy of offering up to two years of transitional child care assistance to families who are no longer eligible for cash assistance.

To calculate an estimate of the program's average effect on child care costs, we multiply (1) the average number of months program or control group members were employed by (2) the average number of days per month they worked (the average number of days per week multiplied by four) and then multiply this product by (3) the value of the daily child care subsidy for one child. This dollar figure is then multiplied by 68 percent, the percentage of families assumed to be using paid, nonrelative child care. To arrive at our estimate of BNF's effect on costs of child care, we subtract total costs for the control group from total costs for the program group.

Transportation. We calculate an estimate of the program's effect on transportation expenses for participants using the average number of months and days per month sample members were employed and the cost of their daily commute for their current or most recent job, as reported at the time of the 30-month follow-up. To develop an estimate for each group, we multiply the reported daily commuting cost by the average number of days per month employed and the average number of months employed for each group. We use the difference in estimated commuting expenses between the program and control groups as our estimate of BNF's effect on transportation costs.

Benefits and Costs of Child Support and Transfer Programs

Here we describe our approach to measuring benefits and costs of child support, TANF and food stamps, Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI), Unemployment Insurance (UI), and transportation assistance. We include child support, SSI/SSDI, UI, and transportation assistance in our analysis because of their statistically significant and relatively substantial impacts at the time of the 18- and/or 30-month follow-up.

Child Support. Survey data provide estimates of impacts on child support receipt for months 18 and 30 of the follow-up period. Impacts at month 18 are higher than at month 30 for both the full sample and the more disadvantaged subgroup. We estimate amounts for other months, assuming that the impact increases by equal increments each month up to month 18, and then decreases by equal increments to the month 30 impact. Our estimate assumes there were no impacts on child support during the period participants were receiving TANF.[10]

[10] We use the average number of months that program group members received TANF and assume these months occur at the beginning of the follow-up period. We assign benefits from child support to participants. If impacts on child support occurred during the months sample members were receiving TANF, they would be a benefit to the government, rather than participants, because Nebraska retains child support paid while recipients are on cash assistance. Therefore, our method may slightly understate benefits to government.

TANF and Food Stamps. We use the sum of estimated monthly impacts on receipt of TANF and food stamps, based on administrative data.

SSI/SSDI and UI. Our approach to estimating benefits or costs of SSI/SSDI and UI receipt is similar to our approach for child support. We use estimated impacts at months 18 and 30, based on survey data, and assume that the impact increases by equal increments up to month 18 and between months 18 and 30. We do not include estimated impacts for months participants were receiving TANF. [11]

Transportation Assistance. We estimate the benefits or costs of transportation assistance using the amount of assistance sample members reported receiving at the 18-month follow-up and the percentage of program and control group members who reported receiving assistance.[12] For each group, we multiply the amount of assistance received by the likelihood that a member of the group received it, and use the difference between the result for each group as the program benefit or cost.

Administrative Expenses for Transfer Programs. Reports from Nebraska to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provide data on the administrative costs of TANF in that state.[13] For administrative costs of other programs, we rely on data from the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means (2004). Administrative costs are estimated to be 2.6 percent for child support, 9.3 percent for TANF, 24 percent for food stamps, 3.1 percent for SSI/SSDI, and 3.9 percent for UI. We assume that administrative costs for transportation assistance are the same as those for TANF.

Benefits and Costs from the Use of Alternative Services

Our approach to measuring benefits and costs from alternative service use involved a combination of survey data and cost estimates from outside sources, as described below.

Mental Health Care. To calculate the benefits or costs of mental health care, we use survey data on the percentage of program and control group members who received mental health services and their average number of months of service receipt. We base our estimate on an approximate per-session cost of mental health counseling calculated for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (Broskowski and Smith 2001). We also assume that sample members who participated in mental health counseling attended an average of three sessions per month.

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[11] As with our estimate of child support received, we use the average number of months program group members received TANF and assume those months occur at the beginning of the follow-up period. This method may understate benefits if sample members received SSI/SSDI during months they received TANF.

[12] We use figures from the 18-month follow-up because amounts of assistance received were not reported at the 30-month follow-up. We do not extrapolate these amounts to 30 months because sample members probably received most or all transportation assistance within 18 months after random assignment.

[13] Because Nebraska's reported administrative costs for TANF vary widely from year to year, we use an average of reported costs in 2002, 2003, and 2004.

To arrive at estimates of service costs for the program and control groups, we multiply the per-session cost, the assumed number of sessions per month, the average number of months of service receipt for each group, and the percentage of the program and control group members who received services. Our estimate of the program benefit is the difference in estimated costs between the program and control groups.

Education. We estimated the costs of three types of education sample members received: vocational, GED, and adult basic education. Social costs per student hour for each type of education were based on estimates used in the cost-benefit analysis of the Job Corps program, which were drawn from a variety of sources (McConnell and Glazerman 2001). Costs per student hour range from $6.78 for GED to $9.18 for vocational training (in 2004 dollars).

For each type of education, we estimated costs separately for the program and control groups by multiplying the cost per hour, the average number of hours or sessions attended for each group (sessions were assumed to be one hour long), and the percentage of each group that received the services. Our estimate of costs or benefits is the sum of the differences between costs for the program and control groups for each type of education. We assume that, because Nebraska provided educational support to TANF clients, any costs or benefits from use of education services accrued to the government.

BENCHMARK ESTIMATES

This section presents the results of our benefit-cost analysis. We first summarize our benchmark estimates for the full sample and the more disadvantaged subgroup. We then project benefits beyond the follow-up period, to estimate how many months of additional earnings would be necessary for BNF's benefits to society to equal or exceed its costs. Finally, we summarize the sensitivity of our benchmark results to changes in critical assumptions.

When interpreting the benchmark estimates, it is important to bear in mind the potential program benefits that were not assigned dollar values. As noted earlier, BNF's effects among more disadvantaged program group members of reducing the likelihood of domestic violence and increasing the likelihood that a minor child would remain in the home may have created benefits to society that are not reflected in our analysis.

- ***BNF produced net costs to society of $7,561 within the 30-month follow-up period.***

BNF's costs to society exceeded its measured benefits by $7,561 per participant for the full sample of participants during the 30-month follow-up (Table VII.3). The program's average cost per participant created a high threshold for overall cost-effectiveness, and total benefits that accrued to society during the follow-up period ($270) amounted to about 3.4 percent of social costs. In other words, for every dollar spent on BNF and expenses related to working in the 30 months following random assignment, society received a benefit of about 3.4 cents.

Table VII.3. Benchmark Estimates of Net Benefits per BNF Participant for the Full Sample, by Perspective (Dollars)

	Perspective			
	Participants	Noncustodial Parents	Government/ Taxpayers	Society
Benefits				
Benefits from Increased Earnings				
Earnings (months 1-30)	-63		0	-63
Fringe benefits	247		0	247
Increased Child Support Income	260	-260	0	0
Increased Taxes	8		-8	0
Reduced Dependence on Transfers				
TANF	-137		137	0
Food stamps	-242		242	0
SSI/SSDI	622		-622	0
UI	-243		243	0
Transportation assistance	-286		286	0
Reduced Administrative Costs for Transfers	0		81	81
Reduced Use of Alternative Programs/Services				
Mental health services	0		144	144
Education services	0		-139	-139
Total Benefits	167	-260	363	270
Costs				
Costs of Program Services	0		-7,383	-7,383
Costs of Working				
Child care	0		-331	-331
Transportation	-116		0	-116
Total Costs	-116		-7,714	-7,831
Net Benefits	**51**	**-260**	**-7,351**	**-7,561**

Notes: Estimates are discounted and in 2004 dollars. Some columns may not total precisely due to rounding.

SSDI = Social Security Disability Insurance; SSI = Supplemental Security Income; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; UI = Unemployment Insurance.

From the perspective of participants, BNF created net benefits of $51. The largest single source of benefits to participants was increased receipt of SSI/SSDI. Additional benefits resulted from increased fringe benefits and child support income. Although increased earnings were expected to be one of the program's primary benefits, during the follow-up period the difference in total monthly earnings between program and control group members was negative and not statistically significant.

BNF's net costs for the government amounted to $7,351. Although the government received benefits from the reduced use of some transfer programs and mental health services, BNF increased government costs for SSI/SSDI and education services, according to our benchmark estimate.

- ***BNF's benefits to society in the follow-up period resulted mainly from increased receipt of fringe benefits and reduced use of mental health services.***

About half of BNF's positive measured benefits to society resulted from increased receipt of fringe benefits among participants. While total monthly impacts on earnings were negative during the follow-up period for the full sample, participants were more likely than control group members to be offered health insurance and retirement benefits, resulting in a positive total effect on employment compensation. In the area of alternative services, society benefited from reduced use of mental health services. However, these benefits were counterbalanced by the costs of participants' increased use of education services—particularly, vocational training. Reduced administrative costs for TANF, food stamps, and other transfers accounted for about 17 percent of BNF's positive social benefits.

- ***BNF's services to more disadvantaged participants resulted in costs to society that exceeded measured benefits by $4,963, or about two-thirds of costs for the full sample.***

We estimated BNF's net costs to society for the more disadvantaged subgroup to be $4,963 per participant during the 30-month follow-up period (Table VII.4). These costs were substantially lower than those for the full sample, due mainly to positive and sizable benefits from earnings for more disadvantaged participants, totaling nearly $3,000. BNF also increased receipt of fringe benefits by $740 among more disadvantaged participants.

From the perspective of more disadvantaged participants, the program created net benefits of $1,574. In addition to earnings and fringe benefits, our benchmark estimate indicates that more disadvantaged participants benefited from increases in child support income ($669) and SSI/SSDI ($486). The program resulted in decreases in TANF, food stamps, and other transfers to participants, totaling $2,782, and an increase in taxes of $360. Costs of working (shared between participants and government) totaled $712.

Table VII.4. Benchmark Estimates of Net Benefits per BNF Participant for the More Disadvantaged Subgroup, by Perspective (Dollars)

	Perspective			
	Participants	Noncustodial Parents	Government/ Taxpayers	Society
Benefits from Increased Earnings				
Earnings (months 1-30)	2,947		0	2,947
Fringe benefits	740		0	740
Increased Child Support Income	669	-669	0	0
Increased Taxes	-360		360	0
Reduced Dependence on Transfers				
TANF	-895		895	0
Food stamps	-956		956	0
SSI/SSDI	486		-486	0
UI	-510		510	0
Transportation assistance	-421		421	0
Reduced Administrative Costs	0		339	339
Reduced Use of Alternative Programs/Services				
Mental health services	0		425	425
Education services	0		-397	-397
Total Benefits	1,701	-669	3,023	4,055
Costs				
Costs of Program Services	0		-8,306	-8,306
Costs of Working				
Child care	0		-585	-585
Transportation	-127		0	-127
Total Costs	-127		-8,891	-9,018
Net Benefits	**1,574**	**-669**	**-5,868**	**-4,963**

Notes: Estimates are discounted and in 2004 dollars. Some columns may not total precisely due to rounding.

SSI = Supplemental Security Income; SSDI = Social Security Disability Insurance; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; UI = Unemployment Insurance.

From the government perspective, BNF produced net costs of $5,868. Costs for program services were higher for more disadvantaged participants than the full sample, due to a longer average period of participation for the more disadvantaged group.[14] However, net costs to the government were lower than for the full sample, because program costs were offset to some extent by reduced transfers, savings on administrative costs for transfers, and increased tax receipts.

The program also produced benefits to government (and society) from reduced use of alternative services among more disadvantaged participants. As with the full sample, however, the program led to higher costs for education services, due to both greater participation and a larger average number of education hours among program participants, compared to members of the control group. Benefits accruing from reduced use of mental health services ($425) were slightly greater than costs to government for increased use of education services ($397).

Projecting Benefits Beyond the Follow-Up Period

BNF was an intensive program that aimed to have long-term effects on the lives of participants, and it is possible that the program's impact lasted beyond the observation period. In fact, earnings impacts were substantial for the more disadvantaged subgroup toward the end of the 30-month follow-up period. However, we have no direct evidence from our survey on whether or how long these impacts might persist. Our estimates of benefits beyond the observation are based on assumptions regarding patterns of future impacts.

In projecting benefits, we focus on BNF's effects on participants' output, as represented by increased earnings and benefits, and on the perspective of society. We do not incorporate possible benefits from reduced use of alternative services or possible additional costs of working, on the assumption that these would be relatively small. Nor do we project possible benefits or costs of additional transfers.

Our benchmark estimate assumes that impacts on participants' earnings in months after the 30-month follow-up are equal to the average earnings impact for the last six months of the period: $50 for the full sample and $197 for the more disadvantaged subgroup. We also assume that the availability of fringe benefits for members of the treatment and control groups and the costs of those benefits to employers (as a percentage of earnings) remain at the same level as assumed for our analysis of 30-month benefits and costs. The value of projected earnings and fringe benefits is discounted to the first year after random assignment.

[14] Program costs for the more disadvantaged subgroup were calculated using the same method as for the full sample: average length of participation (9.9 months) x average cost per participant month ($839) = total average cost per participant ($8,306).

- ***For the full sample, BNF's benefits to society would exceed its costs if impacts on earnings and fringe benefits persisted for at least 9.7 years beyond the follow-up period.***

BNF's impacts on earnings toward the end of the follow-up period were relatively small for the full sample. As a result, its benefits beyond 30 months accumulate slowly under our benchmark assumptions. Not until 116 months after the end of the follow-up period—or 146 months after random assignment—would the program begin to produce net benefits to society. The persistence of program impacts for such an extended period seems unlikely, given evidence of declining impacts over time in other welfare-to-work programs (Grogger et al. 2002). In most programs studied through the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies, for example, impacts on earnings diminished after the third year of a five-year follow-up period (Hamilton 2002).

- ***Among the more disadvantaged group, positive net benefits to society would result if impacts persisted for 1.7 years beyond the follow-up period.***

Projected earnings and fringe benefits for more disadvantaged participants would lead to positive net benefits to society in a much shorter timeframe than that of the full sample. Under our benchmark assumptions, positive net benefits to society begin to accrue about 20 months (1.7 years) after the end of the follow-up period, or 50 months (4.2 years) after random assignment. Although the program's effects may fade out over time, sustained impacts of this duration seem plausible, particularly in light of the pattern of substantial impacts on monthly earnings among the more disadvantaged subgroup toward the end of the 30-month follow-up period.

SENSITIVITY ANALYSES

Although we based our benchmark estimates of BNF's benefits and costs on the best available data and, in our judgment, the most appropriate assumptions, there is some uncertainty inherent in our estimates and assumptions. For this reason, we tested the sensitivity of our estimates of benefits and costs to alternative assumptions. We focused our sensitivity tests on eight areas of the analysis:

1. ***Impacts on Output.*** Although our estimates of BNF's impacts on earnings are unbiased, sampling variability could cause them to differ from the true impact of the program. To assess the extent to which this variability could affect the results, we calculated the value of increased earnings and fringe benefits under the assumptions that monthly earnings impacts were two standard errors above the point estimates or two standard errors below them. These points mark the ends of an approximate 95 percent confidence interval. This means that the probability that the true impact will lie between these bounds is approximately 95 percent.

2. ***Impacts on TANF and Food Stamps Receipt.*** Our estimates of BNF's effects on the receipt of TANF and food stamps are also subject to random

estimation error. To test the sensitivity of our findings to such error, we followed a procedure similar to the one used for earnings, calculating our results under the alternative assumptions that monthly impacts on these transfers were two standard errors above or below the point estimates.

3. ***Value of Fringe Benefits.*** Our benchmark estimates take into account that program group members were more likely than control group members to receive health insurance and retirement benefits. However, these estimates are based on assumptions about the costs of these benefits as a percentage of earnings. To test our results, we took a simpler approach and assumed that fringe benefits for both program and control group members were valued at 20.6 percent of earnings, the cost of fringe benefits for part-time workers in 2004 (U.S. Department of Labor 2006).

4. ***Impacts on Child Support, SSI/SSDI, and UI Receipt.*** Our benchmark estimates for the value of these transfers required that we make assumptions about impacts in months other than 18 and 30. We calculated results under the alternative assumption that impacts on child support, SSI/SSDI, and UI in these other months were the average of the 18- and 30-month impact for each program. We combined the results for these transfer programs when calculating alternative estimates of net benefits or costs.

5. ***Costs of Work.*** We tested the sensitivity of our findings to estimates of the cost of work by calculating results under the assumptions that costs are 20 percent higher or lower than our benchmark.

6. ***Costs of Alternative Services.*** We calculated our results under the assumptions that costs of mental health and education services were 20 percent higher or lower than our benchmark estimates.

7. ***Discount Rate.*** We calculated our results under two alternative discount rates: (1) two percent (a commonly used lower bound for discount rates), and (2) seven percent (the discount rate favored by the Office of Management and Budget and approximately the real pretax return on private investment).

8. ***Pattern of Earnings Impacts After the Observation Period.*** To examine alternative possibilities regarding the time required for the program to produce net benefits to society, we projected earnings impacts after the observation period under an alternative assumption. Starting with the average earnings impact for the last six months of the follow-up period, we assumed that the impact declines by 15 percent each year after the end of the followup.

When testing these elements of our analysis, we changed assumptions for only one element at a time, leaving all others at their benchmark value.

Results of Sensitivity Tests

From the perspective of society, the basic results for the full sample did not change under our alternative assumptions (Table VII.5). That is, BNF created net costs to society under all scenarios. However, our findings regarding the program's benefits to *participants* were sensitive to changes in assumptions about impacts on earnings and transfers. BNF produces net costs to participants, rather than net benefits, under the assumptions that impacts on earnings or receipt of TANF and food stamps are two standard errors below our point estimates.

As with the full sample, our conclusion that BNF services for the more disadvantaged subgroup create net costs to society was not sensitive to changes in key assumptions. However, net costs to society decreased substantially (to $295) under the assumption that impacts on earnings were two standard errors above our point estimates. We also found that the program creates net costs to participants under the assumptions that earnings or TANF and food stamps impacts are two standard errors below the mean. In general, the large confidence interval for these impact estimates suggest that results of the benchmark analysis should be interpreted with some caution.

Altering our assumptions about earnings projections beyond the follow-up period naturally affected our findings for both the full sample and the more disadvantaged subgroup. Under the assumption that earnings impacts decline by 15 percent annually, BNF does not produce positive net benefits to society for the full sample before impacts fade out completely. In contrast, changing the assumption for the more disadvantaged subgroup adds only three months to the time required for the program to produce positive net benefits.

Table VII.5. Net Benefits Under Alternative Assumptions, by Group and Perspective

	Full Sample			More Disadvantaged		
	Participants	Government/ Taxpayers	Society	Participants	Government/ Taxpayers	Society
Benchmark	**51**	**-7,351**	**-7,561**	**1,574**	**-5,868**	-4,963
Earnings						
Earnings impact plus 2 times its s.e.	3,160	-6,984	-4,084	5,752	-5,378	-295
Earnings impact minus 2 times its s.e.	-3,045	-7,719	-11,023	-2,611	-6,358	-9,638
TANF and Food Stamps						
Impacts plus 2 times their s.e.	1,359	-8,888	-7,789	3,615	-8,262	-5,317
Impacts minus 2 times their s.e.	-1,258	-5,814	-7,332	-385	3,576	-4,630
Fringe Benefits						
20.6 percent of earnings for both program and control groups	-209	-7,351	-7,820	1,416	-5,868	-5,121
Child Support, SSI/SSDI, UI						
Impacts in all months are average of impacts in months 18 and 30:	116	-7,420	-7,563	1,764	-5,939	-4,845
Costs of Work						
20 percent higher	27	-7,417	-7,650	1,548	-5,985	-5,106
20 percent lower	74	-7,285	-7,471	1,599	-5,751	-4,821
Costs of Alternative Services						
Mental health 20 percent higher	109	-7,322	-7,532	1,574	-5,783	-4,878
Mental health 20 percent lower	109	-7,380	-7,589	1,574	-5,953	-5,048
Education 20 percent higher	109	-7,379	-7,588	1,574	-5,947	-5,043
Education 20 percent lower	109	-7,323	-7,533	1,574	-5,788	-4,884
Discount Rate						
7 percent	-18	-7,337	-7,605	1,631	-5,839	-4,889
2 percent	82	-7,357	-7,540	1,449	-5,932	-5,126

s.e. = standard error(s); SSDI = Social Security Disability Insurance; SSI = Supplemental Security Income; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; UI = Unemployment Insurance.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

The Rural Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Strategies Demonstration Evaluation used random assignment experiments to study the effectiveness of innovative strategies to help the rural poor find and sustain employment and move toward self-sufficiency. Achieving these goals can be especially challenging for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients who face many obstacles and skill deficiencies. Building Nebraska Families (BNF) offered an intensive home visitation and life skills education approach to help such disadvantaged welfare recipients in rural areas improve personal and family functioning, address challenges, and transition to sustained employment. Research shows that TANF clients in rural Nebraska face similar types of obstacles and at similar rates as TANF recipients in rural and urban areas nationwide (Ponza et al. 2002; Meckstroth et al. 2002; Johnson and Meckstroth 1998). Thus, although BNF operated in rural Nebraska, the findings and lessons from this evaluation may have relevance for other settings.

The findings from the Rural WtW Evaluation suggest that BNF shows promise as a model for increasing employment and earnings among very disadvantaged TANF recipients. In this chapter, we present implications and lessons that may be useful to program designers, policymakers, and evaluators as they consider how best to address the needs of very disadvantaged TANF recipients, particularly those in rural areas. We begin by highlighting the BNF evaluation's key findings. Next, we place the findings in the context of the welfare-to-work literature by comparing the magnitude of the earnings impacts to those from evaluations of other programs. Third, we examine the distinctive features of BNF that may underlie the observed impacts. Fourth, we suggest policy and program implications of the findings, drawing both on positive elements of BNF and on challenges the program faced. Finally, we offer recommendations for making future welfare-to-work evaluations as useful as possible.

SUMMARY OF BNF FINDINGS

A central goal of BNF was to help clients move toward economic independence. To assess the program's success in meeting this goal, we investigated BNF's impact on a wide range of client outcomes, including education and service use, employment and earnings, and self-sufficiency and well-being. To understand how BNF achieved its observed impacts, we also assessed its implementation and examined the experiences of program participants.

In addition, to determine whether the benefits of the program were large enough to justify an investment of public resources in it, we conducted a benefit-cost analysis. In this section, we recap the evaluation's key findings.

- ***BNF was successful in delivering intended life skills education, mentoring, and support to hard-to-employ TANF clients throughout rural Nebraska.***

BNF was implemented in close conformance with its model. It complemented existing employment-related services in rural Nebraska and filled a service gap by providing individualized, home-based education and support at a level of intensity not otherwise available. The average BNF client participated extensively, receiving BNF education and services two or three times a month for eight months. For many clients, the BNF education and services spanned the period both before and after they became employed. Although BNF operated in an environment in which many control group members received services and support outside of BNF, significantly more program than control group members received education and skill-building services, mentoring, and service coordination support. Not surprisingly, given the duration and intensity of the BNF services provided, the program's costs were substantial, averaging $7,383 per participant. In addition, because the more disadvantaged clients participated for a month and a half longer than their less disadvantaged counterparts, the cost of serving them through BNF was higher—$8,306, on average.

- ***For the full sample, BNF improved employment toward the end of the 30-month follow-up period, but did not affect earnings. Still, family income was significantly higher and poverty significantly lower among the program group than the control group.***

Among all sample members, BNF program group members were significantly more likely than control group members to have worked during the final six months of the 30-month follow-up period. They were also significantly more likely to have reported retaining employment longer and moving to a better job. There was no evidence, however, that BNF improved clients' earnings. Still, given program versus control group improvements in earnings and public assistance income (most notably, Supplemental Security Income [SSI] for some clients), program group members had significantly higher average family income in the month before the 30-month survey. The higher income among program group members translated into a significant reduction in the poverty rate 30 months after random assignment, with 55 percent of the program group living below poverty, compared to 63 percent of the control group.

Changes in other measures of well-being were mixed. On the 18-month follow-up survey, program group members scored significantly lower than control group members on scales measuring clients' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation.[1] There was also some evidence that BNF participants experienced greater hardship around the time of the

[1] Data on these measures were not collected through the 30-month follow-up survey.

18-month followup. By the time of the 30-month followup, however, there were few differences in exposure to hardship between the two groups.

- ***For the more disadvantaged subgroup, BNF led to significant, robust impacts on employment and earnings. These impacts translated into higher family income and reduced poverty. Changes in other well-being measures were mixed.***

We characterized sample members as more disadvantaged, or very hard-to-employ, if they met two or more of the following five criteria at the time of random assignment: (1) lack of a high school education, (2) a reported health-limiting condition, (3) a transportation barrier, (4) a lack of earnings in the prior year, and (5) a TANF/AFDC history lasting two or more years. These five criteria typically reflect serious challenges and obstacles to employment among the TANF population.

For the more disadvantaged sample members, BNF education and services led to large impacts on employment and earnings during the 30-month follow-up period. The more disadvantaged BNF clients were more likely than control group members to work more months and hours during the follow-up period. They were also more likely to work in higher-paying jobs with better benefits, to be self-employed, and to retain and advance in their jobs. These employment impacts translated into large impacts on earnings. The earnings impacts for the more disadvantaged program group members grew during the 30-month follow-up period. They were particularly robust during the last six months, when program group members' reported earnings were 56 percent higher than corresponding control group members' earnings.[2] In addition, the more disadvantaged program group members had substantially higher family income than control group members at the time of the 30-month followup and were less likely to be living in poverty. In contrast to the more disadvantaged sample members, there were no significant impacts on employment, earnings, or income for the less disadvantaged sample members.

The positive economic impacts on the more disadvantaged subgroup were accompanied by mixed findings on measures of personal and family well-being. On the 18-month follow-up survey, more disadvantaged program and control group members had similar scores on scales measuring clients' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation. At the 30-month followup, however, positive impacts were found on some measures of health and well-being. In particular, the more disadvantaged BNF clients were less likely to report that their health was fair or poor, that they faced an emotional or mental health problem that limited their

[2] As discussed in Chapter VI and Appendix B, the pattern of earnings impacts based on the administrative Unemployment Insurance (UI) records differs somewhat from the earnings impacts found in the survey data. For the full follow-up period, we found strong positive impacts on earnings for the more disadvantaged subgroup using administrative records (Appendix B, Table B.2). However, earnings impacts based on administrative records were positive and significant in the first and second years of the followup only, but not in the third year. A key source of the difference in the administrative and survey-based earnings impacts is the exclusion of some types of employment from the administrative records, including informal jobs, jobs based on self-employment, and jobs through an out-of-state employer.

ability to work or participate, or that they had recently experienced physical domestic abuse. At 30 months, the BNF clients were also more likely than their control group counterparts to be living with their minor children, and to have received a greater amount of child support income.

Logistical issues, such as housing, remained challenging for the more disadvantaged clients. At 30 months, a significantly smaller fraction of more disadvantaged BNF clients, compared to their control group counterparts, were living in public or government-subsidized housing. While this might indicate an improvement in housing situations, the BNF clients also had significantly higher housing costs and were more likely to experience housing or food availability hardships at some point during the 30-month follow-up period. The meaning of these health and well-being findings is not clear-cut, but it is possible that BNF's emphasis on life skills helped clients address or resolve some health and personal issues, while being employed may have made it more difficult and expensive to manage other aspects of their lives.

- ***BNF's measured benefits did not exceed its costs during the 30-month followup. For more disadvantaged clients, however, we estimate that positive net benefits to society will result if earnings impacts persist for an additional 1.7 years.***

BNF's average costs per participant were substantial, creating a high threshold for cost-effectiveness. Factoring in both the measured benefits and costs of the program, we estimate that BNF created net costs to society of $7,561 per participant for the full sample, and $4,963 for the more disadvantaged subgroup during the 30-month follow-up period. For the full sample, the primary sources of program benefits were increased receipt of fringe benefits, child support, and SSI/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. For the more disadvantaged subgroup, program benefits resulted mainly from increased earnings and fringe benefits. Our projections of earnings beyond the follow-up period indicate that BNF could produce positive net benefits to society among the more disadvantaged clients, if earnings impacts that are equal to the average impact for the last six months of the follow-up period persist for an additional two years beyond the follow-up period (which would be about four years after random assignment). Among the full sample, the time horizon for positive net benefits is much longer—nearly 10 years—and seems unlikely to be realized.

BNF FINDINGS IN CONTEXT

It is useful to place the BNF 30-month subgroup impact findings in context with impacts from other rigorous evaluations of welfare-to-work programs that have also targeted disadvantaged populations. Comparing evaluations provides a sense of whether BNF's impacts may be as promising as those of past welfare-to-work programs and also allows for an assessment of whether the impacts may be large enough to make a difference in the lives of very disadvantaged TANF clients. Among the random assignment evaluations highlighted below, which all had significant impacts (and available data) through three years of followup, there are differences in the context, target populations, length of follow-up period, mode of data collection, and the availability of detailed subgroup data. While these differences complicate the interpretation of impact findings across studies, a broad review of the

findings can help us understand the pattern and magnitude of BNF's impacts in the context of the existing welfare-to-work literature.

Overall, BNF's strong impacts on earnings for the more disadvantaged TANF clients may be particularly notable given the context in which the program was implemented. The BNF program faced a relatively high standard of comparison—the BNF impacts measure the value of BNF services on top of an already strong TANF employment program. Like BNF's program group, the counterpart control group was also held accountable to TANF work and participation requirements (generally not the case for the other studies highlighted below). Moreover, a high fraction of BNF control group members received employment and other services through TANF and other local providers. In such a service-rich environment, program impacts can be relatively difficult to achieve.

Table VIII.1 presents estimated impacts on inflation-adjusted average monthly earnings for the evaluations' most disadvantaged subgroup in two ways: (1) year 3 earnings impacts, and (2) year 1 to 3 earnings impacts.[3] BNF findings are shown based both on administrative UI records and survey data. The other evaluations reported detailed findings based only on UI data, either not collecting or not reporting findings based on survey data for a most disadvantaged subgroup.[4] As discussed in Chapter VI and Appendix B, although we deem the BNF evaluation's survey data a better measure of the labor market experiences of BNF sample members than the Nebraska UI data, we did not find the same strong impacts at the end of the follow-up period using the UI data as we did using the survey data. See Appendix B for more detail.

The most relevant comparison across studies is the year 3 impacts, rather than the year 1 to 3 impacts. Because of BNF's educational mission and indirect focus on employment, program designers hypothesized that its impacts on employment and earnings would be stronger later in the follow-up period, as clients' life skills and personal and family functioning improved. This was true to a lesser extent for the other programs highlighted in Table VIII.1, which generally espoused a relatively rapid transition to work (or a "labor force attachment" model of service delivery). Indeed, using the BNF survey data, BNF's significant impacts on earnings were observed after the first 12 months of the follow-up

[3] The definitions of "most disadvantaged" used in the various evaluations, while somewhat different, are similar enough for making broad comparisons across evaluations.

[4] Comparing impacts across studies is also complicated by several factors. First, the length of the follow-up periods differ. The BNF survey-based monthly estimates are based on a shorter time frame than the other studies—only through month 30 of the follow-up period, compared to month 36 for the other studies. Second, there is a lack of published data on program and control group average earnings for some studies, as noted in Table VIII.1, so it is not always possible to calculate percentage-based impacts. Third, although sample members with $0 in earnings are accounted for in the impact estimates, limits on published data on employment rates for the most disadvantaged subgroup makes understanding the relative size of the impacts more difficult.

Table VIII.1. BNF Findings in the Context of Other Evaluation Findings: Impacts on Average Monthly Earnings for a Very Disadvantaged Subgroup, Estimates in 2004 Dollars

"Most Disadvantaged" Subgroup, by Program	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	Percentage Impact
Year 3[a] (Estimated Average Monthly Earnings)				
Building Nebraska Families (BNF)				
Survey data (based on months 25 to 30)	$548	$351	$197**	56%
Administrative records data	$233	$243	-10	-4%
Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)	$353	$234	$119**	51%
National Evaluation of Welfare- to-Work Strategies (NEWWS)				
Pooled Results	$155	$104	$51***	49%
Riverside LFA	n.a.	n.a.	$53**	n.a.
Portland	n.a.	n.a.	$96***	n.a.
Grand Rapids LFA	n.a.	n.a.	$160***	n.a.
Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) — Riverside	n.a.	n.a.	$99***	n.a.
Years 1 to 3[a] (Estimated Average Monthly Earnings)				
Building Nebraska Families (BNF)				
Survey Data (based on months 1 to 30)	$401	$312	$89*	26%
Administrative records data	$248	$180	$68**	38%
Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)	$248	$152	$96***	63%
National Evaluation of Welfare- to-Work Strategies (NEWWS)				
Pooled Results	$136	$96	$40***	41%
Riverside LFA	n.a.	n.a.	$66***	n.a.
Portland	n.a.	n.a.	$69***	n.a.
Grand Rapids LFA	n.a.	n.a.	$102***	n.a.
Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) – Riverside	n.a.	n.a.	$101***	n.a.

Sources: BNF estimates are derived from administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research (MPR), Inc., and from survey data from the BNF 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys, conducted by MPR. Estimates for the NEWWS Evaluation and the GAIN program were computed by MPR based on administrative records data reported in Michalopoulos and Schwartz (2001) and Grogger et al. (2002). Estimates from the MFIP Evaluation were computed by MPR based on administrative records data reported in Gennetian et al. (2005).

Notes: All dollar figures were converted to year 2004 using the consumer price index.

The definitions of "most disadvantaged" used in the various evaluations, while somewhat different, are roughly comparable.

LFA = Labor Force Attachment program model.

n.a. = not available in published reports for the "most disadvantaged" subgroup.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

[a]With one exception, the monthly estimates for year 3 are based on months 25 to 36 (quarters 9 to 12), and the monthly estimates for years 1 to 3 are based on data for months 1 to 36 (quarters 1 to 12). For the BNF survey-based findings, the monthly estimate for year 3 is based on data for months 25 to 30, and the monthly estimate for years 1 to 3 is based on data for months 1 to 30.

period, when most BNF sample members had exited the program. Moreover, as described in Chapter VI, the magnitude of the BNF earnings impacts grew stronger over time. While the strong impacts observed at the end of the 30-month follow-up period using the BNF survey data may be promising, we do not know how program and control group employment and earnings will compare in the future.

The finding of strong BNF impacts on earnings for more disadvantaged welfare clients is broadly consistent with findings from past evaluations of successful welfare-to-work programs (Gennetian et al. 2005; Grogger et al. 2002; Michalopoulos and Schwartz 2001; Freedman et al. 2000a). For example, in terms of percentage impacts on earnings, BNF's impact in year 3 was 56 percent, compared to 51 and 49 percent, respectively, for the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS) pooled data (Table VIII.1). In terms of impacts in dollar terms (measured as the program versus control group difference in average monthly earnings), BNF's impacts for more disadvantaged TANF clients also compare favorably to those from other evaluations. Using BNF survey data, the impact on average monthly earnings in year 3 ($197) exceeds the average monthly earnings impact from all the other studies shown in Table VIII.1. However, the lack of survey-based findings for the other studies, and the lack of BNF impacts in year 3 using the state-level UI records data, suggest that these comparisons should be interpreted with caution. Nonetheless, using the survey data, and considering the contextual differences noted above, BNF's impacts for the most disadvantaged subgroup appear to compare favorably with those of other welfare-to-work programs that are viewed as successful.

INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS: THE ROLE OF DISTINCTIVE PROGRAM FEATURES

The evaluation's impact findings suggest that longer-term interventions like BNF, which are indirectly related to employment, may help more disadvantaged TANF clients in rural areas overcome obstacles, transition to and retain employment, and move toward self-sufficiency. Insights from our implementation study highlight several features of the BNF model and approach that may be important to the program's promising findings for more disadvantaged TANF clients. Although we cannot link specific program features to the impacts or determine which might be most important, several features may be relevant for future efforts to design programs for very disadvantaged TANF clients, particularly those in rural areas.

- ***BNF complemented Nebraska's existing services by offering unique education and support services both before and after clients took a job. In addition, a relatively favorable labor market probably made it easier for clients to find a job.***

For a program to produce positive impacts, it typically must offer valuable, well-targeted services that are distinct from other available programs. Although a variety of employment and supportive services were available through Nebraska's TANF program and in its rural communities, BNF was unique in its intensity and individualized nature. The BNF educational lessons went beyond the job readiness and life skills training offered through the

TANF program by addressing clients' personal and family skills with a depth and personalization unavailable elsewhere.

For many hard-to-employ participants, easily accessible BNF services complemented the employment and supportive services already available. Many BNF sample members—program and control group members alike—received services through the TANF program. These included job search services, job placement assistance, vocational and educational opportunities, and logistical support related to child care and transportation. BNF's focus on life skills and mentoring balanced the employment-related services participants received and appeared to fill a gap in the social services offered in rural Nebraska. BNF services may have been particularly helpful in enabling clients to better manage their lives at home, tackle personal and family challenges that obstructed their work efforts, and transfer their developing life skills to school and work settings.

A relatively favorable labor market may also have aided clients' work-related efforts. Across BNF's target areas, the levels of unemployment and poverty during the evaluation period were relatively modest—about 5 percent unemployment and 10 to 13 percent poverty. In addition, site visit interviews and focus groups suggested that, despite the rural nature of BNF's target communities, entry-level and other job opportunities were often available. In states where fewer TANF recipients receive employment-related assistance and/or where the labor market is very weak or depressed, BNF may not have been able to have the same impact on clients' labor market outcomes.

- ***BNF's delivery of services through home visitation facilitated accessible, individualized education and support, a feature that may have particular value in rural areas.***

The use of home visits to deliver BNF educational lessons and to provide mentoring and support appeared important in ensuring that BNF services were both accessible and tailored to fit clients' individual needs. In rural areas, geographic conditions and transportation barriers can often make services difficult to access. BNF's use of home visits allayed this concern by bringing regular education and other services directly to clients. This form of assistance may be especially important for the highest-risk families, who the evaluation literature suggests may benefit the most from home-visiting (Gomby 2005).

In addition, home visitation allowed educators to provide highly individualized services. Conducting meetings in clients' homes gave educators a view of clients' everyday lives and daily routines. This approach allowed educators to assess key challenges in clients' lives and offer fitting support and guidance to address these challenges. With such insight into the context and constraints of clients' lives, educators could tailor the BNF educational lessons to fit clients' needs and circumstances, and also deliver the lessons in a sensitive manner. Moreover, the home visits made it easier to develop close mentoring relationships and gave educators a chance to guide and counsel clients on difficult issues and help them access other services and opportunities.

- ***BNF's research-based curriculum promoted wide-ranging life skills education.***

BNF used a research-based curriculum to teach an extensive set of life skills to TANF clients. The breadth of the curriculum surpasses that found in the job readiness and life skills materials more commonly used by TANF programs. The final BNF curriculum—*Survive, Strive, Thrive: Keys to Healthy Family Living*—aims to develop stronger, more self-sufficient families by building skills in (1) personal improvement, (2) family life, and (3) practical life skills (Fox et al. 2007).[5] Detailed lessons encompass such topics as goal setting, decision making, parenting and child development, communication skills, healthy relationships, character building, anger and stress management, and time and money management. The curriculum includes accompanying lesson plans and teaching materials designed for easy use by educators. Educators delivered the curriculum to clients using an interactive, experiential learning approach that applied the lessons to practical, everyday issues. The flexibility in BNF's approach allowed educators to combine topics and tailor BNF lessons and services to fit the specific needs and circumstances of individual clients.

The BNF curriculum, developed by administrators and educators from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension (UNCE), is well grounded in family development research. In particular, the goals and content of the curriculum were influenced by principles of family development research and attributes of strong and resilient families (DeFrain 2002, 1999; Stinnett and DeFrain 1985). During the demonstration, the program coordinator and educators made improvements and refinements to the curriculum, further developing the materials to make them more responsive to the needs of the very disadvantaged TANF clients BNF targeted.

- ***The BNF educators were highly qualified professionals with a level of education and experience exceeding that of staff from typical welfare-to-work programs.***

The BNF educators were all experienced master's-level professionals with degrees in such fields as social work, counseling, education, and family and consumer sciences. Most also had many years of prior work experience and were familiar with their target communities. In contrast, other welfare-to-work programs typically employ less qualified staff than did BNF. For example, none of the case managers from the Rural WtW Evaluation's companion program, Future Steps, had a master's degree, and only some had a bachelor's degree.

Overall, the educators brought a high degree of professionalism to their work, along with a broad range of personal, organizational, problem-solving, and leadership skills. Their background prepared them not only to conduct lessons effectively, but also to model for clients how to apply life skills to their lives, motivate clients to do their best, and connect clients with needed resources. In so doing, educators needed to adapt quickly, creatively, and resourcefully to difficult and complex client circumstances. BNF compensated the

[5] The BNF curriculum is publicly available. For information on ordering the curriculum, see the reference list at the back of the report.

educators well, which helped minimize turnover. In addition, the program coordinator supported them well, which helped foster their ongoing development.

- ***BNF educators carried very low caseloads.***

Because BNF caseloads were small—between 12 and 18 clients—educators were able to provide an intensive intervention to participants. Research suggests that outcomes in home-visiting programs may be strongest when home-visiting services are intense and frequent, as they were in BNF (Gomby 2005; Rapoport and O'Brien-Strain 2001). Moreover, the BNF caseload sizes were relatively small compared to other welfare-to-work programs. For example, full-time case managers from the Rural WtW Evaluation's Future Steps program carried average caseloads of 35 to 40 clients. On average, BNF educators could devote more than two and a half hours each week to each client. Although some of this time was used for administrative duties and travel across large service areas, the small BNF caseloads provided the educators with a relatively large block of time each week to concentrate on each client's case. As a result, educators were able to provide the intensive, individualized services that the BNF program model promoted.

IMPLICATIONS AND LESSONS FOR WELFARE-TO-WORK POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

BNF's promising findings for the more disadvantaged TANF clients may hold interest for other states as they strive to find or develop promising approaches to support work and self-sufficiency among their TANF population. Overall, BNF's experiences—both its accomplishments and its challenges—and the findings from this evaluation suggest several potential implications and lessons for welfare-to-work policymakers and program staff. Although these lessons were derived from BNF experiences in rural Nebraska, they may also have relevance for other settings.

- ***Longer-term programs like BNF will likely require separate state funding in today's TANF context. Given the strong impacts for the more disadvantaged subgroup, any future BNF efforts should target services to particularly disadvantaged and low-functioning TANF clients.***

After the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act (DRA), the U.S. DHHS issued regulations that modified the definition of allowable work activities that could count toward the TANF work participation rate. The revised work activity structure has made it more difficult for states to offer specialized, longer-term services for very disadvantaged TANF clients. Such services may be valuable for preparing very disadvantaged clients for work—clients who otherwise may be in jeopardy of exhausting time-limited cash assistance. However, given limits on how long clients can receive allowable life skill building and job readiness services, states may find it difficult to incorporate programs like BNF into their post-DRA TANF programs. Indeed, even though BNF was valued within the Nebraska Health and Human Services System (NHHSS), the state chose not to incorporate BNF into its TANF program after the passage of DRA. Nebraska concluded that BNF's lengthy program duration did not fit well into the revised work activity categories, and thus, did not support Nebraska's ability to achieve its mandated work participation rate.

With DRA, some states have offered specialized services to their very disadvantaged TANF clients using separate state funding. In Nebraska, because of the relatively high cost of BNF, along with general budget pressures, the state decided against continuing to fund BNF. Still, some states have been able to offer separate state-funded programs or services for their very disadvantaged TANF clients using non-TANF or state maintenance of effort (MOE) dollars. This is a way that BNF or similar services could fit into the current TANF policy environment. In addition, states that already offer home-visiting services for TANF clients may want to incorporate elements of BNF's life skills education into existing home visiting efforts.

The most disadvantaged and lowest-functioning TANF recipients have the most to gain from BNF services and should be targeted for any future services. Any future BNF efforts should consider using systematic screening and assessment to identify the clients with the most substantial obstacles and limits in skills and functioning. Identifying such clients can be challenging, and Nebraska's experience speaks to this challenge. BNF and NHHSS gave TANF case managers fairly wide latitude in identifying clients for BNF. As a result, those referred to the program varied in their level of need. The less disadvantaged BNF clients did no better in employment, earnings, and income than a counterpart control group. Rather, it was the more disadvantaged BNF clients who benefited significantly from the program. As a starting point for identifying the most disadvantaged TANF clients for any future BNF efforts, states might use the criteria, described above, that we used to define the more disadvantaged BNF subgroup.

- ***Although BNF was tested in rural Nebraska, it may transfer well to other rural states, as well as to urban areas. If BNF is replicated, several cost-saving adaptations might be considered, especially in urban areas.***

When BNF was developed, NHHSS directed the limited resources available for BNF to Nebraska's rural areas, rather than to the cities of Omaha and Lincoln, because the rural areas generally had fewer local resources. Moreover, BNF's use of home visits was viewed as particularly well suited to Nebraska's rural areas, because the visits could bring services directly to clients living in isolated areas. Nevertheless, because the challenges BNF clients faced are similar to those common among TANF recipients nationwide, BNF's core services—life skills education, mentoring, and service coordination support—may also be appropriate for very disadvantaged TANF clients in other areas, including urban ones.

If BNF were implemented again in Nebraska or replicated in other TANF settings, and if resources were limited, it might be appropriate to consider some cost-saving adaptations. Any adaptations should be considered cautiously, as we cannot predict how any changes might affect program results. The possible adaptations presented below are intended primarily as suggestions for urban areas, given their greater population density compared to rural areas.

First, BNF educators in urban areas might be able to carry somewhat larger caseloads. BNF caseloads were kept low in Nebraska to allow educators time to travel to clients' homes, which were often spread across a dispersed area. In more densely populated urban

areas, caseload sizes may be able to rise somewhat without sacrificing the intensity of services. Second, a BNF program in another setting might consider making limited use of group-delivered educational lessons (for example, for some commonly offered lessons). Doing so probably would somewhat reduce the frequency of home visiting. This adaptation might be more feasible in urban areas, given the closer proximity of clients. Third, BNF-type programs in other settings, particularly in urban areas, might consider using bachelor's-level professionals as educators. Master's level educators were hired in part because the dispersed rural target area required a high level of professional independence. This same degree of independence may not be as critical in urban areas. In addition, the expertise of the master's level educators helped further develop the BNF curriculum. The case for considering qualified bachelor's level candidates is compelling given that the BNF curriculum is now well established. Overall, in any setting, regardless of the degree held by BNF educators, a high level of staff professionalism, experience, and guidance is essential to provide high-quality, individualized services to a target population that has complex needs and challenges. Research generally suggests that well-qualified staff with low caseloads are likely to be most effective (Gomby 2005). Any future changes to the BNF model ought to take this evidence into account.

The BNF curriculum and program model may also have relevance outside of the TANF arena. Although the curriculum targets families making the transition from welfare to work, it was developed for use both with individuals and groups, and is designed to teach basic life skills to a wide range of audiences. Therefore, the lessons are likely to have broad appeal to other disadvantaged audiences that may benefit from improved life skills and personal and/or family functioning. For example, at-risk teen parents, young couples striving to be good parents and to maintain a solid relationship, and families involved with the child welfare system might find many of the BNF lessons useful.

- ***BNF's implementation across a large service area offers lessons for operating welfare-to-work programs successfully, especially in rural areas.***

Clients of social programs in rural areas are often spread over a wide geographic area, creating a service delivery challenge for agencies providing assistance. BNF's implementation experience highlights several practices that may be valuable for welfare agencies and other social welfare programs. Although these practices have broad relevance, they may be especially valuable for agencies and programs operating in dispersed rural service areas. Three factors in particular appeared to contribute to the overall success BNF had in delivering its program services as intended:

1. ***Strong Partnership with a University's Statewide Cooperative Extension.*** BNF benefited from a productive partnership between NHHSS and UNCE. The two organizations had substantial prior experience working together, which helped smooth BNF's operation. UNCE's existing infrastructure—a network of extension offices throughout Nebraska—made statewide delivery of services easier. UNCE also offered expertise in bringing educational resources to rural communities. In addition, UNCE administrators provided guidance and oversight to a strong and active program coordinator, which helped contribute to

BNF's successful implementation. NHHSS's experience serving TANF recipients, new for UNCE, also helped focus BNF services for the TANF population. Other state welfare agencies in rural areas may consider university-based extension education providers as possible partners in delivering specialized services to TANF recipients. They should be advised, however, that university-based entities, like UNCE, are likely to have relatively high administrative costs because of their statewide infrastructure and considerable educational resources.

2. ***Performance-Based Contracting Tied to Program Enrollment Goals.*** Recruiting and enrolling clients in BNF was challenging. This was because the personal nature of home visiting services made some eligible clients hesitant to agree to home visits, and the dispersed nature of the BNF service area made marketing BNF and recruiting clients inherently time-consuming. The performance-based contract between UNCE and NHHSS for the provision of BNF services provided a strong incentive for educators to conduct continuous outreach to ensure that they enrolled enough clients in BNF. UNCE was paid based on the number of active clients enrolled each month. As a result, maintaining full caseloads was a priority for the program coordinator and educators, and educators tried to maintain regular contact with the NHHSS caseworkers to encourage referrals to BNF. The use of performance-based contracting, then, not only helped ensure that educators carried full caseloads, but also that enrollment goals for the evaluation were met.

3. ***Active Use of Performance Measurement Tools.*** BNF's program coordinator and educators used customized tools to monitor client progress and staff activity. These tools—success markers and the BNFIS—offered a way for program staff members to assess whether clients appeared to be benefiting from program services (individually and as a group), and to tailor BNF lessons and services accordingly. The tools also allowed the program coordinator to identify service delivery issues, even from a distance, and provide ongoing feedback to staff members on their approach to working with clients.

- ***The findings suggest several BNF program challenges and areas for improvement. In particular, BNF clients might benefit from additional logistical support during the postemployment period.***

Although BNF showed strong impacts on employment, earnings, and income for the more disadvantaged subgroup, the evaluation's findings also suggest that the transition to employment was not easy for BNF clients. Eighteen months into the follow-up period, more disadvantaged program group members scored no better than their counterpart control group members on scales measuring self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation. Moreover, significantly higher fractions of more disadvantaged BNF clients faced housing and food availability hardships during the 30-month followup. Unexpectedly, the more disadvantaged BNF clients were also less likely to receive help paying for some types of transportation assistance, and when they did they receive transportation assistance, they

received a significantly smaller amount than their control group counterparts. It is possible that some of the added challenges BNF clients faced reflect higher time and resource costs associated with working.

Work-related supports during the postemployment period are likely to be important in helping clients continue toward self-sufficiency. Although many clients received BNF services after they left TANF for work, 4 in 10 employed clients did not. Any future efforts to implement BNF might place greater emphasis on helping educators work with TANF case managers to ensure that BNF clients receive the logistical supports that are available (through NHHSS or in the community) and for which they are eligible. More generally, in addition to its core educational component, future BNF efforts might also place greater emphasis on the component of the BNF model related to service coordination and advocacy. By design, these types of supports, which may be particularly important during the postemployment period, were less emphasized by the BNF leadership than the life skills education and home visiting.

ISSUES AND LESSONS FOR FUTURE EVALUATIONS

The evaluation findings suggest two lessons that may be relevant for evaluators as they consider how to make future welfare-to-work research as useful as possible. The first lesson is broadly relevant for evaluations of demonstration programs, particularly those with a broad, statewide focus. The second suggests topics of particular importance for future welfare-to-work research.

- ***Summative evaluations are most useful when they test mature, well-developed programs. An adequate pilot-testing period can strengthen a program model and its implementation.***

BNF benefited from a three-year pilot-testing phase that preceded the evaluation. The BNF coordinator was involved throughout the process, as were many NHHSS staff and 5 of the 11 BNF educators and service areas. BNF learned lessons from its pilot and early implementation experiences that helped improve its ongoing program efforts, including those related to recruiting clients, managing staff who worked in widely dispersed areas, providing specialized staff training, and refining the curriculum.

BNF's long pilot-testing phase and ongoing improvement may suggest that new programs can benefit from an ample pilot period to develop and refine their model and implementation practices. The evaluation of BNF provides a good test of a relatively mature and well-implemented program. However, it might have provided a stronger test if, for example, there had been more time to develop the curriculum before the evaluation, and if staff had received more extensive training upfront related to the specific challenges and barriers that very disadvantaged TANF clients face. Still, the BNF experience helps underscore the lesson that testing mature and well-implemented programs is critical in making evaluation findings as informative as possible. BNF benefited from an extended pilot-testing period, and this likely helped to support the program's effectiveness for more disadvantaged clients.

- ***Future evaluations of welfare-to-work programs that serve hard-to-employ TANF recipients might focus greater attention on measuring outcomes related to personal and family functioning and the cost to sample members of working.***

BNF program designers expected that the services would help enhance participants' self-confidence and ability to manage their lives, thereby preparing them to find and maintain employment. Through its focus on clients' personal development, BNF had the potential to produce positive impacts on such aspects of self-concept as self-esteem and self-efficacy. As described in Chapter V, to assess outcomes related to self-concept, we relied on a subset of questions from standard measures, including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale and the Pearlin Mastery Scale. The findings on self-esteem and self-efficacy for the full sample, measured at the 18-month followup, were counterintuitive. To provide a more complete understanding of a program's effect on such outcomes, future evaluations might focus greater attention on measuring them. For example, future evaluations might include the full set of questions from these scales, and/or might more fully explore the relative usefulness of other available measures of self-concept, personal and family functioning, and quality of life.

The findings from this evaluation also raise questions about the costs associated with working. Although this evaluation found that BNF led to an increase in family income and a decrease in poverty, the greater incidence of logistical hardships among the more disadvantaged program group members raises unanswered questions about the increased time and resource costs that may be associated with increased employment. Future evaluations of welfare-to-work programs might consider collecting data on household expenditures. Even a limited set of data on key expenditures would help paint a clearer picture of the financial and other costs associated with working, and how these costs might influence a family's well-being and overall level of self-sufficiency. In addition, while the BNF evaluation collected detailed service use data through 18 months, additional follow-up data over time on the type and extent of clients' service use would be useful for understanding the support networks of TANF families.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION AND WEIGHTING METHODS

This appendix provides a thorough description of the data collection methods used as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Evaluation's 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of the Building Nebraska Families (BNF) sample. It also describes the procedures used to weight these survey data.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

In this section, we describe the methods used to design and conduct both the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys. In particular, we discuss (1) sample disposition and completion rates for both surveys, (2) the sample selection and enrollment processes, (3) the design and pretest processes for the survey instruments, (4) interviewer training and quality assurance, and (5) data collection and locating procedures.

Sample Disposition and Completion Rates

For the 18-month follow-up survey of BNF sample members, we attempted to complete an interview with all 602 sample members 18 months after they were randomly assigned into the study. For the 30-month follow-up survey, we attempted to complete an interview with 600 sample members (the other 2 were discovered to be deceased during the first follow-up survey). Both surveys were conducted primarily by interviewers in MPR's telephone center, assisted by field locators equipped with a cellular telephone that the sample member could use to call in to the MPR telephone center.

18-Month Survey. The overall survey completion rate for the 18-month survey was 87 percent (Table A.1). We completed 525 surveys (out of 602 sample members)—413 originating from MPR's telephone center and 112 originating from cellular telephones used by field locators. The overall response rates for program and control group members were similar—only a half percentage point higher for program than control group members. Among the 77 sample members who did not complete interviews, 54 were not locatable; 9 refused to do the interview; 11 were located, but we were unable to contact them after many attempts; 2 were incarcerated; and 1 was deceased.

30-Month Survey. The overall survey completion rate for the 30-month survey was 83 percent (Table A.1). We completed 502 surveys (out of 602 sample members)—368 originating from MPR's telephone center and 134 originating from cellular telephones used by field locators. The overall response rates for program and control group members were not as close as for the 18-month survey, with nearly seven percentage points more for program than control group members. Among the 100 sample members who did not complete interviews, 66 were not locatable; 11 refused to do the interview; 15 were located, but we were unable to contact them after many attempts; 3 were incarcerated; and 5 were deceased.

In terms of survey nonresponse, for both the 18- and the 30-month surveys, there was little difference between program and control group members in the reasons why surveys were not completed. We discuss patterns of survey nonresponse in greater detail in the section on data-weighting procedures later in this chapter.

Table A.1. Final Disposition of Cases for the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-Month Follow-Up Survey of BNF Sample Members

Final Status of Cases	Program Group (Number [Percentage])		Control Group (Number [Percentage])		Total (Number [Percentage])	
	18-Month	30-Month	18-Month	30-Month	18-Month	30-Month
Total Completes	**313 (87.4)**	**308 (86.0)**	**212 (86.9)**	**194 (79.5)**	**525 (87.2)**	**502 (83.4)**
Complete (Telephone)	243 (67.9)	233 (65.1)	170 (69.7)	135 (55.3)	413 (68.6)	368 (61.1)
Complete (Field)	70 (19.6)	75 (20.9)	42 (17.2)	59 (24.2)	112 (18.6)	134 (22.3)
Refusal	4 (1.1)	5 (1.4)	5 (2.0)	6 (2.5)	9 (1.5)	11 (1.8)
Incarcerated	2 (0.6)	1 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.8)	2 (0.3)	3 (0.5)
Deceased	0 (0.0)	3 (0.8)	1 (0.4)	2 (0.8)	1 (0.2)	5 (0.8)
Unable to Locate	34 (9.5)	32 (8.9)	20 (8.2)	34 (13.9)	54 (9.0)	66 (11.0)
Located, but Can't Contact	5 (1.4)	9 (2.5)	6 (2.5)	6 (2.5)	11 (1.8)	15 (2.5)
Sample Size	**358**	**358**	**244**	**244**	**602**	**602**

Note: The surveys were conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Across Both the 18- and 30-Month Surveys. Examining response rates across both rounds of data collection shows that 77 percent of sample members completed both 18- and 30-month surveys, which included 464 out of 602 sample members (286 program group members and 178 control group members) (Table A.2). Otherwise, 10 percent of sample members completed the 18-month survey only, 6 percent completed the 30-month survey only, and 7 percent completed neither survey (Table A.2).

Table A.2. Final Disposition of Cases Across Both the 18- and 30-Month Follow-Up Surveys of BNF Sample Members

Final Status of Cases	Program Group (Number [Percentage])	Control Group (Number [Percentage])	Total (Number [Percentage])
Completed both the 18- and 30-month surveys	286 (79.9)	178 (73.0)	464 (77.1)
Completed the 18-month survey only	27 (7.5)	34 (13.9)	61 (10.1)
Completed the 30-month survey only	23 (6.4)	15 (6.1)	38 (6.3)
Completed neither the 18- nor the 30-month survey	22 (6.1)	17 (7.0)	39 (6.5)
Sample Size	**358**	**244**	**602**

Note: The surveys were conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Special challenges are associated with interviewing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients in rural areas—specifically, limits on telephone coverage in some areas, and geographic distances that make completing interviews difficult. In conducting the surveys, we incorporated procedures to locate sample members for interviews and help achieve an acceptable response rate. First, during baseline interviews, extensive contact information was collected from all sample members, including contact information for several family members. Second, before the start of interviewing, preliminary database searches were conducted to identify cases that would likely require additional locating work. The amount of time that MPR survey staff tracked sample cases in MPR's telephone center was limited, to allow more time for field locators to find the sample members. About one-fifth of all survey completes originated from field locators. Third, the field locators were recruited locally, so that they would be familiar with the local geography and not be intimidating to the sample members. The locators' local contacts and familiarity with the area were important in making the connections that helped locate the sample members. Fourth, intensive computer locating methods were used, including monthly address updates on sample members from the Nebraska Health and Human Services System (NHHSS). These updates were important in tracking and locating hard-to-find people. Fifth, a $20 incentive was offered to all sample members for completing each interview. When sample members were located, most were willing to cooperate and provide the interview. (We discuss these steps in more detail later under "Data Collection and Locating Procedures.")

Sample Selection and Enrollment

The initial sample consisted of all people referred to BNF during the 28-month enrollment period who were eligible to receive services. People were randomly assigned to either the program group, whose members were eligible to receive the full range of BNF services, or the control group, whose members received only those services available outside of BNF.

Our goal was to recruit at least 600 sample members and achieve a survey response rate of 85 percent (510 completes). We randomly assigned 602 sample members in Nebraska and completed interviews with 87 percent of them (525 completes) in the 18-month survey and 83 percent of them (502 completes) in the 30-month survey.

Our enrollment process consisted of the following steps, some performed by NHHSS staff, and others by BNF staff in each of the counties where BNF was implemented: (1) completion of enrollment paperwork (including informed consent, baseline information form, and contact information form); (2) submission of sample members' information forms for random assignment processing through the Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS), which was managed and overseen by MPR; (3) notification of sample members about their random assignment outcome; and (4) entry of program group member information into the BNF Information System (BNFIS). All the hard-copy forms were shipped to MPR for data entry and storage.

NHHSS and BNF staff received extensive training from MPR on how to administer the baseline enrollment forms and execute their part of the enrollment process. NHHSS staff were responsible for completion of enrollment forms. After the forms were completed and checked for quality, NHHSS sent them to the BNF staff person responsible for that county, who then finished the enrollment process. BNF staff submitted sample members' enrollment forms for random assignment processing through the dial-up IVRS. After the IVRS determined that the applicant was not a duplicate and was eligible for BNF, the applicant was randomly assigned to either the program or control group. The system instantly reported the outcome of random assignment to the BNF staff, who recorded it on the forms. BNF staff also notified sample members about their random assignment outcome, entered the program group member's information into the BNFIS, and then returned the forms to MPR. The process was designed to minimize the amount of extra work for NHHSS and BNF staff.

All forms went through a rigorous quality control process after they were returned to MPR. Missing or incorrect data were retrieved from the sites or, in many cases, the sample members themselves. All forms were data entered with 100 percent verification.

Survey Instrument Design and Pretest

The survey instruments for the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys were designed to be administered by computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), with follow-up work by field locators using cellular telephones. The 18-month survey was designed to take 45 minutes, while the 30-month survey was designed to take 30 minutes. A paper-and-pencil version of the instruments was also developed for use in places where telephone administration was impractical (such as prisons or areas not covered by cellular telephones).

The 18-month survey covered a wide range of substantive topic areas, including:

1. Attitudes toward rural places and perceptions of rural challenges

2. Education and training

3. Receipt of services
4. Current housing arrangement, household structure, and children
5. Detailed employment history
6. Unearned income and income from household
7. Total household income
8. Child care arrangements
9. Barriers to employment
10. Confidence, control, and attitudes toward parenting
11. Material hardship, support networks, and family well-being
12. Background and contact information

The 30-month survey included a subset of items from these topic areas.

In designing the surveys, we drew heavily from questionnaires and instruments used in previous studies. The instrument used questions from (1) the National Evaluation of the Welfare-to-Work Grants Program, (2) the National Job Corps Study, (3) the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979, (4) the National Survey of America's Families, (5) the Current Population Survey, (6) the Iowa Core Survey of Current and Former TANF Recipients, (7) the Iowa Child Impact Study, (8) the Postemployment Services Demonstration, (9) the 1998 Survey of Former AFDC Recipients in Milwaukee, (10) the Voices of Rural America National Survey, (11) the Nebraska Welfare Evaluation Client Survey, (12) the Survey of New Parents from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, and (13) the World Health Organization's Composite International Diagnostic Interview Short Form (CIDI-SF). In addition, many new items were created specifically for these instruments. We also consulted two outside experts: Bruce Weber from the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at Oregon State University and Greg Duncan from the Joint Center for Poverty Research at Northwestern University. The 18-month survey was drafted between February and April 2002. It was revised based on feedback from ACF and our consultants. The 30-month survey was drafted between August and October 2003. It was also revised based on feedback from ACF.

We conducted survey pretests to identify ways to improve (1) the flow and sequencing of questions, (2) administration procedures, (3) length of the survey, (4) wording of the questions, and (5) instructions for the interviewers. For the 18-month survey, we pretested several versions of the survey during August and September 2002, completing six pretest surveys. For the 30-month survey, we pretested several versions of the survey during September and October 2003, completing eight pretest surveys. The participants in both sets of pretests included people drawn from the Rural WtW programs in Illinois, Nebraska,

and Tennessee. The interviews were drawn from all three sites to simulate the likely disposition of the full Rural WtW sample.[1]

For both survey pretests, we trained three experienced interviewers familiar with the evaluation to complete the pretest interviews. For the 18-month pretest, the six completed interviews averaged 67 minutes; for the 30-month pretest, the eight completed interviews averaged 37 minutes. We modified the instruments in an iterative fashion, based on information obtained through survey monitoring by MPR researchers and debriefings with interviewers. Because the 18-month interview took longer than expected, we cut many questions from that instrument. We also cut many questions from the 30-month instrument. In addition, for both instruments, we made adjustments to several items based on respondents' ability to understand and answer the questions.

For each follow-up survey, after completing the pretest, we submitted the survey instrument and supporting materials to the Office of Management and Budget for approval. Based on their comments, we made additional revisions to the instruments before the start of data collection. Although CATI applications were used for the actual data collection, the survey pretests were conducted using a paper-and-pencil version of the instruments. Because of the extensive programming that would be required to make the many rounds of CATI revisions during the pretest, it was not practical to program and test CATI versions of the pretest instruments. The CATI applications were developed after we made final revisions to the instruments. The final 18-month instrument, administered by CATI, took an average of 51 minutes to complete. The final 30-month instrument, administered by CATI, took an average of 30 minutes to complete.

Interviewer Training and Quality Assurance

Before the start of data collection, we held trainings at our telephone center for all MPR project staff. MPR's Rural WtW survey director and project director led the trainings, supported by an MPR survey assistant. For both survey rounds, all telephone interviewers and locators were required to attend a 12-hour training designed to give them a thorough understanding of the project goals and the skills necessary to produce good-quality data. All survey supervisors and monitors also received training so they could monitor the quality of the data collection.

Training included a broad range of topics. Trainees received background information on the study, including information about its research goals. The survey instrument was reviewed, item by item, with detailed explanations about the meaning and correct administration of the questions. Trainees also received instruction on sample management, strategies for contacting sample members and explaining the study, and guidelines for

[1] The same survey instruments were used to collect follow-up information from the evaluation's Illinois Future Steps sample. The survey questions were designed to be general enough for use with both the Nebraska and Illinois samples.

appropriate question probing. Before the end of training, each trainee was expected to complete two practice interviews, monitored by project staff.

As part of our regular quality assurance procedures, we conducted ongoing survey monitoring for all active interviewers. Each interviewer was monitored on approximately 10 percent of his or her calls, including introductions and survey refusal conversion attempts. Our professional survey monitoring staff, as well as Rural WtW project staff, monitored interviewers throughout the study.

We hired field locators to work on cases that we could not locate from our telephone center. We hired local residents and trained them in intensive locating techniques. Because the locators' primary responsibility was to find sample members and then encourage them to call the telephone center, only minimal training on the instrument was required. Local staff were familiar with the geography and were better able to plan trips to maximize their coverage. They were also familiar with local customs and could build rapport with sample members more quickly. In addition, they could connect with sample members' friends and relatives to obtain their help locating the sample members.

For interviews initiated through a field locator, we routinely verified 10 percent of the locator's completed cases. Completed cases were randomly selected for either telephone or mail validation, in which the respondent completed a short questionnaire, confirming that he or she had completed the interview and was a member of the research sample.

Data Collection and Locating Procedures

The 18-month survey data were collected during the 29-month period from October 2003 to February 2006, and the 30-month survey data were collected during the 26-month period from October 2004 to November 2006. Before the start of each round of data collection, we reviewed the sample cases that had been randomly assigned to date and identified sample members with changed or incomplete contact information. We relied on several national databases, comparing our sample to existing contact information and updating our records with new information. This step was repeated periodically, as new cases were added to the sample.

Because the data collection was time-sensitive, cases were released to the telephone center exactly 18 months from the date of random assignment for the 18-month survey, and 30 months from the date of random assignment for the 30-month survey.[2] Because the process was spread over many months, we used hard-copy contact sheets to manage the sample flow. In general, we worked cases in the telephone center for six to eight weeks. For cases not completed at the end of that period, we began field locating and followup.

[2] The exception is sample members who were randomly assigned during the last three months of the enrollment period. For the 30-month survey, these cases were released to the telephone center up to three months early, to complete 30-month data collection sooner.

For both survey rounds, we mailed an advance letter one week before the target date on which we would initially call a sample member for an interview. The letters described the study, explained MPR's role in it, and invited the sample member to call us on our toll-free line and participate in the survey at her or his earliest possible convenience. It offered sample members a $20 incentive for completing an interview and explained that participation was voluntary and that the identities and responses of all participants would be kept confidential. Through the advance letters, we also identified cases with incorrect contact information. Some of the letters were returned to us because of out-of-date address information, and others were returned with forwarding address information. We remailed the letters with new information to the new addresses and updated our records with the new information. Those letters without new information required additional locating.

The next interviewing step involved calling each sample member on his or her target interview date to attempt to complete an interview. If the interview could not be completed, appointments for future interviews were made when possible. Alternatively, we scheduled routine followup of these cases on varying days and times. If the initial contact attempt identified sample members with incorrect telephone numbers or outdated contact information, these cases were immediately tagged for additional locating.

We used several techniques to locate sample members whose contact information was out-of-date. We contacted family members and friends for updated contact information. Failing that, sample members' identifying information was run through several national databases owned by LexisNexis. New contact information was generated for interviewers by using names, social security numbers, dates of birth, and last known addresses and telephone numbers. In addition, to try to identify sample members who might have become incarcerated since enrolling in the program, locators searched Internet databases with federal and state corrections information. Moreover, NHHSS staff provided us with monthly address updates for the sample members outstanding on our list.

We mailed letters and postcards to sample members with whom we had not completed interviews. Every few months, we changed the format and content of the letters and postcards, as well as the size and appearance of the envelope and the method of mailing (regular first-class mail versus priority mail). We did this to spark sample members' interest in opening the letter and reading it.

A small number of sample members initially refused to participate in the surveys. After their initial refusal, we waited a week, then mailed them a personalized, specially crafted letter designed to change their mind about participating. The letter reiterated the importance of the study and their participation in it. They were invited to call our toll-free number to complete an interview and reminded of the $20 incentive. We waited until we were confident they had received the letter, and then a specially trained "refusal conversion interviewer" called to attempt to gain the sample member's cooperation. If this attempt resulted in a second refusal, the case was sent to the field, to be attempted in person. (In-person refusal conversion attempts often are more successful, because there is a personal connection, and the respondent feels important because of the extra effort made.)

Limitation of the CATI System

During the early part of the 30-month data collection, we identified a problem in our CATI system for the 30-month survey. Of the 464 BNF sample members who completed both the 18- and 30-month surveys, 38 percent (177 cases) were erroneously given the version of the 30-month survey that was intended for sample members who did not complete the 18-month survey. This meant that, for some of the 18-month respondents, the 18-month survey and the data collected from it were not used as reference points during the 30-month survey. Here, we identify the two primary areas in which this issue affected the analysis, and we describe the approaches we adopted in response.

Variables That Used the Date of the 18-Month Interview as a Point of Reference. Most variables created from the 30-month survey used the month before the interview, or the six months before the interview, as their point of reference. The CATI error did not affect these variables. However, on the 30-month survey, the 18-month respondents were to have been asked questions about their personal circumstances and work history since the time of the first follow-up interview. For respondents affected by the CATI error, these items instead referred to the period since random assignment. As a result, it was not possible to generate measures of affected cases' status during the period between interviews. Instead, these cases were treated like 18-month nonrespondents, and measures of their status since random assignment were created. If the respondent reported having had the status in the 18-month interview, but never having had the status in the 30-month interview, we assumed that the respondent failed to recall having had the status and replaced the 30-month status with the 18-month status.

Monthly Employment and Earnings Variables. To reduce recall error and smooth the "seam" between the 18- and 30-month employment histories, the 18-month respondents were to have been reminded in the 30-month interview of the employment status they had reported at the time of the 18-month interview. Their employment history from the time of random assignment through the time of the interim interview was derived from the 18-month interview, while employment history from the time of the interim interview through the time of the final interview was derived from the 30-month interview. Respondents affected by the CATI error were asked to report on jobs and earnings since random assignment, but their employment history was constructed in exactly the same way as that of unaffected respondents. That is, employment information that the 30-month instrument collected for the time of random assignment through the time of the interim interview was ignored in favor of information from the 18-month interview covering the same time period. This protocol was based on the assumption that any discrepancies between the 18- and 30-month interviews in the employment history immediately following random assignment were due to higher recall error in the 30-month interview.

To assess whether the CATI error was likely to affect estimates of program effects on employment and earnings, we tested for any indication that the affected and unaffected samples differed from each other or that selection into the affected sample was different for the program and control groups. We did not find evidence of systematic differences in the affected and unaffected samples in general or across program and control groups.

Exceptions to the general pattern of nonsignificant differences included statistically significant differences in the percentage of black sample members and the percentage with a valid driver's license. Importantly, we found no evidence that the affected sample was more or less likely to work. Thus, it seems unlikely that the CATI error could have affected estimates of BNF's impact on clients' employment and earnings.

DATA-WEIGHTING PROCEDURES

In this section, we describe the evaluation's data-weighting procedures. We created three sets of weights for our analyses of the BNF survey data. The first set is for the sample of 18-month survey respondents, the second for the sample of 30-month survey respondents, and the third for the sample of "dual respondents" (those sample members who responded to both surveys). The same methodology was used in the creation of each set of weights. For each follow-up survey, we begin with an analysis of patterns of nonresponse in the data, and we follow with a description of the specific adjustments made in the computation of each set of weights.

18-Month Follow-Up Survey

In this section, we examine the patterns of nonresponse in the 18-month follow-up survey data, and we discuss the steps taken in the computation of the weights for these data.

Nonresponse Patterns. The BNF population has 602 eligible cases, 600 of which were used as the basis for calculating the weights. Two cases were not included in the weight calculations because they did not complete the baseline information form and, hence, their demographic information was not available to us. For this reason, we assigned these cases a weight of 1, so that they would represent only themselves.

Among the remaining 600 cases in the BNF population, 523 responded to the follow-up survey, and 3 were treated as respondents to the survey for calculating the nonresponse adjustment.[3] The remaining discussion is based on these 600 sample members and 526 respondents.[4] We compared the characteristics of the survey respondents to those of the nonrespondents to examine differences between them (Table A.3). We found that there are significant statistical differences in the distribution of the respondents and the nonrespondents on the following characteristics: education level, working status, and age of

[3] The three cases that were treated as respondents were either incarcerated (two cases) or deceased (one case). Like the respondents to the survey, we located each of these three sample members. However, given their situation we were not able to complete an interview. In the majority of other sample cases, the sample members who were located did complete an interview. Given this, we assumed that the characteristics of these three cases were likely to be closer to the characteristics of respondents than nonrespondents. As such, we felt it was appropriate to treat them as respondents in the calculation of the weights.

[4] The 18-month survey data analysis in the body of the report is based on 525 respondents (313 program group members and 212 control group members). This number includes the 523 cases for which we have both a baseline and a follow-up survey and the aforementioned 2 cases for which we have only a follow-up survey.

the youngest child. The differences in other characteristics, such as gender and race, are not significant.

The overall survey response rate, adjusted for calculating the nonresponse adjustment (as described above), was 88 percent (Table A.4). There was a very small difference in response rates (about one percentage point) between the program and control groups. The largest difference (10 percentage points) was between the cases who were not currently working (86 percent) and the cases who were currently working (96 percent). The second-largest difference (7 percentage points) was between males (81 percent) and females (88 percent). If the participants in the study are divided into smaller groups (program versus control crossed with gender, working status, living status, Hispanic ethnicity, or education level), we also find differences in the response rates. For example, the response rate for males in the program group was 78 percent, compared with 85 percent for males in the control group.

Computation of the Weights. The weights were computed using three components, with the last two accounting for survey nonresponse. We developed three separate weighting adjustments: (1) a rescaling weight within each site, (2) a weighting cell adjustment for nonresponse, and (3) a poststratification adjustment to mimic the demographic population characteristics under study. First, the rescaling weight accounts for the different probabilities of selection into the program and control groups across the BNF sites.[5] We created the rescaling weight such that, in each site, the sum of the rescaled weight was the same for the program and control groups. The rescaling factor was created so that each group would contribute equally to the analytic results, rather than the program group (with larger sample sizes) having more impact. The rescaled weight is denoted as *sizedwgt*. The nonresponse adjustment was then conducted such that the analyses using the information from respondents were representative of the total sample. Finally, the poststratification was done such that, after the nonresponse adjustment, the sum of weights within site (or site groups) was again the same for the program and control groups. These adjustments comprise the final weight.

[5] We also applied this rescaling weight to our analysis of the Nebraska administrative records data. Otherwise, the administrative records data were not weighted, because they were available for all BNF sample members.

Table A.3. Comparison of 18-Month Survey Respondents to Nonrespondents

	Respondents		Nonrespondents	
Characteristics at Baseline	Counts	Percentage	Counts	Percentage
Program or Control				
Program	315	60	43	58
Control	211	40	31	42
Gender				
Male	43	8	10	14
Female	483	92	64	86
Race				
White	441	84	61	82
Nonwhite	85	16	13	18
Ethnicity				
Hispanic	62	12	9	12
Non-Hispanic	464	88	65	88
Age at Enrollment				
Younger than 20	38	7	4	5
20 to 29	307	58	40	54
30 to 39	138	26	24	32
40 or older	43	8	6	8
Education*				
No GED or high school diploma	161	31	32	43
GED or high school diploma	227	43	29	39
More than high school diploma or GED	138	26	13	18
Living with Partner				
Yes	142	27	23	31
No	384	73	51	69
Age of Youngest Children*				
No child under 18	9	2	0	0
Less than 3 years old	311	59	36	49
3 to 5	86	16	13	18
6 to 17	111	21	21	28
Unknown	9	2	4	5
Currently Working for Pay***				
Yes	91	17	4	5
No	435	83	70	95
Currently Receiving TANF				
Yes	471	90	62	84
No	55	10	12	16

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-Month Follow-Up Survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: The counts of respondents and nonrespondents were adjusted, as described in the text. We conducted chi-squared tests for all the characteristics to test for differences between the respondents and the nonrespondents.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table A.4. Adjusted Response Rates for the 18-Month Follow-Up Survey, by Key Baseline Characteristics

	Population	Respondents	Response Rate
All	600	526	87.7
Male[a]	53	43	81.1
Female	547	483	88.3
Not currently working for pay	505	435	86.1
Currently working for pay	95	91	95.8
Program			
All	358	315	88.0
Male	27	21	77.8
Female	331	294	88.9
Female not working	276	242	87.7
Female working	55	52	94.5
Control			
All	242	211	87.2
Male	26	22	84.6
Female	216	189	87.5
Female not working	182	155	85.1
Female working	34	34	100.0

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-Month Follow-Up Survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

[a] Because of the small sample size for males, the numbers of working and nonworking males are not shown in this table.

For the first adjustment, the rescaling weight, *sizedwgt,* is defined as:

$$SW_{cs} = \frac{TANF_c}{N_{cs}}$$

where c represents the BNF county (or site), s represents the random assignment status (either program or control), $TANF$ represents the number of family TANF cases, and N represents the number of BNF sample members.

For the second adjustment, the nonresponse adjustment, we formed weighting cells within the program and control groups using the characteristics that best described the completion pattern—gender, working status, living status, Hispanic ethnicity, education levels at the time of random assignment—with a minimum of 20 completed cases for each cell. Within each cell, the nonresponse adjustment factor is defined as:

$$Adj_NR = \frac{\sum sizedwgt, \text{all members}}{\sum sizedwgt, \text{respondents}}$$

and within each cell the weight after the nonresponse adjustment is defined as:

$$Wgt_NR = sizedwgt \times Adj_NR$$

Table A.5 shows the creation of weighting cells and the adjustment factor in each cell.

Table A.5. Weighting Cells and Nonresponse Adjustment, by Treatment Status

Treatment Status	Gender	Working	Living with Partner	Hispanic	Education	NR Factor
Program	Male	All	All	All	All	1.255
	Female	No	No	All	No GED/HS	1.086
	Female	No	No	All	GED/HS	1.191
	Female	No	No	All	College or higher	1.032
	Female	No	Yes	All	All	1.253
	Female	Yes	All	All	All	1.074
Control	All	No	All	No	No GED/HS	1.256
	All	No	All	No	GED/HS	1.153
	All	No	All	No	College or higher	1.436
	All	No	All	Yes	All	1.042
	All	Yes	All	All	All	1.005

NR Factor = Nonresponse factor.

The third adjustment is a poststratification of the completed cases by program or control group within each site or site group. At certain sites, there were not enough cases for poststratification to be conducted with accuracy. In these cases, we combined small sites with other sites similar in key demographic characteristics. Within the program/control groups in each site (or site group), the poststratification factor is defined as:

$$Adj_PS = \frac{\sum sizedwgt}{\sum Wgt_NR}$$

The final weight, after poststratification, is defined as:

$$Wgt_NRPS = Wgt_NR \times Adj_PS$$

Overall, the nonresponse adjustments for the program and control groups created a small design effect due to unequal weights compared to the design effect due to the rescaling factor. Table A.6 shows the design effects before and after the nonresponse adjustment, as well as the effective sample sizes.

Table A.6. Design Effects and Effective Sample Sizes for the 18-Month Survey

	Sample	Respondents	DEff Before NR	DEff After NR	Effective N
Program	358	315	1.580	1.598	197
Control	242	211	1.410	1.466	144

DEff Before NR = Design effect before the nonresponse adjustment.
DEff After NR = Design effect after the nonresponse adjustment.

30-Month Follow-Up Survey

In this section, we examine the patterns of nonresponse in the 30-month follow-up survey data, and we discuss the steps taken in the computation of the weights.

Nonresponse Patterns. The BNF population has 602 sampled cases. As with the 18-month survey data, 600 of these were used as the basis for calculating the 30-month weights. Among the remaining 600 cases in the BNF population, 501 completed the 30-month follow-up survey, and 8 were treated as respondents to the survey for calculating the nonresponse adjustment.[6] The remaining discussion is based only on these 600 sample members and 509 respondents.[7] We compared the characteristics of the survey respondents to those of the nonrespondents to examine differences between them (Table A.7). We found that there are significant statistical differences in the distribution of the respondents and the nonrespondents on the following characteristics: the treatment status, and the response status to the 18-month follow-up survey. The differences in other characteristics, such as gender, race, working status, and education, are not significant.

[6] The eight cases that were treated as respondents were incarcerated (three cases), deceased (four cases), or a non-English speaker (one case). Like the respondents to the survey, we located each of these sample members. However, given their situation we were not able to complete an interview. In the majority of other sample cases, sample members who were located did complete an interview. Given this, we assumed that the characteristics of these eight cases were likely to be closer to the characteristics of respondents than nonrespondents. As such, we felt it was appropriate to treat them as respondents in the calculation of the weights.

[7] The survey data analysis in the body of the report was based on 502 completes (309 program group members and 193 control group members), which includes the 501 cases for which we have both a baseline and a follow-up survey and the aforementioned 1 case for which we have only a follow-up survey.

Table A.7. Comparison of 30-Month Survey Respondents to Nonrespondents

	Respondents		Nonrespondents	
Characteristics at Baseline	Counts	Percentage	Counts	Percentage
Treatment Status				
Program	313	61	45	49
Control	196	39	46	51
Gender				
Male	44	9	9	10
Female	465	91	82	90
Race				
White	425	84	77	85
Nonwhite	84	17	14	15
Ethnicity				
Hispanic	60	12	11	12
Non-Hispanic	449	88	80	88
Age at Enrollment				
Younger than 20	34	7	8	9
20 to 29	300	59	47	52
30 to 39	133	26	29	32
40 or older	42	8	7	8
Education				
No GED or high school diploma	161	32	32	35
GED or high school diploma	216	42	40	44
More than high school diploma or GED	132	26	19	21
Living with Partner				
Yes	141	28	24	27
No	368	72	67	74
Age of Youngest Children				
No child under 18	7	1	2	2
Less than 3 years old	292	57	55	60
3 to 5	89	17	10	11
6 to 17	110	22	22	24
Unknown	11	2	2	2
Currently Working for Pay				
Yes	84	17	11	12
No	425	84	80	88
Currently Receiving TANF				
Yes	454	89	79	87
No	55	11	12	13
Responded to the 18-month Follow-up Survey ***				
Yes	469	92	57	63
No	40	8	34	37

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-Month Follow-Up Survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: The counts of respondents and nonrespondents were adjusted, as described in the text. We conducted chi-squared tests for all of the characteristics to test for differences between respondents and nonrespondents.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

The overall response rate for the survey, adjusted for nonresponse (as described above), was 85 percent (Table A.8). There is a 6-percentage point difference in response rates between the program and control groups (87 and 81 percent, respectively). The largest difference (35 percentage points) is between cases who responded to the 18-month follow-up survey (89 percent) and cases who did not respond to it (54 percent). If the sample members are divided into smaller groups (program versus control crossed with response status to the 18-month follow-up survey, race, and ethnicity), we also find large differences in the response rates between groups (Table A.8). For example, the response rate for program group members who did not respond to the 18-month follow-up survey is 58 percent, while the response rate for program group members who did respond to the 18-month follow-up survey is 91 percent.

Table A.8. Adjusted Response Rates for the 30-Month Follow-Up Survey, by Key Baseline Characteristics

	Population	Respondents	Response Rate
Full Sample	600	509	84.8
Not responded to 18-month survey	74	40	54.0
Responded to 18-month survey	526	469	89.2
Hispanic responded to 18-month survey	62	54	87.1
Non-Hispanic responded to 18-month survey	464	415	89.4
White responded to 18-month survey	441	395	89.6
Nonwhite responded to 18-month survey	85	74	87.1
Program			
All	358	313	87.4
Not responded to 18-month survey	43	25	58.1
Responded to 18-month survey	315	288	91.4
Hispanic responded to 18-month survey	37	32	86.5
Non-Hispanic responded to 18-month survey	278	256	92.1
Control			
All	242	196	81.0
Not responded to 18-month survey	31	15	48.4
Responded to 18-month survey	211	181	85.8
White responded to 18-month survey	179	155	86.6
Nonwhite responded to 18-month survey	32	26	81.3

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 30-Month Follow-Up Survey of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Computation of the Weights. As with the 18-month survey weights, the 30-month weights were computed using three components, with the last two accounting for survey nonresponse. As we did for the 18-month survey weights, we used three separate weighting adjustments: (1) a rescaling weight within each site, (2) a weighting cell adjustment for nonresponse, and (3) a poststratification adjustment to mimic the demographic population characteristics under study. First, we used the same rescaling weight described above in the section on the 18-month follow-up survey. This weight, *sizedwgt*, accounts for the different probabilities of selection into the program and control groups across the BNF sites. Second, we developed the nonresponse adjustment so that the analyses using the information from respondents were representative of the total sample. Finally, the poststratification was developed such that, after the nonresponse adjustment and poststratification, the sum of weights within site (or site group) was again the same for the program and control groups. These adjustments comprise the final weight.

For the first adjustment, as for the 18-month survey data, the rescaling weight, *sizedwgt,* is defined as:

$$SW_{cs} = \frac{TANF_c}{N_{cs}}$$

where c represents the BNF county (or site), s represents the random assignment status (either program or control), $TANF$ represents the number of family TANF cases, and N represents the number of BNF sample members.

For the second adjustment, we formed weighting cells within the program and control groups using the characteristics that best described the completion patterns—the response status to the 18-month survey, gender, race, Hispanic ethnicity, age category at the time of random assignment, and education level at random assignment—with a minimum of 20 completed cases for each cell. Within each cell, the nonresponse adjustment factor is defined as:

$$Adj_NR = \frac{\sum sizedwgt, \text{all members}}{\sum sizedwgt, \text{respondents}}$$

and, within each cell, the weight after the nonresponse adjustment is defined as:

$$Wgt_NR = sizedwgt \times Adj_NR$$

Table A.9 shows the creation of weighting cells and the adjustment factor in each cell. As shown below, the characteristics that best describe the survey completion patterns differed for the program and control groups.

Table A.9. Weighting Cells and Nonresponse Adjustment, by Treatment Status

Program Group

Responded to 18-Month Survey	Hispanic	Age at Enrollment	Education	NR Factor
No	All	All	All	1.656
Yes	No	29 or younger	No GED/HS	1.009
Yes	No	29 or younger	GED/HS	1.048
Yes	No	29 or younger	College or higher	1.021
Yes	No	30 to 39	All	1.156
Yes	No	40 or older	All	1.070
Yes	Yes	All	All	1.165

Control Group

Gender	Race	Education	NR Factor
Male	All	All	1.061
Female	Nonwhite	All	1.221
Female	White	No GED/HS	1.572
Female	White	GED/HS	1.194
Female	White	College or higher	1.326

NR Factor = Nonresponse factor.

The third adjustment is a poststratification of the completed cases by program or control group within each site (or site group). At certain sites, there were not enough cases for poststratification to be conducted with accuracy. In these cases, we combined small sites with other sites similar in key demographic characteristics. Within the program/control groups in each of seven site groups, the poststratification factor is defined as:

$$Adj_PS = \frac{\sum sizedwgt}{\sum Wgt_NR}$$

The final weight, after poststratification, is defined as:

$$Wgt_NRPS = Wgt_NR \times Adj_PS$$

Overall, the nonresponse adjustments for the program and control groups created a small design effect due to unequal weights compared to the design effect due to the rescaling factor. Table A.10 shows the design effects before and after the nonresponse and poststratification adjustments, as well as the effective sample sizes.

Table A.10. Design Effects and Effective Sample Sizes for the 30-Month Survey

	Sample	Respondents	DEff Before NR and PS	DEff After NR and PS	Effective N
Program	358	313	1.580	1.577	198
Control	242	196	1.410	1.466	134

DEff Before NR = Design effect before the nonresponse adjustment.
DEff After NR = Design effect after the nonresponse adjustment.

Additional Set of Weights for the Sample of Dual Respondents

We also produced another set of weights to conduct impact analyses for the group of sample members who responded to both the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys ("dual respondents"). Key findings based on the sample of dual respondents are presented in Appendix C, where they are compared to key findings based on the 30-month survey sample. Findings based on the two samples were very consistent.

Among the 600 BNF sample members used as the basis for calculating the weights for dual respondents, 469 responded to both surveys (including 464 respondents and 5 who were considered respondents for calculating the nonresponse adjustment because they were either incarcerated, deceased, or a non-English speaker). The overall adjusted "dual respondent" response rate was 78.2 percent.

When we calculated a separate set of weights for the group of dual respondents, we followed the same methods described above for calculating weights for the 18- and 30-month survey samples. In so doing, we developed three separate weighting adjustments. As before, we first applied the rescaling weight. Second, for the weighting cell adjustment for nonresponse, we formed weighting cells within the program and control groups. For the program group, the cells were formed by the variables Hispanic ethnicity, working status, education level at enrollment, and the age category of the youngest child. For the control group, the cells were formed by the variables race, working status, education level at enrollment, and age category at enrollment. Third, for the final adjustment, we developed and applied poststratification factors to the completed cases by treatment status within site groups. Overall, as with the other weights, the nonresponse adjustments for the program and control groups created a small design effect due to unequal weights.

APPENDIX B

FINDINGS ON EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS FROM ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Our main findings related to the employment and earnings impacts of Building Nebraska Families (BNF) come from data collected from the 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys. We also compiled employment and earnings data from the state of Nebraska's unemployment insurance (UI) administrative records. Because these data are available for the entire sample, not just those who responded to the survey, they allow us to assess whether the decision to respond to the survey introduced bias into our survey-based findings. In addition, findings based on administrative data serve as a robustness check on results derived from our survey data.

Although administrative employment and earnings data represent accurate information on the jobs and earnings reported by employers in Nebraska, these data have some important limitations. In particular, administrative data only include jobs located in Nebraska and covered by UI. Therefore, some employment and earnings information would be excluded if a sample member worked out of state, was self-employed, or held an informal job. Such employment would not be covered by UI.

Because survey data include a broader set of jobs than administrative data, we believe that our survey-based findings are more likely to reflect BNF's impacts on employment and earnings. The broader coverage of survey data may be particularly important because the survey-based findings show that self-employment, which is unlikely to be covered by UI, was significantly more prevalent among program than control group members. Moreover, because about one-third of the counties in BNF's service area were adjacent to neighboring states, it is possible that some clients—program and control group members alike—may have obtained employment out of state. Because of limits on available data on out-of-state employment, however, it is not possible to assess how such employment may have varied for the program and control groups. Our ability to assess the importance of informal employment is also limited, because we cannot identify which jobs in the employment history were informal.

We took two steps to address possible concerns about the reliability and validity of the survey data. First, we performed a rigorous quality review check of all completed surveys to ensure that sample members' responses to questions about their employment and earnings experiences were believable. Survey responses were reviewed carefully for consistency and

validity, and corrections for missing or confusing data were obtained from BNF sites or from sample members. In addition, outliers in the survey data were omitted from the analyses to ensure that a small number of responses did not disproportionately affect the findings.[1] Second, we weighted the survey data to adjust for possible bias from survey nonresponse. (See Appendix A for details on developing the weights.) To further examine how nonresponse bias may have influenced the survey-based findings, we compared findings based on administrative data for two samples: (1) the full sample, and (2) the sample that responded to the 30-month survey (see below).

In the rest of this appendix, we first discuss the extent to which impacts based on administrative findings are similar for the full sample and the subgroup of the sample that responded to the survey. We then compare findings based on administrative data to findings based on survey data.

COMPARING THE FULL SAMPLE TO THE SURVEYED SAMPLE

Employment and earnings findings based on administrative data for sample members who responded to the 30-month survey are generally similar to findings based on administrative data for the full sample. This suggests that nonresponse to the survey did not introduce bias into the survey-based findings. For example, according to UI records, 89 percent of program group members in the full sample and the same percent of program group members who responded to the 30-month follow-up survey were employed at some point during the 10 quarters (30 months) after random assignment (Table B.1). Similarly, about four in five control group members from both the full sample and the surveyed sample were employed at some point during the followup. Overall, total earnings during the followup also were similar for the full sample and the surveyed sample (Table B.2). These findings suggest that survey participation bias is not likely to affect our analysis.

COMPARING FINDINGS BASED ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND SURVEY DATA

The employment and earnings impacts estimated from administrative UI records differ in their timing from the impacts found in the survey data. In this section, we discuss the patterns in the survey- and administrative-based impacts.

- ***Employment and earnings impacts in the survey data come at the end of the followup, while impacts in the administrative data are concentrated at the beginning of the followup.***

[1] We omitted cases from the earnings analyses that had monthly earnings from a single job greater than $4,000 in any of the months of the 30-month follow-up period. The $4,000 cutoff was approximately five standard deviations above the mean value for earnings from a single job and was also a natural breaking point in the distribution of the earnings data. Three cases met these criteria and were omitted from the analyses of earnings impacts. For each of these three cases, the data for one or more variables used to calculate monthly earnings were not believable.

Table B.1. Impacts on Employment Based on Administrative Data, by Sample Members' Survey Response Status (Percentage)

	Full Sample				Surveyed Sample			
	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Employed, by Quarter After Random Assignment								
1	55.3	46.5	8.8**	0.03	56.5	45.5	11.0**	0.01
2	57.6	46.9	10.6***	0.01	57.6	47.3	10.3**	0.02
3	50.9	46.3	4.7	0.24	50.4	48.3	2.1	0.63
4	52.0	52.8	-0.8	0.85	52.2	57.1	-4.9	0.25
5	51.3	50.6	0.7	0.85	51.2	52.9	-1.7	0.69
6	54.3	52.4	1.8	0.65	55.6	55.5	0.1	0.99
7	55.4	49.6	5.7	0.15	55.4	56.7	-1.3	0.76
8	49.7	49.1	0.7	0.87	51.1	54.0	-2.9	0.49
9	49.7	51.4	-1.7	0.67	53.5	53.9	-0.3	0.94
10	47.2	46.1	1.1	0.78	49.7	48.2	1.4	0.74
11	51.0	45.1	6.0	0.13	53.8	47.9	6.0	0.15
12	42.9	44.4	-1.5	0.71	44.6	48.3	-3.6	0.39
Ever Employed								
During 30-month followup[a]	88.6	82.3	6.3**	0.02	88.8	80.1	8.7***	0.00
During first year of followup	79.7	68.9	10.8***	0.00	80.8	68.3	12.5***	0.00
During second year of followup	69.0	69.0	0.0	0.99	69.8	72.5	-2.6	0.50
During final six months of followup	55.6	56.4	-0.8	0.84	59.0	57.7	1.3	0.75
Sample Size	**358**	**242**			**309**	**192**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]Corresponds to quarters 1 through 10 after random assignment. These summary statistics are directly comparable to summary statistics based on survey data presented in Chapter V.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table B.2. Impacts on Earnings Based on Administrative Data, by Sample Members' Survey Response Status (Dollars)

	Full Sample				Surveyed Sample			
	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Earnings, by Quarter After Random Assignment								
1	670	631	39	0.63	670	656	14	0.88
2	869	885	-16	0.88	864	940	-75	0.53
3	931	920	11	0.92	927	956	-29	0.82
4	1,029	917	111	0.35	1,047	1,001	46	0.74
5	1,081	819	263**	0.03	1,128	890	238	0.08
6	1,228	985	244*	0.06	1,289	1,113	175	0.24
7	1,234	1,011	223*	0.10	1,279	1,161	118	0.44
8	1,129	1,027	102	0.42	1,214	1,189	24	0.86
9	1,034	1,077	-43	0.73	1,110	1,184	-74	0.59
10	1,144	1,216	-72	0.59	1,233	1,372	-138	0.36
11	1,211	1,279	-68	0.64	1,308	1,391	-82	0.61
12	988	1,205	-216	0.10	1,024	1,350	-325**	0.03
Average Monthly Earnings								
During 30-month followup[a]	345	316	29	0.33	359	349	10	0.76
During first year of followup	292	279	12	0.67	292	296	-4	0.91
During second year of followup	389	320	69*	0.06	409	363	46	0.27
During final six months of followup	363	382	-19	0.64	391	426	-35	0.43
Sample Size	**358**	**242**			**309**	**192**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]Corresponds to quarters 1 through 10 after random assignment. These summary statistics are directly comparable to summary statistics based on survey data presented in Chapter V.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

In the survey data, we found modest impacts on employment toward the end of the 30-month followup for the full sample, and large impacts on employment and earnings toward the end of the followup for the more disadvantaged subgroup (see Chapter V for a full discussion of the full sample findings and Chapter VI for a discussion of the subgroup findings). However, program impacts based on administrative data tended to be concentrated in the early months of the followup.

In the survey data, there were significant employment impacts for the full sample only in the last six months of the followup, when three-quarters of program group members were employed, compared to two-thirds of control group members (Table V.1). In the administrative data, there were significant employment impacts only in the first year of the followup, when 80 percent of program group members worked, compared to 69 percent of control group members (Table B.1).

In both the survey and administrative data, program impacts were stronger for the more disadvantaged subgroup, although again the timing of the impacts differed between the two types of data. In the administrative data, across the full follow-up period, we found strong positive impacts on earnings. Average monthly earnings in jobs covered by UI were $248 for more disadvantaged BNF program group members, 38 percent more than the $180 of control group members (Table B.3). However, earnings impacts based on administrative records were positive and significant in the first and second years of the followup, but not in the final six months. This contrasts with the survey-based findings in which earnings impacts became larger over time (Table F.4).

One source of the difference in the timing of the administrative- and survey-based earnings impacts is that some jobs (such as those that are informal, based on self-employment, or through an out-of-state employer) are not covered by UI. Therefore, administrative data may not contain information on all jobs included in the survey data. Indeed, for both the full sample and the more disadvantaged subgroup, employment rates in the second year of the followup and in the final six months of the followup based on the survey data are much higher than those based on the administrative data. For example, according to administrative records, 42 percent of more disadvantaged program group members and 41 percent of more disadvantaged control group members were employed at some point during the final six months of the followup (Table B.4). According to survey data, these figures were 63 and 52 percent, respectively (Table VI.1). These findings are consistent with the exclusion of some types of employment from administrative records. Surprisingly, employment rates during the first year of the followup are actually higher in the administrative data. It is unclear what the source of this finding might be.

Further evidence of the importance of jobs not covered by UI lies in the prevalence of self-employment and in BNF's impact on self-employment. For the full sample, 23 percent of program group members were self-employed at some point during the followup, significantly more than the 11 percent of control group members who were ever self-employed (not shown). For the more disadvantaged subgroup, self-employment rates and impacts were similar to those for the full sample: 23 percent of more disadvantaged program group members were ever self-employed, compared to 13 percent of their control group

counterparts (not shown). These impacts on self-employment, by themselves, do not explain the differences in the administrative- and survey-based findings. However they do suggest that it was not uncommon for sample members to work in jobs not covered by UI.

Table B.3. Subgroup Impacts on Earnings Based on Administrative Data, by Sample Members' Degree of Disadvantage (Dollars)

	More Disadvantaged Sample Members				Less Disadvantaged Sample Members			
	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Earnings, by Quarter After Random Assignment								
1	447	263	184**	0.03	908	943	-35	0.80
2	586	441	146	0.20	1,159	1,274	-115	0.52
3	612	532	81	0.56	1,272	1,239	33	0.86
4	759	471	288**	0.02	1,353	1,279	73	0.71
5	768	415	352**	0.01	1,447	1,168	279	0.13
6	1,000	601	399**	0.02	1,483	1,339	144	0.46
7	999	584	415**	0.02	1,507	1,419	89	0.67
8	869	631	238	0.16	1,438	1,382	57	0.76
9	651	630	21	0.89	1,446	1,454	-8	0.97
10	747	826	-80	0.65	1,562	1,555	7	0.97
11	795	851	-56	0.77	1,620	1,661	-41	0.85
12	676	876	-200	0.26	1,276	1,503	-227	0.25
Average Monthly Earnings								
During 30-month followup[a]	248	180	68**	0.04	452	435	17	0.71
During first year of followup	200	142	58**	0.05	391	395	-4	0.94
During second year of followup	303	186	117**	0.01	490	442	47	0.40
During final six months of followup	233	243	-10	0.86	501	501	0	0.99
Sample Size	**149**	**103**			**201**	**134**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]Corresponds to quarters 1 through 10 after random assignment. These summary statistics are directly comparable to summary statistics based on survey data presented in Chapter VI.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table B.4. Subgroup Impacts on Employment Based on Administrative Data, by Sample Members' Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage)

	More Disadvantaged Sample Members				Less Disadvantaged Sample Members			
	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	*p*-Value
Employed, by Quarter After Random Assignment								
1	50.5	28.8	21.7***	0.00	59.1	63.3	-4.1	0.44
2	49.7	31.4	18.3***	0.00	64.8	61.0	3.9	0.46
3	44.4	29.2	15.2**	0.01	58.2	60.9	-2.6	0.63
4	48.7	40.8	7.9	0.20	58.2	61.5	-3.2	0.55
5	41.8	35.2	6.6	0.27	63.2	63.5	-0.3	0.96
6	46.1	43.2	3.0	0.63	63.0	59.5	3.5	0.50
7	48.6	36.9	11.6**	0.05	64.9	60.8	4.1	0.44
8	42.0	34.5	7.5	0.19	58.2	62.6	-4.3	0.42
9	35.7	37.4	-1.7	0.78	62.6	63.1	-0.5	0.92
10	35.4	35.9	-0.5	0.93	58.2	55.0	3.2	0.55
11	39.5	34.0	5.6	0.34	62.1	54.6	7.5	0.16
12	31.9	34.7	-2.9	0.62	52.6	53.9	-1.3	0.81
Ever Employed								
During 30-month followup[a]	83.5	69.9	13.6***	0.01	93.0	93.6	-0.6	0.83
During first year of followup	75.9	53.3	22.6***	0.00	83.8	82.3	1.6	0.70
During second year of followup	61.0	56.9	4.2	0.48	78.8	78.6	0.2	0.97
During final six months of followup	42.3	41.0	1.3	0.83	68.6	69.0	-0.3	0.95
Sample Size	**149**	**103**			**201**	**134**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]Corresponds to quarters 1 through 10 after random assignment. These summary statistics are directly comparable to summary statistics based on survey data presented in Chapter VI.

*/**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

APPENDIX C

COMPARISON OF MAIN FINDINGS TO FINDINGS BASED ON SAMPLE OF 18- AND 30-MONTH RESPONDENTS

The main findings related to the effect of Building Nebraska Families (BNF) on the employment, self-sufficiency, and well-being of welfare recipients and other low-income people are based on the 502 sample members who responded to the final follow-up survey administered approximately 30 months after random assignment. Because a full employment history was gathered from the 38 study participants who responded to the 30-month survey but had not responded to the earlier 18-month interview, it was possible to include them in the analysis sample. Including these respondents increased the power of the study to detect impacts.

The early employment and earnings histories of the 30-month-only respondents probably are more affected by recall error than those of sample members who responded to both the 18- and 30-month surveys The 30-month only respondents would not be as likely to have accurate recollections of their employment history for the early part of the follow-up period when surveyed 30 months after random assignment as they would have if they had been surveyed 18 months after random assignment. However, recall error should affect the treatment and control groups equally—7.4 percent of treatment group members, compared to 7.8 percent of control group members, were 30-month-only respondents.[1] Therefore, there is no reason to believe that this error biases the estimated impacts. To make certain that the results did not vary substantively with the choice of sample, we repeated key analyses related to employment and earnings for sample members who responded to both the 18- and 30-month surveys. We did so for the full sample, as well as for the more and less disadvantaged subgroups. Findings across the two samples were highly consistent. Here, we detail those findings relating to the key outcomes of earnings and employment.

[1] Differences in the percentage of treatment and control group members who were 30-month-only respondents were not significantly different for the full sample, or for the more and less disadvantaged subgroups.

- ***There are no important differences in employment and earnings impacts between the sample that responded to both the 18- and 30-month surveys and the sample that includes all respondents to the 30-month survey.***

Potential problems related to recall error are most relevant to the earliest period of the followup, when the difference between the time of the survey and the reference period of the survey questions is the greatest for those who responded to the 30-month survey only. Impacts on employment and earnings for each of the first two years of the followup are qualitatively similar to our main findings when those who responded to the 30-month survey only are excluded from the sample (Table C.1). For example, our main findings were that 65 percent of program group members were employed at some point during the first year of the followup, compared to 67 percent of control group members. When sample members that responded to the 30-month survey only are excluded, these figures are 64 and 66 percent, respectively.

In addition to qualitative comparisons of impacts by survey response, we conducted statistical tests of whether there were significant differences between our main employment and earnings impacts and the impacts for the sample that excludes those who responded to the 30-month survey only. Consistent with our expectations, we found no statistically significant differences in any of the impacts for any of the time periods under study (the full follow-up period, or the first year, second year, or final six months of the follow-up period).

- ***Among the degree of disadvantage subgroup, impacts for the sample that responded to both the 18- and 30-month surveys are also similar to the evaluation's main findings.***

As with the full sample, impacts on employment and earnings for each of the first two years of the followup are qualitatively similar to our main findings when those who responded to the 30-month survey only are excluded (Table C.2). For example, our main findings indicate that average monthly earnings were $300 for program group members during the first year of the followup, compared to $286 for control group members (Table VI.1). When sample members who responded to the 30-month survey only are excluded, these figures are $301 and $280, respectively (Table C.2). As with the full sample, statistical tests of whether there were significant differences between our main employment and earnings subgroup impacts and the subgroup impacts for the sample that excludes those who responded to the 30-month survey only revealed no statistically significant differences. None of these findings suggests that recall error associated with sample members who participated in the 30-month interview only introduced bias to our main impact estimates.

Table C.1. Employment and Earnings During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period, by Survey Response (Percentage, Unless Specified Otherwise)

	Respondents to Both 18- and 30-Month Surveys				All 30-Month Survey Respondents			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	90.4	87.6	2.8	0.32	90.7	87.6	3.1	0.26
Number of months employed	14.9	14.6	0.4	0.69	15.0	14.8	0.2	0.77
Monthly hours worked	70.4	67.5	2.9	0.57	70.6	69.4	2.5	0.61
Monthly earnings (dollars)	493	497	-4	0.93	494	504	-10	0.80
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	64.0	65.6	-1.6	0.70	65.0	66.7	-1.7	0.67
Number of months employed	4.8	5.1	-0.3	0.54	4.9	5.2	-0.3	3.54
Monthly hours worked	53.8	59.5	-5.7	0.33	54.5	62.3	-7.8	0.19
Monthly earnings (dollars)	379	435	-56	0.24	388	448	-59	0.20
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	79.1	81.5	-2.4	0.47	78.7	81.2	-2.5	0.46
Number of months employed	6.8	6.3	0.5	0.27	6.8	6.3	1.1	0.77
Monthly hours worked	81.2	73.0	8.2	0.15	79.8	71.4	8.4	0.14
Monthly earnings (dollars)	551	533	18	0.70	559	527	32	0.49
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	74.9	66.2	8.7**	0.03	74.4	67.4	6.4	0.10
Number of months employed	3.5	3.1	0.4*	0.06	3.5	3.1	0.4*	0.08
Monthly hours worked	87.2	77.6	9.6	0.18	87.4	78.9	8.5	0.22
Monthly earnings (dollars)	623	560	62	0.30	619	569	50	0.39
Sample Size	**286**	**178**			**309**	**193**		

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table C.2. Employment and Earnings During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period for Those Who Responded to Both the 18- and 30-Month Surveys, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage, Unless Specified Otherwise)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	85.3	79.7	5.6	0.29	95.9	94.1	1.9	0.50
Number of months employed	12.5	10.7	1.8	0.18	17.6	18.1	-0.4	0.72
Monthly hours worked	59.1	47.0	12.2	0.11	83.0	85.7	-2.7	0.71
Monthly earnings (dollars)	412	316	95*	0.10	594	670	-77	0.22
First Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	60.4	51.3	9.0	0.17	69.2	77.5	-8.3	0.14
Number of months employed	3.9	3.8	0.1	0.86	5.9	6.1	-0.2	0.78
Monthly hours worked	43.0	40.8	2.1	0.79	66.5	74.1	-7.6	0.38
Monthly earnings (dollars)	301	280	21	0.74	475	565	-89	0.20
Second Year of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	68.5	72.9	-4.5	0.46	90.4	89.2	1.1	0.76
Number of months employed	5.9	4.3	1.6**	0.05	7.9	8.1	-0.2	0.77
Monthly hours worked	69.5	48.8	20.7**	0.02	90.9	92.8	-1.9	0.81
Monthly earnings (dollars)	475	325	150**	0.02	649	743	-94	0.19
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period								
Ever employed	6.2	5.0	1.2	0.11	84.2	83.0	1.2	0.79
Number of months employed	3.0	2.2	0.8**	0.05	4.1	4.0	0.1	0.65
Monthly hours worked	75.7	53.7	22.0*	0.07	98.8	101.0	-2.2	0.81
Monthly earnings (dollars)	557	339	218**	0.02	704	784	-80	0.34
Sample Size	**119**	74			**161**	**100**		

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

APPENDIX D

BNF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT TOOLS

BUILDING NEBRASKA FAMILIES
PROGRAM ENTRY/EXIT CHECKLIST

Client Name: _____ (Last) _____ (First)

BNF Client ID: |__|__|__|__|

Master Case ID: |__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|

MPR ID: |__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|

Educator Name: _____ (Last) _____ (First)

Form Completed at: ☐ Entry ☐ Exit ☐ Follow-Up

Date Form Completed: |__|__| / |__|__| / |__|__|__|__|
Month Day Year

For these statements, think about how you usually do things. Please put a check in the box that is the best response for each statement.	**N/A**	**Never**	**Seldom**	**Sometimes**	**Most of the Time**	**Almost Always**
1. I feel positive about my life.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
2. I can cope with the changes I'm facing.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
3. I can listen to bad news without getting mad.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
4. I can set goals for myself.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
5. I use a calendar to schedule my appointments and activities.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
6. I solve problems on my own.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
7. I seek help from others to solve a problem.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
8. I do things ahead of time to cut down on feeling rushed when getting ready for work or school.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
9. I exercise to work off stress.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
10. I miss work or appointments.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
11. I praise my (child/children) for being good.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
12. I use positive communication with my family members.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
13. My family has fun together.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
14. My family eats at least one meal a day together.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
15. I can pay my bills (in full) on time.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
16. I plan how I will spend or save my money each payday.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
17. I keep a record of how I spend my money.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
18. I am hopeful about the future.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
19. I feel depressed.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐
20. I rely on stimulants to cope.	00 ☐	01 ☐	02 ☐	03 ☐	04 ☐	05 ☐

BUILDING NEBRASKA FAMILIES
SUCCESS MARKER REPORT FORM

Client Name: _____ (Last) _____ (First)

BNF Client ID: |__|__|__|__|__|

Master Case ID: |__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|

MPR ID: |__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|

Educator Name: _____ (Last) _____ (First)

Rating Scale

0 = Never 1 = Rarely (less than 1/3) 2 = Sometimes (1/3 to 2/3) 3 = Most of the time (More than 2/3)

ENTER DATE OF RATING

Criterion	|__|__|/|__|__|/|__|__| MM DD YY	|__|__|/|__|__|/|__|__| MM DD YY	|__|__|/|__|__|/|__|__| MM DD YY	|__|__|/|__|__|/|__|__| MM DD YY	|__|__|/|__|__|/|__|__| MM DD YY	|__|__|/|__|__|/|__|__| MM DD YY
Keeps appointments	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Actively participates in BNF	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Comes prepared to lessons	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Participates in planning BNF program	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Identifies personal assets, needs, and growth areas	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Sets short-term goals	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Overcomes obstacles to participation	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Completes assignments	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Practices new skills with family	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Achieves primary goals	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Sets and achieves long-term goals	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Maintains employment	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Takes personal responsibility for meeting goals	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Demonstrates self-sufficiency based on individual goals	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Incorporates lessons into their own value and belief system	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Serves as mentor for others	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Volunteers in the community	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Shares BNF stories with other EF clients	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐
Publicly supports BNF	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐	0☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐

APPENDIX E

SUPPLEMENTAL TABLES FOR FULL SAMPLE IMPACTS

Table E.1. Regression-Adjusted Mean Employment Rates During the 30-Month Followup, by Month (Percentage)

Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	26.6	28.0	-1.4	0.72
2	31.4	34.1	-2.7	0.51
3	34.6	37.5	-3.0	0.48
4	37.3	40.4	-3.0	0.47
5	39.8	43.1	-3.3	0.43
6	41.0	44.1	-3.1	0.48
7	46.1	44.2	1.9	0.66
8	46.9	47.8	-0.8	0.85
9	47.5	50.5	-3.0	0.49
10	48.4	53.4	-5.0	0.25
11	48.6	49.9	-1.4	0.75
12	48.8	53.9	-5.1	0.24
13	52.4	51.8	0.7	0.88
14	56.9	53.2	3.8	0.39
15	57.4	51.2	6.2	0.15
16	55.8	47.7	8.1*	0.06
17	55.3	49.0	6.3	0.14
18	55.9	52.1	3.7	0.37
19	59.9	57.2	2.7	0.52
20	61.4	59.9	1.5	0.72
21	53.3	55.0	-1.7	0.70
22	54.1	52.6	1.5	0.73
23	53.7	53.7	0.0	0.99
24	60.1	52.8	7.3*	0.08
25	59.6	54.2	5.5	0.19
26	61.6	50.5	11.1***	0.01
27	58.9	49.6	9.2**	0.03
28	58.9	54.2	4.7	0.26
29	59.1	53.3	5.7	0.18
30	57.0	48.8	8.2*	0.06
Sample Size	**307**	**193**		

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.2. Regression-Adjusted Mean Monthly Earnings During the 30-Month Followup, by Month (Dollars)

Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	192	262	-69	0.13
2	291	374	-83	0.13
3	329	423	-94*	0.10
4	351	470	-120**	0.04
5	358	499	-141**	0.01
6	393	489	-97*	0.09
7	434	497	-63	0.28
8	442	535	-92	0.13
9	453	529	-76	0.21
10	446	490	-44	0.44
11	473	480	-7	0.91
12	503	488	15	0.81
13	534	508	26	0.67
14	569	509	60	0.31
15	592	487	104*	0.07
16	604	466	138**	0.02
17	563	477	85	0.14
18	539	493	47	0.42
19	578	539	39	0.50
20	563	574	-11	0.85
21	558	571	-13	0.83
22	546	568	-23	0.71
23	557	574	-16	0.79
24	606	536	70	0.23
25	615	550	65	0.29
26	636	553	83	0.17
27	634	575	59	0.35
28	617	603	15	0.81
29	623	566	57	0.36
30	609	558	52	0.41
Sample Size	**309**	**193**		

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.3. Unadjusted Mean Employment Rates During the 30-Month Followup, by Month (Percentage)

Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	26.2	28.4	-2.2	0.66
2	30.9	34.6	-3.7	0.49
3	34.3	37.7	-3.4	0.53
4	36.9	40.7	-3.8	0.49
5	39.0	43.9	-4.9	0.38
6	40.6	44.5	-3.8	0.49
7	46.5	43.8	2.7	0.64
8	47.2	47.5	-0.2	0.97
9	48.3	49.6	-1.3	0.82
10	49.0	52.7	-3.7	0.52
11	49.2	49.3	-0.1	0.99
12	49.4	53.4	-4.0	0.48
13	53.2	51.1	2.1	0.71
14	57.6	52.5	5.1	0.37
15	58.3	50.3	8.0	0.16
16	56.4	47.1	9.3*	0.10
17	55.9	48.5	7.4	0.19
18	56.8	51.2	5.7	0.32
19	60.7	56.4	4.4	0.43
20	62.2	59.2	3.0	0.59
21	54.0	54.3	-0.3	0.95
22	54.7	52.0	2.7	0.64
23	54.4	53.1	1.3	0.82
24	60.9	52.0	9.0	0.11
25	60.7	53.0	7.7	0.17
26	62.4	49.7	12.7**	0.02
27	60.7	47.8	12.9**	0.02
28	61.6	51.5	10.0*	0.07
29	61.3	51.1	10.2*	0.07
30	58.9	47.1	11.8**	0.04
Sample Size	**309**	**193**		

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.4. Unadjusted Mean Monthly Earnings During the 30-Month Followup, by Month (Dollars)

Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	192	262	-70	0.21
2	290	375	-85	0.21
3	328	424	-96	0.18
4	348	473	-126*	0.09
5	354	503	-149**	0.04
6	392	490	-98	0.18
7	441	490	-49	0.51
8	451	526	-74	0.34
9	464	518	-54	0.48
10	455	481	-27	0.72
11	487	467	20	0.80
12	514	477	37	0.63
13	544	498	46	0.55
14	579	500	79	0.30
15	599	480	118	0.11
16	608	462	146*	0.06
17	571	469	103	0.19
18	551	481	70	0.36
19	592	524	67	0.36
20	574	563	11	0.88
21	562	567	-6	0.94
22	550	565	-15	0.85
23	568	563	5	0.94
24	614	527	87	0.26
25	627	537	90	0.25
26	643	546	98	0.22
27	649	560	88	0.28
28	640	580	60	0.44
29	642	547	95	0.23
30	624	544	80	0.32
Sample Size	**309**	**193**		

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.5. Employment at the Time of the 18-Month Survey, by Type of Job (Percentage)

Outcome[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
Job Characteristic (%)				
Offers hourly wage greater than $8	13.7	13.4	0.3	0.92
Is full-time (more than 35 hours per week)	28.6	21.9	6.6*	0.07
Employed in job at least 6 months	28.5	24.1	4.4	0.24
Is temporary or seasonal	4.9	5.0	0.0	0.98
Is regular daytime shift	27.4	33.9	-6.4*	0.10
Job Benefit (%)				
Provides health insurance	18.2	14.4	3.8	0.24
Provides sick leave	13.0	15.1	-2.1	0.49
Provides paid vacation	18.2	17.8	0.4	0.90
Provides retirement plan	9.6	11.0	-1.3	0.62
Sample Size	**313**	**212**		

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]The sample for these job characteristic variables includes both sample members who were working and those who were not. If the sample were limited only to those who were working, impact estimates would not be valid; see text for more discussion on this point.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.6. Characteristics of the Current or Most Recent Job at the Time of the 18-Month Survey, for Sample Members Who Were Employed During the Follow-Up Period (Percentage, Unless Specified Otherwise)

Outcome[a]	Program Group	Control Group
Hourly Wage Rate (Dollars)	7.13	6.96
Monthly Earnings (Dollars)	1,053	986
Number of Months on Job (Months)	9.1	7.4*
Usual Hours Worked per Week (Hours)	34.0	31.9*
Occupation		
Administrative support/clerical	1.9	6.0
Sales/retail	11.6	23.5**
Health services	25.7	7.8***
Food services	25.6	23.1
Cleaning services	7.8	4.6
Other services	11.7	9.8
Production/trade	12.6	19.0
Manager/professional/technical	2.3	9.7**
Other	0.5	0.5
Sample Size	**271**	**167**

Source: Based on the Rural Welfare-to-Work 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]Because sample members who did not work during the follow-up period are not included in this table, we do not report estimated impacts for these outcomes. However, we do report statistically significant differences between the two groups.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.7. TANF Receipt During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period, Administrative Data (Percentage)

Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	90.3	90.5	-0.2	0.93
2	87.5	87.2	0.3	0.91
3	67.8	67.4	0.4	0.92
4	57.7	57.6	0.1	0.99
5	53.0	51.1	1.9	0.64
6	50.1	50.0	0.2	0.97
7	47.2	46.0	1.2	0.76
8	42.7	37.6	5.0	0.20
9	35.1	41.4	-6.3	0.11
10	34.6	40.4	-5.8	0.14
11	33.3	40.5	-7.2*	0.07
12	30.1	37.8	-7.7**	0.04
13	30.8	34.5	-3.7	0.33
14	29.0	39.5	-10.5***	0.01
15	29.6	37.1	-7.6**	0.05
16	30.9	33.7	-2.9	0.45
17	28.9	29.4	-0.5	0.89
18	27.7	28.4	-0.7	0.84
19	28.1	25.9	2.1	0.55
20	25.3	26.0	-0.7	0.84
21	23.2	24.3	-1.1	0.75
22	21.6	23.9	-2.3	0.50
23	20.4	25.2	-4.8	0.14
24	19.6	27.4	-7.8**	0.02
25	23.0	27.8	-4.8	0.17
26	20.7	23.8	-3.0	0.37
27	21.3	20.7	0.6	0.85
28	22.0	18.7	3.3	0.31
29	21.2	17.0	4.3	0.18
30	20.6	17.7	2.9	0.37
Sample Size	**358**	**242**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.8. Overall TANF and Food Stamp Receipt During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period, Administrative Data

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
30-Month Follow-Up Period				
Received TANF (percentage)	96.6	98.3	-1.7	0.20
Months received TANF (number)	10.7	11.3	-0.6	0.31
Average TANF received (dollars)	120	125	-4	0.56
Received FS (percentage)	98.0	98.2	-0.2	0.87
Months received FS (number)	21.2	21.3	-0.1	0.87
Average FS received (dollars)	222	230	-8	0.44
First Year of Follow-Up Period				
Received TANF (percentage)	95.8	98.2	-2.4	0.10
Months received TANF (number)	6.3	6.5	-0.2	0.51
Average TANF received (dollars)	176	180	-4	0.66
Received FS (percentage)	97.3	97.5	-0.2	0.89
Months received FS (number)	9.6	9.5	0.0	0.93
Average FS received (dollars)	251	257	-6	0.58
Second Year of Follow-Up Period				
Received TANF (percentage)	51.2	55.5	-4.3	0.28
Months received TANF (number)	3.1	3.6	-0.4	0.17
Average TANF received (dollars)	89	98	-9	0.37
Received FS (percentage)	82.2	82.3	-0.2	0.96
Months received FS (number)	7.9	7.9	-0.1	0.84
Average FS received (dollars)	207	218	-11	0.38
Final 6 Months of Follow-Up Period				
Received TANF (percentage)	34.7	38.3	-3.7	0.34
Months received TANF (number)	1.3	1.3	0.0	0.98
Average TANF received (dollars)	72	68	4	0.70
Received FS (percentage)	73.3	75.0	-1.7	0.64
Months received FS (number)	3.8	3.8	-0.1	0.75
Average FS received (dollars)	193	199	-6	0.67
Sample Size	**358**	**242**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

FS = food stamps; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.9. Food Stamp Receipt During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period, Administrative Data (Percentage)

Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	90.3	93.0	-2.7	0.24
2	92.1	92.0	0.1	0.95
3	87.9	86.9	1.0	0.72
4	80.6	83.6	-3.0	0.33
5	80.9	80.8	0.1	0.98
6	79.6	78.0	1.6	0.64
7	77.4	78.6	-1.2	0.72
8	75.9	72.1	3.9	0.28
9	74.4	71.7	2.7	0.46
10	73.8	72.4	1.4	0.69
11	72.2	72.3	-0.1	0.98
12	69.1	72.0	-3.0	0.43
13	68.3	72.4	-4.1	0.27
14	68.2	70.7	-2.5	0.50
15	68.5	70.8	-2.3	0.53
16	67.8	68.5	-0.7	0.85
17	69.0	68.1	0.9	0.82
18	65.7	63.9	1.7	0.66
19	62.8	64.2	-1.4	0.71
20	63.3	63.4	-0.1	0.98
21	64.8	61.1	3.6	0.34
22	63.6	63.1	0.5	0.89
23	61.3	64.5	-3.2	0.41
24	63.4	64.3	-0.9	0.82
25	65.3	65.3	0.0	0.99
26	63.5	63.8	-0.3	0.94
27	62.7	66.1	-3.4	0.38
28	60.7	65.1	-4.5	0.26
29	60.7	62.3	-1.6	0.69
30	62.8	59.8	3.0	0.45
Sample Size	**358**	**242**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table E.10. Clients' Estimated Level of Confidence at the Time of the 18-Month Follow-Up Survey

Characteristic	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate
Summary of Confidence Statements (Out of 14, maximum of 70)[a]	59.5	60.4	-0.9
Find and keep permanent employment	4.3	4.2	0.1
Avoid destructive relationships	4.2	4.3	-0.1
Have a satisfying relationship with child(ren)	4.8	4.8	-0.0
Find and keep good friends	4.2	4.2	0.0
Feel you are part of a community	3.5	3.5	0.0
Take your child(ren) to the doctor/dentist when needed	4.8	4.8	0.0
Get teachers to listen when you talk about your child(ren)	4.6	4.5	0.1
Keep yourself healthy	4.3	4.5	-0.1
Find and use the community services you need	4.2	4.3	-0.1
Set goals for yourself	4.2	4.4	-0.2*
Use a calendar to set appointments for yourself	4.4	4.6	-0.2**
Eat at least one meal per day together with your family	4.6	4.7	-0.1
Pay your bills in full on time	3.8	3.8	0.0
Plan how you will spend or save your money each payday	3.9	4.0	-0.1
Sample Size	**311**	**209**	

Source: Rural WtW 18-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a] The questions were adapted from a survey used by Iowa's Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Program. All of the self-reported characteristics are based on a five-point scale that measured how confident the client was that she could do each of the above activities: "confident," "mostly confident," "somewhat confident," "a little confident," or "not confident." The clients' response to each statement has a maximum value of 5, ranging from 5 for "confident" to 1 for "not confident." The 14 statements were summed to calculate the summary measure of confidence.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

APPENDIX F

SUPPLEMENTAL TABLES FOR SUBGROUP IMPACTS

Table F.1. Monthly Employment Rates During the 30-Month Followup, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	20.9	19.9	1.0	0.86	34.1	33.0	1.2	0.84
2	23.8	23.7	0.1	0.99	39.9	42.3	-2.5	0.68
3	25.5	25.6	-0.1	0.99	44.6	47.3	-2.7	0.66
4	26.3	32.1	-5.9	0.32	49.0	46.9	2.1	0.73
5	29.0	34.8	-5.8	0.33	48.5	50.9	-2.4	0.70
6	32.9	34.5	-1.5	0.80	49.3	52.6	-3.3	0.59
7	40.2	33.3	6.8	0.27	53.0	53.5	-0.5	0.93
8	39.9	34.4	5.4	0.39	54.7	59.8	-5.1	0.39
9	40.9	40.9	0.0	0.99	55.1	58.7	-3.7	0.55
10	42.1	43.2	-1.2	0.86	56.4	61.8	-5.4	0.37
11	43.0	38.3	4.7	0.48	55.6	60.5	-4.9	0.42
12	40.0	41.5	-1.5	0.82	59.6	67.5	-7.9	0.19
13	46.2	38.7	7.5	0.24	61.1	66.4	-5.4	0.36
14	48.3	39.0	9.3	0.17	67.4	67.5	0.0	0.99
15	48.1	37.3	10.8	0.11	68.9	65.3	3.6	0.53
16	45.6	33.5	12.1*	0.07	68.3	61.9	6.4	0.26
17	46.2	35.0	11.2*	0.08	66.8	62.7	4.0	0.47
18	46.6	32.6	13.9**	0.03	66.8	70.2	-3.4	0.55
19	50.3	41.7	8.6	0.20	71.8	70.1	1.6	0.76
20	52.1	49.9	2.2	0.72	72.4	68.1	4.4	0.43
21	44.9	41.7	3.2	0.62	63.2	67.3	-4.1	0.47
22	42.7	39.1	3.6	0.57	65.8	65.8	0.1	0.99
23	41.2	38.4	2.8	0.66	66.1	69.1	-3.1	0.59
24	48.2	37.7	10.5	0.11	72.9	67.2	5.7	0.31
25	48.4	40.9	7.5	0.26	71.0	66.7	4.4	0.42
26	52.0	33.7	18.3***	0.01	70.9	66.2	4.6	0.41
27	47.7	33.9	13.8**	0.03	69.4	62.8	6.7	0.24
28	49.4	37.5	11.9*	0.07	68.3	68.3	0.0	0.99
29	47.2	40.9	6.4	0.33	69.2	64.2	5.0	0.37
30	49.1	36.6	12.5*	0.06	64.1	61.3	2.8	0.63
Sample Size	**126**	**82**			**172**	**106**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table F.2. Employment at the Time of the 18-Month Follow-Up Survey, by Type of Job and Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Outcome[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
Job Characteristic (%)								
Offers hourly wage greater than $8	9.6	5.7	3.9	0.29	16.8	22.1	-5.2	0.24
Is full-time (35 hours per week)	29.9	11.6	18.3***	0.00	29.2	30.9	-1.8	0.74
Employed in job at least 6 months	21.7	16.1	5.6	0.30	35.8	30.5	5.3	0.33
Is temporary or seasonal	7.6	3.8	3.7	0.30	3.5	5.0	1.5	0.54
Is regular daytime shift	22.0	23.8	-1.8	0.76	34.2	40.6	-6.4	0.24
Job Benefit (%)								
Provides health insurance	11.3	4.8	6.5*	0.09	26.3	23.2	3.1	0.53
Provides sick leave	5.6	4.0	1.6	0.61	19.1	26.0	-6.9	0.17
Provides paid vacation	12.3	7.4	4.9	0.25	23.5	27.6	-4.1	0.43
Provides retirement plan	4.3	1.4	3.0	0.30	16.8	19.5	-2.7	0.56
Sample Size	**130**	**85**			**176**	**122**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]The sample for these job characteristic variables includes both sample members who were working and those who were not. If the sample were limited only to those who were working, impact estimates would not be valid; see text for more discussion on this point.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table F.3. Characteristics of the Current or Most Recent Job at the Time of the 18-Month Follow-Up Survey, for Sample Members Who Were Employed During the Follow-Up Period, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage, Unless Specified Otherwise)

	More Disadvantaged		Less Disadvantaged	
Outcome[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Program Group	Control Group
Hourly Wage Rate (Dollars)	7.17	6.81	7.16	7.19
Monthly Earnings (Dollars)	1,126	908**	1,025	1,064
Number of Months on Job (Months)	7.3	6.5	10.5	7.9*
Usual Hours Worked per Week (Hours)	35.4	30.0	33.2	33.1
Occupation				
Administrative support/clerical	4.1	4.1	1.6	2.8
Sales/retail	10.1	11.5	10.1	26.9**
Health services	33.4	5.0**	23.7	11.3*
Food services	16.4	45.2**	27.8	10.9**
Cleaning services	6.2	15.9	4.1	5.4
Other services	13.5	0.0	13.8	15.4
Production/trade	13.3	16.4	13.9	18.8
Manager/professional/technical	0.6	17.5	4.3	7.1
Other	0.0	0.0	7.4	0.0
Sample Size	**106**	57	**159**	**106**

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a]Because sample members who did not work during the follow-up period are not included in this table, we do not report estimated impacts for these outcomes. However, we do report statistically significant differences between the two groups.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table F.4. Monthly Earnings During the 30-Month Followup, by Degree of Disadvantage (Dollars)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	161	178	-18	0.78	243	324	-81	0.23
2	217	228	-11	0.87	401	475	-73	0.37
3	233	249	-16	0.83	457	558	-101	0.25
4	266	321	-54	0.45	464	593	-129	0.15
5	259	362	-103	0.15	470	611	-141	0.10
6	310	346	-35	0.61	490	613	-123	0.15
7	343	324	19	0.78	542	646	-105	0.25
8	347	364	-17	0.83	547	691	-144	0.11
9	356	411	-55	0.51	562	629	-67	0.43
10	351	359	-7	0.93	547	612	-65	0.43
11	394	339	55	0.51	578	612	-34	0.69
12	397	328	69	0.40	638	639	-1	0.99
13	461	332	129	0.13	635	681	-46	0.60
14	479	353	126	0.13	684	662	22	0.80
15	507	338	169**	0.04	702	640	62	0.45
16	516	293	223**	0.01	721	641	80	0.34
17	474	306	168**	0.05	688	634	55	0.51
18	453	279	174**	0.03	652	686	-33	0.69
19	510	300	211***	0.01	665	755	-90	0.29
20	486	353	133*	0.08	674	780	-106	0.22
21	478	396	82	0.33	656	753	-97	0.27
22	448	377	71	0.40	662	774	-113	0.20
23	451	343	109	0.20	682	817	-135	0.13
24	515	323	193**	0.03	729	748	-19	0.82
25	529	329	200**	0.02	729	764	-36	0.70
26	552	325	227**	0.01	747	772	-25	0.77
27	557	350	207**	0.03	727	782	-55	0.54
28	547	374	173*	0.06	709	802	-93	0.27
29	526	362	164*	0.07	735	755	-20	0.82
30	553	363	190**	0.03	680	756	-76	0.40
Sample Size	**126**	**82**			**172**	**86**		

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation 18- and 30-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table F.5. TANF Receipt During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	88.3	91.9	-3.7	0.30	91.9	89.1	2.7	0.40
2	86.9	89.8	-2.9	0.48	87.1	85.4	1.7	0.65
3	64.3	69.1	-4.7	0.41	68.1	67.3	0.8	0.88
4	53.1	59.9	-6.8	0.26	59.9	57.7	2.1	0.69
5	49.9	55.0	-5.2	0.39	54.1	49.2	4.9	0.37
6	53.2	56.1	-3.0	0.63	45.5	45.9	-0.4	0.94
7	52.3	53.6	-1.3	0.82	41.3	40.2	1.1	0.84
8	44.6	46.0	-1.4	0.82	39.6	30.6	9.0*	0.08
9	39.1	49.2	-10.2	0.11	29.4	35.0	-5.6	0.27
10	36.0	43.5	-7.5	0.22	33.2	37.3	-4.0	0.44
11	33.8	48.4	-14.6**	0.02	32.3	33.0	-0.7	0.90
12	31.2	45.3	-14.2**	0.02	29.1	29.8	-0.7	0.89
13	30.9	42.4	-11.5*	0.06	31.7	25.9	5.8	0.24
14	28.2	46.8	-18.6***	0.00	29.8	32.4	-2.6	0.62
15	29.3	47.0	-17.7***	0.00	29.4	28.4	1.0	0.83
16	31.5	41.3	-9.8	0.11	29.7	27.5	2.2	0.66
17	28.1	35.9	-7.8	0.18	27.7	24.7	3.0	0.54
18	27.2	36.1	-8.9	0.13	25.6	22.9	2.7	0.57
19	24.4	30.9	-6.5	0.25	29.5	22.9	6.6	0.17
20	20.4	33.0	-12.6**	0.02	27.9	20.7	7.2	0.12
21	19.4	31.9	-12.5**	0.02	25.1	18.2	6.9	0.13
22	18.4	33.3	-14.9***	0.01	23.3	15.0	8.2*	0.06
23	17.5	37.4	-19.9***	0.00	20.6	13.9	6.7	0.11
24	19.3	36.4	-17.2***	0.00	18.6	19.5	-0.9	0.83
25	22.5	35.8	-13.2**	0.02	21.1	20.7	0.4	0.94
26	20.2	29.6	-9.4*	0.09	18.8	18.8	0.0	0.99
27	23.8	26.1	-2.3	0.67	17.0	17.4	-0.4	0.93
28	24.3	22.5	1.9	0.72	16.3	17.2	-0.9	0.82
29	24.0	16.4	7.6	0.13	15.7	19.5	-3.8	0.37
30	22.3	16.4	6.0	0.23	16.9	21.1	-4.3	0.32
Sample Size	**149**	**103**			**201**	**134**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table F.6. Overall TANF Receipt During the 30-Month Followup, Administrative Data

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
30-Month Followup								
Received TANF (percentage)	94.1	98.7	-4.6*	0.07	99.5	97.3	2.1	0.18
Months received TANF (number)	10.6	13.1	-2.5**	0.02	10.4	9.9	0.5	0.51
Monthly TANF received (dollars)	120	149	-29**	0.02	117	104	13	0.17
First Year of Followup								
Received TANF (percentage)	93.8	98.7	-4.9*	0.06	98.1	97.2	1.0	0.57
Months received TANF (number)	6.3	7.1	-0.8	0.11	6.1	6.0	0.1	0.77
Monthly TANF received (dollars)	181	204	-23	0.12	168	159	9.0	0.46
Second Year of Followup								
Received TANF (percentage)	47.9	64.5	-16.6***	0.01	55.0	47.2	7.8	0.15
Months received TANF (number)	2.9	4.5	-1.6***	0.00	3.2	2.7	0.5	0.15
Monthly TANF received (dollars)	81	127	-46***	0.00	94	72	22*	0.08
Final 6 Months of Followup								
Received TANF (percentage)	34.7	47.9	-13.2**	0.03	32.1	30.6	1.4	0.78
Months received TANF (number)	1.4	1.5	-0.1	0.69	1.1	1.1	-0.1	0.73
Monthly TANF received (dollars)	75.5	83.5	-8.1	0.61	60	56	4	0.72
Sample Size	**149**	**103**			**201**	**134**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table F.7. Food Stamp Receipt During the 30-Month Follow-Up Period, by Degree of Disadvantage (Percentage)

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Month After Random Assignment	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
1	88.5	95.8	-7.4**	0.04	92.0	90.2	1.9	0.53
2	92.1	97.6	-5.4*	0.06	92.9	85.4	7.6**	0.02
3	86.3	93.2	-6.8*	0.08	89.3	80.3	9.0**	0.02
4	77.9	90.1	-12.2**	0.01	82.1	78.5	3.6	0.38
5	78.9	84.2	-5.3	0.29	81.8	78.4	3.4	0.42
6	78.2	85.2	-7.0	0.16	78.2	73.4	4.9	0.29
7	78.8	84.2	-5.4	0.28	74.6	75.5	-0.9	0.85
8	75.3	76.2	-0.9	0.86	75.0	70.5	4.4	0.35
9	72.3	77.3	-5.0	0.37	75.8	68.0	7.7	0.10
10	72.8	78.5	-5.7	0.29	74.0	68.3	5.7	0.25
11	73.3	77.2	-3.9	0.48	71.5	69.6	1.9	0.70
12	68.7	75.0	-6.3	0.27	70.4	69.1	1.3	0.79
13	66.3	77.6	-11.3**	0.05	70.5	67.9	2.6	0.60
14	68.2	77.4	-9.2	0.10	69.2	64.7	4.5	0.38
15	70.2	77.2	-7.0	0.21	68.5	64.1	4.5	0.38
16	67.8	78.1	-10.3*	0.07	68.2	58.6	9.6*	0.07
17	68.6	74.6	-6.1	0.28	69.7	61.7	8.1	0.11
18	65.0	70.1	-5.2	0.38	66.8	57.5	9.2*	0.08
19	62.3	70.1	-7.8	0.19	64.0	57.7	6.3	0.23
20	64.0	67.3	-3.3	0.58	64.1	59.8	4.3	0.42
21	65.9	66.4	-0.6	0.92	64.9	57.8	7.1	0.18
22	62.8	67.2	-4.3	0.47	64.8	58.8	5.9	0.27
23	60.2	70.7	-10.6*	0.08	63.3	57.7	5.6	0.29
24	63.3	67.7	-4.4	0.46	64.9	60.1	4.8	0.37
25	61.8	65.8	-4.0	0.51	67.9	64.8	3.1	0.55
26	61.4	65.5	-4.1	0.50	65.1	62.4	2.7	0.61
27	58.2	67.7	-9.5	0.12	66.2	64.6	1.6	0.76
28	57.0	66.5	-9.4	0.12	63.0	64.3	-1.4	0.80
29	56.8	62.8	-6.0	0.33	63.2	61.4	1.8	0.74
30	58.2	60.2	-2.1	0.74	65.3	59.6	5.7	0.28
Sample Size	**149**	**103**			**201**	**134**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table F.8. Overall Food Stamp Receipt During the 30-Month Followup, Administrative Data

	More Disadvantaged				Less Disadvantaged			
Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value	Program Group	Control Group	Estimated Impact	*p*-Value
30-Month Followup								
Received FS (percentage)	96.5	99.7	-3.1	0.13	99.6	96.3	3.3*	0.06
Months received FS (number)	20.8	22.7	-1.9	0.10	21.5	20.1	1.4	0.16
Monthly FS received (dollars)	216	247	-31**	0.05	229	214	15	0.27
First Year of Followup								
Received FS (percentage)	96.4	99.7	-3.2	0.12	98.3	94.9	3.5	0.14
Months received FS (number)	9.4	10.1	-0.7*	0.09	9.6	9.0	0.6	0.13
Monthly FS received (dollars)	247	276	-29*	0.07	258	240	18	0.20
Second Year of Followup								
Received FS (percentage)	82.0	86.9	-4.9	0.29	83.4	78.0	5.4	0.20
Months received FS (number)	7.8	8.6	-0.8	0.17	8.0	7.3	0.7	0.17
Monthly FS received (dollars)	202	236	-35*	0.08	214	20	15	0.38
Final 6 Months of Followup								
Received FS (percentage)	67.1	79.2	-12.1**	0.03	78.3	70.9	7.4	0.12
Months received FS (number)	3.5	3.9	-0.36	0.28	3.9	3.8	0.1	0.62
Monthly FS received (dollars)	179	209	-30	0.16	201	191	11	0.55
Sample Size	**149**	**103**			**201**	**134**		

Source: Administrative records data from the state of Nebraska, compiled by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. as part of the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

FS = food stamps.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.

Table F.9. Clients' Estimated Level of Confidence at the Time of the 18-Month Follow-Up Survey, by Degree of Disadvantage

	More Disadvantaged			Less Disadvantaged		
Characteristic	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate	Program Group	Control Group	Impact Estimate
Summary of Confidence Statements (Out of 14, maximum of 70)[a]	58.9	60.0	-0.8	60.1	60.8	-0.8
Find and keep permanent employment	4.2	4.1	0.1	4.4	4.3	0.1
Avoid destructive relationships	4.1	4.4	-0.3	4.3	4.3	0.0
Have a satisfying relationship with child(ren)	4.8	4.7	0.0	4.8	4.9	-0.1*
Find and keep good friends	4.3	4.1	0.2	4.2	4.3	-0.1
Feel you are part of a community	3.4	3.4	-0.0	3.6	3.6	0.1
Take your child(ren) to the doctor/dentist when needed	4.8	4.6	0.2	4.8	4.9	-0.1
Get teachers to listen when you talk about your child(ren)	4.5	4.4	0.1	4.6	4.6	0.0
Keep yourself healthy	4.3	4.3	-0.0	4.3	4.6	-0.3**
Find and use the community services you need	4.1	4.4	-0.2	4.2	4.3	-0.1
Set goals for yourself	4.1	4.4	-0.3*	4.4	4.4	-0.0
Use a calendar to set appointments for yourself	4.4	4.5	-0.1	4.4	4.7	-0.3***
Eat at least one meal per day together with your family	4.5	4.7	-0.2	4.6	4.6	-0.0
Pay your bills in full on time	3.8	3.9	-0.1	3.8	3.7	0.1
Plan how you will spend or save your money each payday	3.9	4.0	-0.2	4.0	3.9	0.1
Sample Size	**129**	**85**		**175**	**122**	

Source: Rural Welfare-to-Work 18-month follow-up surveys of BNF sample members, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Note: All estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods. The data were weighted to account for (1) the different probability of selection to the program group across the BNF sites, and (2) survey nonresponse. Standard errors of the estimates account for sample weights.

[a] The questions were adapted from a survey used by Iowa's Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Program. All of the self-reported characteristics are based on a five-point scale that measured how confident the client was that she could do each of the above activities: "confident," "mostly confident," "somewhat confident," "a little confident," or "not confident." The clients' response to each statement has a maximum value of 5, ranging from 5 for "confident" to 1 for "not confident." The 14 statements were summed to calculate the summary measure of confidence.

*/**/*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.