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Craig Thomas Follins

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The Dissertation Committee for Craig Thomas Follins Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

An Analysis of the Expectations and Actual Experiences of Students in Welfare to Work Programs: A Community College Case Study

Committee:

John E. Roueche, Supervisor

Oscar G. Mink

William Moore Jr.

Norvell Northcutt

Margot Perez-Greene

**An Analysis of the Expectations and Actual Experiences of Students in Welfare to
Work Programs: A Community College Case Study**

by

Craig Thomas Follins, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my lovely wife, Millicent, and to my wonderful, understanding, and loving daughters, Monique, Keisha, Nicole and Chantal.

Travon and Adasha you are truly gifts from God.

We all made tremendous sacrifices so that we may make a collective difference in the new millennium.

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**An Analysis of the Expectations and Actual Experiences of Students in Welfare
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Craig Thomas Follins, Ph.D.
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Supervisor: John E. Roueche

The community college has historically been uniquely situated to serve the poor, the underserved, the locked-out, and those individuals who otherwise would not attend post-secondary education. In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. This new welfare reform legislation (PRWORA) imposed time limits on the receipt of welfare benefits for the first time in our nation's history.

It created a very interesting situation for community colleges in America. Community colleges would not only be the designated education and training providers for welfare recipients, they would have to provide these services in a "work first" environment.

This study will examine the experiences of selected students who came to the Houston Community College System via the welfare to work to self sufficiency route. This study will discuss the 1996 Welfare Reform legislation, Houston Community College System's history and involvement in welfare programs, explore the attributes and characteristics of what has worked and what has not, and finally, discuss implications for future such programs.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

This research topic evolved from my involvement with welfare recipients during my employment with the Houston Community College System. I had the unique opportunity, in concert with other capable professionals, to be on the front lines of various activities that attempted to address welfare reform (from a community college perspective). That involvement, coupled with my personal background as a former welfare recipient, has led me to this project.

Welfare, for all intents and purposes, was reformed with the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This Act virtually ended guaranteed cash assistance to low income women and children, set a maximum five-year time limit on the receipt of federal welfare dollars, imposed work and training requirements, and created the most sweeping welfare reform in the nation's history. The imposition of time limits created havoc for those who had a multi-generational relationship with public assistance. It also placed a heavy burden on community colleges and other community service providers to come up with effective strategies, programs and services to address the stringent stipulations of the legislation.

The Houston Community College System (HCCS) was positioned very well to respond to the challenges of the PRWORA because of its long history of service to the underserved. At the time of the passage of this new legislation, HCCS had already recorded nearly thirty years of activity in the welfare arena. In fact, more than half of the students who have attended HCCS are considered low income, and many are current or former welfare recipients themselves.

This study examined how HCCS was able to access federal dollars and design short-term, customized, continuing education training programs, in a variety of areas, as part of it's welfare to work to self-sufficiency efforts. This study also addressed how HCCS was able to work through educational and training barriers such as childcare, mental illness, transportation, domestic violence and motivation. This study tells about the individual and unique journeys that students have taken as they have attempted to move from welfare to work to self-sufficiency.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt made special mention of welfare in his 1935 State of the Union message. Roosevelt, in the most somber of tones, talked about continued aid as “ a narcotic,” “a subtle destroyer of the human spirit.” He, and others, believed that it was “fundamentally destructive to the national fiber” (Moynihan, 1968. p.22). Moynihan (1968) saw welfare as a highly anti-rehabilitative mechanism for unmarried younger women who were unprepared for self-sufficiency, much less for responsible parenthood. He often asserted that welfare encourages pregnancy, contributes to the dissolution of the family, and becomes an endless cycle of more and more dependency. It is dehumanizing and brings about a sense of shame and worthlessness.

Welfare recipients now have governmental imposed time limits on the receipt of federal monies. They can no longer collect benefits forever, and are under an enormous amount of pressure to find self-sufficient employment situations (Brock, Grossman, Hamilton, 2001). Moreover, the community college

has historically been involved in assisting welfare recipients, and other low income individuals acquire the training, skills, abilities and resolve to move up economically. Today, the community college is challenged even more to undertake a greater role in delivering education, training and other services to the welfare population (Block, Grossman, Hamilton, 2001).

The notion of post-secondary activities was certainly highlighted with the federal welfare reform legislation that was enacted on August 22, 1996 (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 or Public Law 104-93). Essentially, this new law challenges every state to reconfigure and redesign welfare assistance for poor families in ways that will move them rapidly off of the public dole. Further, this law mandates minimal skill attainment levels, and puts in place benchmarks, outcomes and performance measures for all states. The new five-year time limit places community colleges on the front line of welfare reform.

Community colleges are tasked with balancing the training and educational needs of welfare recipients with the 20-30 hour work activity requirement that is part of the new law. Training may only count for a portion of the work activity requirement. Community colleges, such as HCCS, will have to develop approaches that allow recipients to fulfill the other portion of their work activity requirement.

Lisman (2001) explains that community colleges face two challenges; the work first philosophy of many TANF programs, and the problems of dealing with multiple constituencies in developing training programs. He relates that several

states have elected to require their able-bodied individuals to get a job immediately rather than allow them to receive some sort of short-term training to make them more employable. Lisman (2001) argues that this policy illustrates a belief that the dependent nature of the system rather than the effects of poverty is the main reason why people are on welfare. As a result of this thinking, he reasons, many States, including Oregon, Wisconsin, and Florida, have effectively mandated that welfare recipients get a job and get off of welfare. Consequently, community colleges have found it necessary to make several adjustments to meet the requirements of these kinds of programs. Many have developed community service programs to provide non-paid work experiences to allow individuals to continue to qualify for welfare benefits. Still others have had to develop fast-track training programs to accommodate the work first edict, which does not support recipients receiving long-term training. Lisman (2001) relates that the overall challenge for community colleges is to develop comprehensive and well-designed programs that satisfy the needs of the agencies that are implementing welfare reform.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of successful students in Houston Community College System welfare to work programs.. The problem being addressed is significant for a variety of reasons. The economic boom of the 1990's has subsided, and poverty, particularly among persons of color is on the rise. The welfare rolls are beginning to increase with the country mired in a long-term recession. Community colleges now have much literature,

history and involvement (with welfare to work) since the passage of welfare reform legislation. Many former recipients have been in self-sufficient situations long enough for us to develop some thematic data to determine effective methodologies and strategies.

Many of these self-sufficient former recipients need to keep their jobs or find new ones to remain self-sufficient. Getting that first job is hard enough for many former recipients. The research literature suggests that many recipients who find jobs lose them in a very short period of time. (Herr, Halpern, and Wagner; Hershey and Pavetti, 1997)

In the recent past, welfare has been available as a safety net for recipients who cycle in and out of employment situations. With the new law, however, after recipients reach their time limits, the safety net will no longer be there for them. These recipients are now inextricably linked to the community college.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it seeks to determine what, if any, linkage former recipients have maintained with the college. For it may be the college that they will perceive as their link to follow up services such as job retention, job acquisition, and child care referral, transportation and emotional support.

This study will attempt to fill the void that exists in the research literature between the services that the Houston Community College System provided for welfare recipients since the welfare reform law, and the outcomes obtained by successful former recipients who have been served by the institution. It will also

provide data to increase community college service provider's understanding of follow up activities that may be needed to ensure continued self-sufficiency for students that have come through the various welfare to work to self sufficiency programs.

Moreover, it is increasingly important for the Houston Community College System to have some empirical data that speaks to institutional effectiveness regarding services to the welfare to work client. In other words, this research is significant in that it tells the welfare reform story from the former recipient's perspective. Some of these recipients may be part of the 2002 statistics that indicate nearly half (40 percent) of the women and children who had left the welfare rolls had no way to support themselves. They were not employed, not on welfare, and had nowhere to go. The remaining 60% who were employed were still mired in poverty. Their average income was estimated to be no more than \$10,000 per year, and most had jobs without benefits such as medical insurance, sick leave and retirement (Hays, 2003, pB8). Hays (2003, p.B9) argues that she is "absolutely convinced that welfare reform, in all of its complexity, and with all of the proclamations of its 'success,' remains one of the most urgent and important issues of our time."

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)?
2. What were the direct effects of the 1996 law on HCCS?
3. What are some of the outcomes of former recipients who came to HCCS

via welfare to work to self-sufficiency?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

There are a variety of terms that will be utilized in this study. They have specific meaning as it relates to this work.

AFDC-Aid to Families with dependent children. Precursor to TANF, and was the name of the national welfare package for single mothers receiving assistance for their dependents.

Barriers-Obstacles and situations that may inhibit recipients from becoming self-sufficient. These include child care, transportation, substance abuse, mental or physical illness, criminal history, domestic violence issues, etc.

Block Grants- The term block grant generally refers to a package of funding that is created by consolidating several existing programs into one. TANF funds were allocated to states in the form of block grants. The 1996 legislation converted the former AFDC program into block grants to states, giving individual states greater control over the shape of their welfare programs. The legislation also includes some constraints on the use of block grant funds and some conditions for the receipt of funds. In particular, it sets high standards for participation in work activities (Brown, 1997, p.109).

Dropout- Student who enrolls in a school for a semester and does not voluntarily enroll in the following semester.

Earned Income Credit-Also known as the earned income tax credit or EITC is a federal tax credit that is worth nearly \$4000.00 for some families who meet income guidelines. This is a benefit that many former welfare recipients qualify

for once they begin employment.

Family- One or more parents and one or more children living in the same household.

HCCS- Houston Community College System in Houston, Texas.

Houston Works USA- One of several vendors who operate the 34 career (The WorkSource) centers in the Gulf Coast Workforce Board area.

Job placement-The act of placing a welfare recipient in a full-time permanent work situation as a result of being enrolled in school.

Job Shadowing- Structured opportunity for a student to accompany employed professionals as they perform their duties. By attending meetings and observing the normal business of the profession, the student can try on the occupation and see how the classroom learning is used in a real-world situation.

Mentoring- Usually support and guidance by persons who advise and act as role models. Mentors assist students and peers with the familiarization of rules, norms and expectations of the workplace, and serve as resources by helping to resolve personal problems, and work related issues and conflicts.

N.C.I. (Neighborhood Centers Incorporated)-Contracted to provide child care for the WorkSource.

Non-traditional student- Students who are 25 years or older, or who do not live on campus, or who are part-time, or who have returned to school after having a family, or who are welfare recipients, or who experience any combination of these characteristics.

Outcomes-Measurable programmatic tool that determines goal achievement

or non-goal achievement.

Poverty-Generally defined as \$18,000 or below for a family of four (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

Retention-The act of remaining in school or in an employment situation.

Sanction-The act of imposing a penalty by a TANF case worker on a recipient for violating any condition of their public assistance benefit receipt.

Self-sufficiency- Wage or economic condition set by the state that indicates level of support sufficient to maintain a minimal level of subsistence for an individual or family (generally, off welfare and the ability to develop a sense of economic independence).

TANF-Temporary assistance to needy families. Replaced AFDC and was part of the 1996 welfare reform legislation. Essentially, this is temporary cash assistance that individuals receive as they make their way to self-sufficiency. The typical TANF recipient receives \$188 per month in temporary cash assistance in the state of Texas.

TWC-Texas Workforce Commission is the state agency responsible for all workforce related programs in the state, including the self-sufficiency fund.

Work First- Work first programs seek to move people from welfare into unsubsidized jobs as quickly as possible, and job search itself is a central activity in these programs (Brown. 1997, p.2).

ASSUMPTIONS

There were eight assumptions made that assisted with the design of this study. First, that this study will be of significance and importance in the ongoing

dialogue and discussion regarding welfare reform and the community college. Second, that the involvement of community college in welfare reform will have a dramatic impact on the lives of welfare recipients. Third, the lives of the children of welfare recipients enrolled in community colleges will be immeasurably and positively impacted as a result of that enrollment. Fourth, the Houston Community College System will remain actively involved in the discovery of effective programs that lead to self-sufficiency. Fifth, the community will be positively impacted by the knowledge uncovered by this study. Sixth, the government will continue to fund programs that foster self-sufficiency and economic independence for former welfare recipients. Seventh, that former recipients that I talk to will indicate that their lives have been made better for having made their association with the Houston Community College System. Lastly, that the Houston Community College Board of Trustees and administration will use this study in a manner that will benefit the entire organization.

LIMITATIONS

Welfare is such a broad area that it is often a real challenge to be focused, while attempting to be as inclusive as possible. Consequently, this study is limited to a specific college and to a specific group of former recipients. Although the study started with former welfare clients that were purposively selected, it remains a real possibility that some will want to generalize about the entire welfare population.

The research is also limited to programs and services that are specific only

to the Houston Community College System. These programs are not designed to represent the myriad of wonderful programs found at other organizations. Where possible, parallels with similar programs will be pointed out throughout this work.

This research is also limited to the welfare legislation, policies, procedures, and protocols that were in effect at the time of this writing. It is also limited to the policies, procedures, protocols and practices of the Houston Community College System. This research project, then, will provide an opportunity to look at the lives of twelve former welfare recipients as they made their way through the Houston Community College System. As the economy continues to have cycles of uncertainty, there will be a need to know the most effective ways to serve the poor. Therefore, it is an opportune time to bring discussion to the potential implications of serving welfare recipients via the community college route.

Themes developed from the literature and the case studies will afford practitioners an opportunity to begin theory development about which approaches are best suited to work with the welfare population. As an example, practices that result in former recipients being able to maintain self-sufficiency may provide a window of approaches that are worthy of replication.

Community College leaders may use this research to adopt models that not only work for former welfare recipients, but also are applicable to the traditional college student. Practices that are working may be able to be applied in areas that heretofore were not addressed.

Moreover, community colleges have the best potential for having the greatest influence on future workforce development efforts (Gennett, Johnstone,

& Wilson, 2001). However, federally mandated time limits have encouraged states to incorporate a “work first” mentality (Kotarba; Ramon; Atkinson; Lee; Struse; Montoya, 2002). Work first will, and has, created numerous challenges for the community college. Work first may have been an initial concern, but training will certainly be a crucial part of diminishing the welfare rolls. Community colleges will certainly play a key role in the overall effort of reform welfare.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

THE 1996 WELFARE REFORM ACT

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 revolutionized welfare policy. It effectively ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). President William Jefferson Clinton signed the bill into law on August 22, 1996. It is a comprehensive bipartisan welfare reform plan that dramatically changed the United States welfare system into one that requires work in exchange for time-limited assistance. The Act has very specific work requirements, a performance bonus to reward states for moving welfare recipients into jobs, state maintenance of effort requirements, comprehensive child support enforcement, and supports for families moving from welfare to work including increased funding for childcare and guaranteed medical coverage (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Work Requirements

Work requirements stipulate that recipients must work after two years on public assistance. Furthermore, 25% of all families in each state must be engaged in work activities or have left the rolls in fiscal year (FY) 1997, rising to 50% in FY 2002. The law mandates that single parents must participate for at least 20 hours per week the first year, increasing to 30 hours per week in FY 2000. It also stipulated that two-parent families must work 35 hours per week by July 1, 1997 (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Support for Families Transitioning into Jobs

Some \$14 billion dollars was provided for child care over a six year period. This funding was made available to allow more mothers to obtain employment. Healthcare coverage was guaranteed under this new law, including one year of transitional Medicaid when they leave welfare and obtain employment (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996)

Work Activities

State work requirements mandated that recipients be required to participate in unsubsidized or subsidized employment, on-the-job training, work experience, community service, 12 months of vocational training, or provide child care services to persons who are participating in community service. Up to six weeks of job search (no more than 4 consecutive weeks) would count toward the work requirement. However, no more than 20% of each state's caseload may count toward the work requirement solely by participating in vocational training or being a teen parent in a secondary school. Single parents with a child under six who cannot find child care cannot be penalized for failure to meet the work requirements. States can exempt from the work requirement single parents with children under age one, and disregard this group in the calculation of participation rates for up to 12 months (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

A Five-year Time Limit

Families who received assistance for five cumulative years (or less at state option) will be ineligible for cash aid under the new welfare law. States will be permitted to exempt up to 20% of their caseload from the time limits, and states will have the option to provide non-cash assistance and vouchers to families that

reach the time limit using Social Services Block Grants or state funds (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Personal Employability Plans

States are required to make an initial assessment of recipient's skills. States can also develop personal responsibility plans for recipients identifying the education, training and job placement services needed to move into the workforce (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

State Maintenance of Effort Requirement

States are required to maintain their own spending on welfare at least 80% of the FY1994 levels. States must also maintain spending at 100 % of FY1994 levels to access a \$2 billion contingency fund designed to assist states affected by high population growth or economic downturn. In addition, states must maintain 100% of FY 1995 spending on child care to access additional child care funds beyond their initial allotment (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Job Subsidies

The law also allows states to create jobs by taking money now used for assistance checks and using it to create community service jobs or to provide income subsidies or hiring incentives for potential employers (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Performance Bonus to Reward Work

Performance bonuses will be paid to states to reward them for moving recipients into employment. The Secretary of Health and Human Services, in

consultation with the National Governor's Association (NGA) and American Public Welfare Association (APWA), will develop criteria for measuring state performance (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

State Flexibility

States that receive approval for welfare reform waivers before July, 1, 1997 have the option to operate their cash assistance program under some or all of these waivers. For states electing this option, some provisions of the new law which are inconsistent with the waivers would not take effect until the expiration of the applicable waivers in the geographical areas covered by the waivers (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Promoting Responsibility: Comprehensive Child Support Enforcement

The new law has strong child support enforcement measures that President Clinton proposed in 1994. It is the most sweeping crackdown on deadbeat parents in history. These efforts were designed to increase child support collections by nearly \$24 billion and reduce the overall cost of welfare by some \$4 billion over a ten year time span. In order for states to be eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grants, they must operate a child support enforcement program meeting stipulated federal guidelines (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

National New Hire Reporting System

PRWORA creates a Federal Case Registry and National Directory of New Hires to track parents across state lines. Employers are required to report all new hires to state agencies for transmittal of new hire information to the National

Directory of New Hires. PRWORA expands and streamlines the process for direct withholding of child support from wages (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Streamlined Paternity Establishment

PRWORA fine tunes the legal process for paternity establishment. This makes it a lot easier and faster to establish paternity. It also expands the voluntary program of in-hospital paternity that was started back in 1993. Voluntary paternity establishment is encouraged by the new law. Persons who fail to cooperate with paternity establishment will have their monthly cash assistance checks cut by at least 25%. This is called a sanction (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Uniform Interstate Child Support Laws

PROWRA provides for more uniform rules and procedures for interstate cases (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Computerized State-Wide Collections

PROWRA requires states to establish central registries of child support orders and centralized collection and disbursement units. States are expected to expedite their procedures for child support enforcement (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Tough New Penalties

PROWRA allows states to implement tough child support enforcement techniques. It expands wage garnishment, allows states to take assets, allows for community service imposition, and more significantly, allows states to take

driver's and other professional licenses from parents who don't pay their child support (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Families First

The new "Family First" policy allows families who are no longer receiving public assistance to get priority in the distribution of child support arrears. This will give these families who have left the welfare rolls about \$1 billion over the first six years of the new law (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Access and Visitation Programs

Non-custodial parental involvement is encouraged through the use of grants that help establish programs that support and facilitate visitation and access to their children (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Live at Home and Stay in School Requirements

This new law mandates that unmarried minor parents be required to live with a responsible adult or in an adult-supervised situation. They must also participate in educational and training activities in order to maintain their cash benefits. It is the responsibility of each state to find or assist in finding adult-supervised situations for teenagers (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs

PRWORA allocates funds for abstinence education, and establishes strategies for prevention of non-marital teen births, and assures that at least 25% of communities have teen pregnancy prevention programs. Moreover, the Attorney General will establish a program that studies the relationship between

statutory rape and teen pregnancy, and that educates law enforcement officials on the prevention and prosecution of statutory rape (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Legal Immigrants

PROWRA includes provisions that deny most forms of public assistance to most legal immigrants for five years or until they become U.S. citizens. The notion here is that legal immigrants who fall on difficult times through no fault of their own should be able to get help (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S HISTORY AND INVOLVEMENT IN WELFARE TO WORK PROGRAMS

The Houston Community College System has been involved in welfare programs since its inception over thirty years ago. Institutional experiences include the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) in the early 1970's, in the 1980's with involvement in the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), in the 1990's with the numerous welfare to work programs, and in the new millennium with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). HCCS' history and involvement includes (but is not limited to) the following examples.

During the 1996/97 fiscal year, Houston Community College System (HCCS) provided employment services to 1,142 refugee women whose ages ranged from 23-62 years of age. Many of them were single parents, with small children, and widows who were entering the workforce for the first time. Counseling, workplace literacy, child care and transportation were among the

services provided. Four hundred eighteen (418) received full-time employment in regular and On-the-Job-Training (OJT) positions. The average hourly wage was \$5.86 with a low of \$5.00, and thirteen women received jobs with benefits. Thirty-three (33) enrolled in Child Care Certification classes and twenty-one received child care certification licenses and opened registered day care homes in their communities (self-employment). These outcomes met or exceeded those which were projected, and demonstrated HCCS' commitment to the welfare-to-work initiative through collaboration, education and training efforts with the public and private sector (Leverett, 1997).

The Houston Community College System has been a Refugee Services Provider since 1976. During that time, the college has provided Vocational Skills Training, Language Acquisition Training, and Employment Service to more than 70,000 refugees from approximately 24 countries of national origin (Hebert, 1997).

Another program HCCS has been involved in is the Adult Education Program for AFDC-JOBS. Participants are referred by the Texas Workforce Commission. All 1,417 students served by HCCS and the 339 students served by community based organizations were receiving AFDC-JOBS benefits. HCCS addresses the basic skills, English as a Second Language (ESL), and GED preparation. HCCS had both a stand-alone and consortium-based program funded through state and federal grants for students functioning at or below the high school competition level. HCCS and a group of (16) community-based organizations make up the Houston Literacy Consortium, serving from 20,000 to

22,000 students each year (Davis, 1997).

HCCS, as provider and fiscal agent, oversees one of the largest adult education and literacy programs in the state of Texas. The number of public assistance recipients served by these programs is growing in a concerted effort to take basic skills education to where the students live and raise their families. HCCS is actively involved in providing basic instruction and planning leadership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Neighborhood Networks program. HCCS is providing the foundations in basic skills and computer literacy that, with the aid of student support services, will lead to additional training and job readiness. In 1996-1997, HCCS was involved with instruction at four sites. Through coordination and support, the project's vision of community partnership will lead to well-prepared, self-sufficient individuals (Davis, 1997).

YouthBuild is another HCCS project that has been funded several times by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. YouthBuild Houston, '97 received a \$700,000 YouthBuild implementation project that served a group of 45 youths, of whom 36 will complete the program at a total program cost of more than \$1 million (including matching funds). The project's service area consisted of low-income areas in the northeast and central areas, with housing areas in the Fifth and Fourth Wards. Housing partners for the project include the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH) and the Fifth Ward Redevelopment Corporation (Hebert, 1997).

In 1998, HCCS signed on as a subcontractor to Houston Works USA in a

welfare to work, \$5,000,000 grant. HCCS provided work experience, community service, job placement services, post-employment services, job retention services, supportive services and individual development accounts to nearly 300 TANF clients. This program came to be known as the Institute for Excellence (IFE). The IFE worked closely with the Texas Department of Human Services and Houston Works USA to identify qualified participants for the IFE. The staff and resident councils at the Houston Housing Authority had agreed to help HCCS publicize the opportunity for TANF housing residents to enter the IFE, receive a job upon graduation from the Institute, and receive a scholarship from HCCS to continue their education toward a GED, Vocational/Technical Certification, or two-year academic program, but also have a job waiting for them and a chance to go to college. HCCS expanded its strong relationships with community and faith based organizations, high schools, and agencies dealing with learning disabled and handicapped populations to find eligible clients interested in changing their lives. The Institute for excellence uses a holistic approach to solve the training needs of students and the workforce needs of employers. HCCS noted that community colleges are the logical place for this type of holistic training and counseling to take place because they are the only institution that can address the community's full range of educational and training needs (for ESL, ABE, GED, Voc/Tech, Academics, and Customized Training). The Institute for Excellence adds three elements to these existing services:

- A comprehensive assessment of the personal and mental health needs of the student and on-going counseling support.

- An emphasis on “soft skill” curriculums designed to address dysfunctional behavior, personal development, and workplace readiness.
- A direct linkage to employers through the creation of “Employer Partners” that will be involved in the training and hiring of the Institute’s graduates.

HCCS’ Institute for Excellence is guided by the belief that the community college is the institution best suited to provide the bridge between the persons who need jobs, and the employers who need trained, reliable and motivated employees. The Institute for Excellence is the last piece of the puzzle to bridge the gap between people and jobs. The implementation of the Institute for Excellence propelled HCCS to the next level in workforce and community development.

The Institute for Excellence understood that employers value training, but realized that a GED, or skills training, cannot ensure success if the employee has a bad attitude, or brings personal or emotional baggage to the workplace. HCCS has found, through numerous experiences, that the thing that employers need most are people who are highly motivated and reliable. These are the employees who will have the lowest turnover, and have opportunities for advancement. They will also add value to the company by their long-term productivity.

The Institute for Excellence approach deals with the mental health, self-esteem, and life coping needs as part of the overall training program. The primary client base of the Houston Community College System has other needs that must be addressed along with education and training. It is imperative that these needs be met if there is to be long-term success. Long-term welfare recipients, single

parent families, and other persons suffering from poverty, abuse, long-term unemployment and dysfunctional families, need special help in overcoming the barriers to success. The Institute of Excellence helps the student learn how to overcome these barriers.

The Institute for Excellence (IFE) has linkages with many employers. The IFE is employer driven while maintaining a balance to represent the needs of the populations they serve. In an ideal situation, the employers will be involved in the assessment and delivery of training. In return, employers are committed to hiring successful graduates. The IFE builds on HCCS leadership in Work Keys Job Profiling to help employers better understand the precise hard and soft skill levels required for certain positions in their company, and then train to meet those requirements. The IFE is a powerful marketing tool that attracts employers, participants and funding sources interested in the long-term value of their investment in job training.

Range of Services

- Assessment of mental health needs, personal and family history, attitude and behavior, educational skill competencies, and workplace skills.
- Intensive Job Readiness Training and Counseling in attitude and behavior, self-esteem, employer expectations, customer service, life skills, interpersonal relationships, problem solving techniques, and resolution of personal and family issues.
- Pre-employment and post-employment training in customized skills training linked to a job. Developmental/remediation classes (GED, ABE,

ESL) customized to individual learning needs. “Scholarships” through financial aid for academic or Voc/Tech programs will be available to qualified Institute graduates.

- Placement of IFE graduates in full or part-time jobs with benefits. Part-time employees will continue to attend the Institute for Excellence for an additional 12-16 weeks. Jobs come from partner employers who are involved with the assessment and job readiness programs, and have agreed to give priority to graduates of the IFE.
- Job retention is addressed by regular contact with employers and graduates to identify potential problems and implement early intervention strategies.
- Counseling and case management: The Institute’s counseling and case management approach promotes the long term mental health and personal growth of the individual. Participants must be taught the techniques to help themselves stay motivated and on target long after they leave the program.

Entry into the Institute for Excellence is an earned right. Everyone has the opportunity to gain admission; no one is forced to participate. At the same time, it has to be made clear to a potential enrollee that with opportunity comes responsibility. They must visualize a positive future and believe that they can achieve their dreams. This approach has resulted in a motivated group of participants ready to take control of their own destiny. It also saves resources and valuable training time.

The hallmark of the Institute for Excellence is the Intensive Job Readiness

Training and Counseling. All participants must successfully complete this program which emphasizes changes in dysfunctional behavior patterns and increasing self-esteem. This part of the Institute is designed to accomplish six specific things:

- Break the cycle of negativism and low self-esteem that characterize many long term TANF clients through a program aimed at behavior modification, self-esteem, self-examination, confidence building, value clarification, and image enhancement. The Institute utilizes adaptations of programs from the leaders in this field such as the Covey Institute, Pacific Institute, Adkins Institute, Zinger-Miller, Project Hope, Project Strive and others.
- Get clients ready for the basic requirements of the workplace through the development of workplace skills and life coping skills (e.g. dress, punctuality, communication, transportation and child care issues, employer expectations, teamwork, etc.).
- Motivate the TANF recipient to want to change their life by visualizing a life-long path to continued improvement and success. The dollar difference between the client's total benefit package and an entry level job is not significant enough to motivate people to move from welfare to work. Threats do not motivate change since Texas sanctions only result in the loss of \$78 per month because children's benefits, food stamps, and health benefits continue.
- Introduce clients to the employers and jobs that are available through

internal recruitment fairs and tours of the participating companies. The philosophy is to encourage the participant to make positive choices for themselves.

- Give the employer partners an opportunity to observe and talk with the participants prior to offering a specific job.
- Get participants to “buy in” to the concepts that their TANF and other government paid benefits are limited and should be thought of as “assets” that the participant can invest to achieve a self-sustaining economic future. Participants will be introduced to the concept of ROI, Return on Investment and the need to invest their welfare benefits wisely to achieve a good return.

HCCS works closely with the Texas Department of Human Services (the welfare office), career centers and other community based organizations to identify qualified participants for the Institute for Excellence. The Institute for Excellence has a formal working relationship with the public housing developments, many of whom are also TANF recipients. The message to the residents is the Institute is not just another job training program. If they have the right stuff to graduate from the Institute, they will have a selection of jobs and a chance to go to college. To further enhance the prestige of the Institute for Excellence, the participants go through an extensive assessment process prior to admission into the program.

All referrals are given in-depth interviews and assessments. If the Institute for Excellence appears to be an appropriate match for the TANF

client, they will be given a battery of academic and psychological tests to determine their skill levels, aptitudes, attitudes, as well as personal, family and mental health needs. Educational levels are determined through standardized tests aligned to the ACT Work Keys. The purpose of this assessment is to identify the specific “skills gaps” to which individual training remedies can be efficiently and cost-effectively targeted. Based on the results of the assessment, participants are enrolled in the Institute for Excellence or referred to another program that better meets their needs. An individual training path is developed for each trainee (Houston Works/HCCS WtW contract, 1998).

Project Training Resources to Advance Careers (TRAC) was developed in November of 1999, in conjunction with the ideas and concerns of several partners who desired to answer the growing needs of employers needing qualified, trained and motivated candidates. Individuals on public assistance were prime candidates for this project as they sought economic self-sufficiency. To that end, HCCS Central College and Call Center Solutions Inc. created a partnership that addressed this dilemma. Project TRAC involved the training of Bilingual Teacher Aides (as requested by the Houston Independent School District) to fill 150 openings. The next occupational area identified was the Certified Customer Service Professional. Employers were in need of securing qualified, capable, customer service personnel to handle their growing clientele and customers to address problems related to service, demography, and a host of other divisions involving customer contact (Capps, 1999).

THE EVOLUTION OF FEDERAL LEGISLATION IN WELFARE REFORM

Some might argue from a biblical standpoint that attempts at welfare reform have persisted since the earliest days of our creation. More practically, however, true welfare reform from a governmental perspective, has only been around since the depression era. The government has created many efforts over the years to deal with welfare, poverty, and the issues associated with them. Here is a listing of the chronological evolution of some major governmental efforts (source: Houston Community College System Outreach Services):

W.P.A. (1935-42) Works Progress Administration: President Roosevelt created the first federally funded jobs program, the W.P.A. In an effort to address the massive amount of unemployment in the country, the WPA provided publicly funded employment and training opportunities for adults.

MDTA (1962) Manpower Development and Training Act: This legislation focused on retraining workers who were displaced by technological change and on training disadvantaged workers. Throughout the 1960's additional training initiatives were implemented creating a system of multiple programs that were administered centrally.

CETA (1973) Comprehensive Employment and Training Act: This legislation is representative of the anti-poverty programs geared toward addressing the social unrest found in urban settings. CETA consolidated existing programs and instituted federal block grants to increase state and local control over how employment and training funds would be used. While the federal

government provided oversight, local governments and training providers had tremendous input and control. In 1978 new legislation moved authority away from the community and more towards state government. It also gave a formal role to business groups through the development of Private Industry Councils (PICs). PICs were comprised of private and public sector representatives that served on Councils to oversee the workforce development system.

JTPA (1978) Job Training Partnership Act : JTPA was passed in response to the economic challenges of that era which included the de-industrialization of America and large-scale losses of manufacturing jobs (auto and steel). New programs for dislocated workers were funded, as well as training programs for disadvantaged adults. JTPA handed oversight responsibility over to the individual states. It also increased the power of the business community on the Private Industry Councils (51% of PIC members must be from business) and increased the PICs role in controlling workforce development. JTPA utilized community colleges as well as a range of non-profit and community-based training providers to provide services. JTPA had a human service approach, which focused on identifying an individual's need in providing those services.

WTW (1996) Welfare to Work: was established with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in August, 1996. This new law was implemented as a "work first" program. There are time limits on the receipt of federal funds. The program includes job placement, job retention, increased earnings and child support collection. Local programs are

operated by the Workforce Development Boards (formerly Private Industry Councils) in cooperation with various local agencies. WtW grants are also provided to other organizations to serve populations and deliver specialized services.

WIA (1998) Workforce Investment Act: The Workforce Investment Act was enacted into law in August, 1998. It was designed to help address the challenges of a global economy. Rather than focusing on the individual and their needs like JTPA, WIA focuses on the needs of “the company” and how to make companies and industries more productive. WIA gives state and local governments the primary responsibility to implement all programs and mandates an even larger role for business led decision-making. A major goal for WIA is economic development for the business community obtained by growing companies and increasing the number of jobs.

Selected Welfare to Work Programs

Before listing examples of welfare to work programs, it is important to take note of the support for welfare reform by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). In a national study conducted in 1998 by the AACC, 400 (out of 1123 that were mailed) community colleges responded to questions about their welfare to work activities (Kienzel, 1999):

- Since welfare reform began, more than 42% of community colleges have seen an increase in the number of students enrolled in welfare-to-work programs; 21 percent of survey respondents reported a decline in welfare-to-work enrollment.

- 53.3 percent of responding community colleges have state-funded welfare-to-work programs, with an average of 2.5% of their students enrolled in such programs.
- Nearly 5 percent of students enrolled in credit and non-credit programs at community colleges receive cash payments.
- 56 percent of courses offered at community colleges for welfare to work participants are credit courses; 44 percent are non-credit courses.
- More than half of responding community colleges indicated that they have a one-stop career center. Of these colleges, 93.7 percent provide job placement assistance, 60.8 percent offer child care services, and 46.6 percent arrange transportation for their welfare population.
- Welfare-to-work programs at community colleges primarily emphasize entry-level training (69.6 percent of responses) adult education and remedial education (53.3 percent), and basic technical training (47.6 percent)
- Approximately 44 percent of community colleges cited job-readiness instruction as the most frequent kind of activity for their respective welfare-to-work populations.
- According to survey responses, 63.9 percent of welfare recipients enrolled in community colleges lack basic literacy and numeric skills, and 63 percent lack personal management skills, greatly hindering their ability to find and maintain employment (AACC Research Brief, 1999).

The state of Texas was an early welfare to work implementation

state. In 1998 the Texas legislature passed House Bill 1863. This monumental legislation was responsible for setting up the \$50 million Texas Self-Sufficiency Fund. This fund allows community colleges and community based organizations to partner with at least one private sector employer, to recruit, train, and employ welfare recipients. The Houston Community College has received nearly \$7 million dollars from this fund since 1998. Thousands of welfare to work clients have climbed the economic ladder with the collaboration of the community college (Bombach, 2001).

New York State's Corning Community College's Learn to Earn program focuses on low income and welfare recipients in pursuit of education and training. The two-fold emphasis on developing an individualized developmental plan, and securing employment are geared toward the ultimate goal of self sufficiency (<http://corning-cc.edu/learntoearn/>). The Learn to Earn program is about seamless service delivery through a progression of education and workforce development activities that include:

- development of the individualized employment plan;
- volunteer and work experience opportunities combined with post-secondary education;
- skills assessment and employment readiness orientations;
- linkage with short-term training to obtain critical entry-level employment skills;

- employment readiness, placement, and post-employment training and assistance;
- referrals to CSS Workforce New York's Career Centers and community resources to meet individual needs.

California's Riverside College has a program it calls New Visions. It is a flexible program for welfare to work clients that offer multiple activities to fit the lives of welfare clients. This remarkable training program is one of the few that allows parents and students the opportunity to switch back and forth from weekday to weekend, and from day to night classes (Fein; Beecroft; Long; and Catalfamo, 2000).

New York City's LaGuardia Community College in Queens has done some remarkable and creative things regarding welfare recipients. Learning communities have been divided up into four clusters. These clusters include, Technology, Business, Sociology and Computers and Society. These clusters, students report, have made understanding the course content easier. Each student is required to complete two terms of internship. There are also work-based learning experiences that help to enhance what is taught in the classroom. So successful is this initiative, that nearly 65% of the students report being hired by the company they intern with. It is noted that internships and clusters are viewed as key reasons why retention and graduation rates are so high at LaGuardia (Jenkins and Fitzgerald, 1998, p.5).

California has a creative initiative called welfare to work through service. It is funded by the Corporation for National Service in collaboration with the

California Colleges Chancellor's Office, the state department of social services, and 24 local partnerships that include community colleges, welfare offices, public schools, Head Start programs, parents, and local literacy programs. TANF clients are recruited to serve in AmeriCorps and America Reads. The program operates with high expectations. AmeriCorps members enroll for an average of eight units in early childhood education courses at a local community college. They then receive extensive pre-service tutor training, and are expected to tutor 20 hours a week at a pre-school center or in a K-3 classroom serving children from low-income and limited-English speaking families. They are not left alone, but in fact are supervised by classroom teachers or school site coordinators. Participants are also expected to attend weekly reflection meetings to talk about their experiences and expectations.

Participants share their thoughts about balancing homework, childcare, and other family responsibilities. After eight months of child development classes, tutor training, and tutoring experience, one student has enough early childhood units to qualify as an assistant in a preschool. This is a first step toward her vision of becoming a preschool teacher. She will receive a monetary award of up to \$2,362 to continue to attend school. She explains that her experience has not only been good for her career, but it has helped her really understand her own children a lot better.

The initial year of the program concluded in 1998 with 37 percent of the 700 AmeriCorps members having completed enough early childhood education to qualify as teacher's assistants or master teachers in preschools or child care

centers; some 64 participants received Early Childhood certificates. Nearly 50 were offered jobs at their current sites and 17 new community/early childhood literacy partnerships were strong enough to stand on their own and continue to deliver tremendous literacy programs based in their own neighborhoods.

The community college program “Building Individual and Community Self-Sufficiency Through Service” is part of their vision of creating an engaged campus. The hope is that this program will become a building block for a statewide initiative. Nearly 4800 preschool and K-3 children at 200 school sites received extra literacy development that teachers say have improved their reading skills (NW Regional Education Lab, 2001).

San Diego Community College District’s VESL program is a pioneer program in the development of curricula for Vocational English-as-a-Second language (VESL). Once ESL students attain basic proficiency in English, they want to find employment, but are usually only qualified for low-end, low paying, labor intensive jobs. The VESL program motivates students to pursue vocational training that will lead to a greater degree of self-sufficiency. VESL provides intermediate-level English literacy students with English instruction combined with the always important vocational training. This model decreases the period of time it takes to obtain gainful employment by integrating basic skill instruction with vocational training. The VESL program has raised reading scores from the 4th-8th grade level in ten months, and has placed 90% of completers in more advanced vocational training (Jenkins and Fitzgerald, 1998).

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance has provided

funding to the Massachusetts Community Colleges Executive Office (MACC) to establish a state-wide comprehensive welfare-to-work program that enables Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) recipients to successfully enter the workplace. Through the delivery of intensive, high caliber, short-term academic skills training and employment services, recipients can access employment opportunities that will assist them in the transition from welfare to self-sufficiency. The program is specifically designed for welfare recipients who now have less than a two-year time limit to receive their benefits because of welfare reform (Mota, 1999, p. 246).

North Harris Montgomery Community College District had a wonderful program that addressed the domestic violence issue. Indeed, the PATHWAYS program provided participating welfare recipients with post-employment, multi-track, multi-level educational options, life skills, communication, and cultural diversity training. One of the many components of the program works to “break the cycle” of domestic violence by offering preventative programs for participant’s children (<http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/domesticviolence.htm>).

The State University of New York’s Bridge Program is another laudable welfare to work effort. The program is a statewide welfare to work program that operates at some 33 institutions of the State University System of New York. It has been operating nearly ten years, and is an integral part of New York State’s welfare to work program. The broad priorities of the program are to:

- Help end the cycle of dependency for TANF recipients, through high

quality work-based training and education, case management, and other services;

- Contribute to the larger workforce development efforts of New York State's communities by preparing a critical segment of the population for employment with targeted employers;
- Respond rapidly and in a cost effective manner to evolving federal, state, and local policies regarding welfare employment preparation;
- Demonstrate the value of interagency coordination and cooperation in implementing public policy; and
- Contribute to New York's economic development program by coordinating WtW efforts with business and industry.

Since its inception, Bridge has enrolled approximately 20,000 welfare recipients, and has placed approximately 6,000 in unsubsidized employment. Since job retention requirements began in January of 1997, Bridge has documented over 2, 479 participants who met a retention rate. Other outcomes of the program include:

- Over 7000 have completed activity components (work-based training, workfare, job development and, or placement);
- Approximately 6,000 have entered unsubsidized employment;
- Over \$4,700 in welfare grant savings per entry to employment;
- Local tax levy savings of nearly \$10 million;
- Unsubsidized income
- On average, 29 unsubsidized hours were worked per week at a rate of

\$6.50 per hour.

Bridge contributes significantly to helping New York State and its localities meet their TANF participation rate, while imposing no additional program costs to localities. The Bridge program has repeatedly demonstrated flexibility and adaptability both in changing state priorities, and to the needs of the local economy and social service districts as demonstrated through:

- Education and training with a work component that meets participation requirements;
- Workfare enhanced with education and training activities;
- Job readiness with targeted education, training and job development;
- Employer specific training, including subsidized employment and on-the-job training; and
- Retention services including post-employment case management.

Another initiative of the Bridge program is:

the Child Care Training and Placement Program which was developed by Bridge as an interagency initiative. This program responds to the increased need for child care slots across the state, and assists localities in meeting TANF participation rates. Over \$1.5 million in TANF funds will provide 80 hours of training to approximately 2,200 participants who fulfill their own obligation to “engage in work” while enabling other TANF recipients to do so also.

Employer Specific Activities and Services are distinguished by a direct relationship with a specific employer from the beginning of a client’s employment preparation efforts. There are two principal employer specific

activities: employer specific training and subsidized employment. The direct employer linkage should improve job placement and retention.

Bridge College to Work is a program funded with approximately \$4 million in TANF funds to expand to any of SUNY's community colleges and colleges of technology that determine, in coordination with their local social service districts, that a Bridge program would contribute to local welfare to work efforts. Bridge College to Work program models include, but are not limited to: work-based cooperative education; short-term Vocational Education; and Enhanced Work Experience/Job Readiness (Bridge program brochure, 2001).

Central Piedmont Community Colleges' heralded Pathways to Employment Program is a welfare to work program in North Carolina. Pathways to Employment is a community-based model that links the community college, the local welfare agency, community businesses, and other organizations in a welfare to work effort. As part of an effort to deal with Work First, the community college developed a variety of flexible, short-term programs that provides academic, social and job-specific training designed to prepare students to enter the workforce with some skills (<http://cpcc.edu/pathways/history.htm>).

The passage and enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act made fundamental changes in government aid to the poor. Central Piedmont, a leader in adult education and literacy, recognized the need to provide quality basic skills and workplace skills in order for welfare recipients to be successful when time limits become a reality. CPCC determined that a course of study was needed that provided education in areas where there is

a worker shortage, while reinforcing basic and employment skills. Consequently, CPCC received a grant from the North Carolina Community College System to implement the Pathways to Employment program. The program was developed to include three important components: human resources (employability and life skills), basic skills (reading, math and GED preparation and communication skills) and the job skills necessary to succeed in a specific field. CPCC applies the Pathways to Employment model into a truly workable process. It is a nationally recognized program that provides the education and training for those who have not had many opportunities for employment enhancement (<http://cpcc.edu/pathways/history.htm>).

In an effort to provide short-term training that would enable a Work First participant to find successful employment, CPCC in conjunction with the Employment Security Commission, Job Link, and the Department of Human Services, researched area employer needs. This collective effort gave CPCC a more precise representation of the needs of the business community. With this information, CPCC was able to provide a more viable and trained workforce that adds value to the labor market and to the welfare to work participants. The development of the curriculum area is based on the workforce needs in the Charlotte/Mecklenberg area. The current curricula includes Medical Reimbursement Specialist, Office Information System Specialist/Receptionist, and Customer Service Representative, Hospital Unit Coordinator, and Medical Office Administrative Procedures (<http://cpcc.edu/pathways/history.htm>).

The Pathways to Employment program has linkages with other

organizations to meet the needs of the community. Community aid organizations such as the United Way, Break the Cycle foundation, Charlotte Women's Shelter, JTPA, The Charlotte Housing Authority, Goodwill and Neighborhood Development, participate in the Pathways program by offering scholarships and participant support (<http://cpcc.edu/pathways/history.htm>).

A partnership with the Department of Social Services provides an effective way to recruit, manage and retain Work First participants in the Pathways program. An on-site Department of Social Services representative provides much needed support to both the program and the participants. The Social Worker has access to possible program participants and has knowledge of funding, which helps in the recruitment of candidates who can benefit from the program. The partnership between CPCC and the Department of Social Services assures a successful program by also providing the participants with direct access to Social Services. This link helps with retention by providing students with Social Services support. The direct access reduces scheduling conflicts and assists with personal problems, such as child care and transportation, that may interfere with the participant's study schedule (<http://cpcc.edu/pathways/history.htm>). The various interdepartmental linkages encourage better program flexibility to prepare the Work First participants for success. The Community Development Department, under which the Pathways program is housed, partners with short-term training, continuing education and traditional curriculum departments in order to provide a flexible, supportive training process that fits the needs and desires of the students, while maintaining academic standards and requirements.

The partnership between the Pathways program and the Human Resources Development (HRD) Department results in an integrated curricula that provides the job search and basic tools that are key for the student's success in putting the education to work in the job market (<http://cpcc.edu/pathways/history.htm>).

CPCC has other community partnerships that provide students with support after the course ends. The Job Placement Services department is a resource on-campus that students can use to help find employment. The Work-Based Learning program also offers instruction on post-employment skills to help students keep their jobs after they obtain employment (<http://cpcc.edu/pathways/history.htm>).

The Pathways to Employment program has several partnerships with local employers to assist students in getting jobs after graduation. Several business partners have agreed to give consideration for employment to Pathways Program participants upon completion of their training. Representatives from various area businesses and placement agencies such as Northeast Medical Center, Carolinas Healthcare System, Med Dent, Presbyterian Hospital, Pro Staff and Kelly Services have provided tremendous opportunities for work-based learning experiences such as job shadowing, field trips, clinical experiences and guest speakers. The organizations also attend graduation ceremonies and job fairs (<http://cpcc.edu/pathways/history.htm>).

Paneitz (2003 p.1) discusses the Pathways to Employment program as an innovative best practice. She talks about the strong partnerships they have developed and how beneficial they have been.

In addition to its strong partnership with the Department of Social Services, the Pathways program is linked with other organizations to meet the needs of the community. Organizations such as the United Way of Central Carolinas, Charlotte Enterprise Community, Christ Episcopal Church, Johnston YMCA, Sprint PCS, Employment Security Commission, *Joblink* Centers, Break the Cycle Foundation, Charlotte Women's Shelter, the Charlotte Housing Authority, Goodwill Industries, Freddie Mac, and the City of Charlotte Neighborhood Development all participate in the Pathways program by offering scholarships and participant support. Examples of such support includes(Paneitz, p.2):

- In June 1998, the Pathways to Employment program received grants from the North Carolina Community College System for a total of \$43,000.
- In June 1999, the Pathways to Employment program received a two-year Grant of \$103,300 from the North Carolina Community College System.
- In December 1999, the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services provided \$41,670 to fund an on-campus computer lab for the Pathways to Employment program.
- In January 2000, CPCC received a second enhancement grant of \$40,000 for program development from the North Carolina Community College System.
- In June 2001, the Pathways to Employment program received a two-year Grant of \$180,000 from the North Carolina Community College System.
- The Pathways to Employment program also received a \$40,000 grant from

The United way of Central Carolinas in 2000, a \$43,000 grant in 2001, and a \$34,000 grant in 2002 to fund student scholarships.

- In October 2002, Pathways received a \$15,000 loan from Freddie Mac for tuition and books. Over three years, this will fund up to 15 Credit Smart classes designed to teach financial literacy.
- In January 2003, Pathways to Employment received a five-year grant for \$125,000 from the Christ Episcopal Church in Charlotte to fund student scholarships. In-kind support from CPCC is estimated to be approximately \$260,000 over a five-year period.

Paneitz (2003,p. 3) further discusses the successes that the Pathways to Employment program has enjoyed by citing the following outcomes:

- The 80-percent attendance and grades of 80-percent and higher required for students to graduate help establish very high expectations for the participants. In the end, the graduates are well trained in their courses of study. Turning out qualified candidates to the workforce establishes a respected reputation for CPCC among business partners, who then anticipate the next group of graduates.
- The partnering with the Department of Social Services has resulted in the funding and establishment of a 20-station computer lab at the Central Campus for Pathways to Employment participants.
- The program trains individuals with multiple barriers to employment in jobs that have promising futures.
- The career-path design of the Pathways to Employment program

encourages lifelong learning.

- The program allows students lacking a high school diploma or GED to access CPCC's skills-training courses.
- The program design meets the needs of welfare to work clients and other clientele to be served under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.
- The Pathways to Employment program began in the fall of 1998 with one course and grew over five years to an offering of eight programs.
- In January 2000, CPCC's Pathway to Employment program was presented at *Futures Assembly 2000*. It is considered a model for institutions developing similar programs.
- CPCC's Pathways to Employment program has been presented as a model at numerous state and national conferences.
- President George W. Bush participated in a press conference in Charlotte in February 2002, at which he discussed welfare reform and praised the Pathways program, saying, "The innovation it takes in this community is positive and strong, and that's why we are here; to herald a program that actually works. Sometimes they sound good on paper, they read good, but the results are short. And that's not the case in Mecklenburg County when it comes to putting people to work.

Paneitz (2003, p.4) concludes her remarks about the Pathways to

Employment program success by adding:

The Pathways to Employment program links many facets of the community to better assure the success of the individual participant. The very high retention

rate of 80.25 percent is indicative of the program's success. To date, 423 students have graduated from the program, and 343 clients (81 percent) were employed after six months. Seventy-seven percent were employed after one year. Fifty percent of those students needing a GED earned it during the course of their program. Seventy-five percent of the graduates are no longer receiving TANF benefits, and the average pay is \$10.50 an hour. Follow-up data is collected by Pathways to Employment staff and the Department of Social Services. The success of the participants gives credence to claims of the value of strong community links and quality education integral to the Pathways program. The quality of the short-term training, with its integrated curricula, on-site social worker, and strong partnerships with community agencies makes the Pathways to Employment program at Central Piedmont Community College truly successful.

Dutchess County Community College in New York has a program it calls the PACE program. PACE stands for Public Assistance Comprehensive Employment and Training program. This program which began operations in Fall 1987, began as a pilot project funded by the New York State Department of Social Services (NYS DSS). Once funding ended in 1993, the Dutchess County Department of Social Services (DSS) continued the funding supporting the notion that the program has had a successful track record of moving clients from welfare to work.

The PACE program offers a wide variety of support services to its students including financial aid, academic and career counseling, tutoring, job placement,

and follow-up in the workplace. DCDSS provides money for child care and transportation; two of the biggest employment and training barriers for welfare to work clients. This collaboration is effective and leads public assistance recipients to permanent self-sufficiency, and in a greater sense, contributes to the vision of a productive and educated work force for the future.

Since the inception of the program 681 public assistance recipients with children, mostly single mothers, have participated in the PACE program. Of this number, 160 have graduated. Of the 160 graduates, about 150 became employed upon program completion. On average, 25%-30% of students graduate from DCC. This compares favorably to the overall DCC graduate rate, but it is not the whole story. While the majority of PACE graduates find employment and become self-sufficient, the PACE program staff believe that at least half, and probably more of the non-graduates found employment because PACE was the vehicle that provided the first step. The PACE program staff estimate that their program has helped move at least 400 persons from welfare to work. With an average family size of three, this means that well over 1,000 adults and children in Dutchess County are living off of county welfare benefits (<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/workforce/welfare/wfdcc.html>).

In Washington and Multnomah Counties, Oregon, the TANF agency contracts with Mt. Hood and Portland Community Colleges to provide the Steps to Success program, which is the local welfare employment program. Steps to Success provides education and employment services to more than 12,000 welfare applicants and recipients annually. Clients begin the program by combining job

search with classes designed to improve their job seeking and job retention skills. Those who do not find work during this period may receive a variety of additional services including basic education, GED preparation, vocational training, work experience, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and special classes for those who are learning-disabled or have very low basic skills. Employers are involved in curriculum development for industry-specific training and in providing work experience opportunities. The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Labor are providing technical assistance workshops that promote the Mt. Hood model (<http://financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/vocational>).

Onondaga Community College has the contract to administer Jobs Plus, the welfare to work program in Onondaga County, New York, which includes the city of Syracuse. Participants are required to participate in a four-week job club. Those who do not find a job during those four weeks are assessed and assigned to work experience in combination with education, job readiness and life skills training, vocational training, or continued job search. A new option for TANF recipients is Career Clusters, which are a set of courses that can be completed in one or two semesters and relate directly to a specific job where there are local employment opportunities. Participants earn credit toward an eventual degree or certificate, and are strongly encouraged to think about continuing their education after they begin their jobs. Students who complete these clusters can obtain jobs as teachers aides, food workers, social works assistants and others. About 2,500 public assistance recipients are involved in Jobs Plus

(<http://financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/vocational>).

California's West Valley and Mission Community Colleges received a grant from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation to help welfare recipients make the transition to employment. Program activities include such things as the development of a skills activity center to provide assessment, counseling, and other activities; locating additional work experience and work study opportunities; increasing child care availability; and adapting and developing educational programs that offer career path opportunities and options for completing programs in less than a year. These programs include Home Health Aide, Certified Nursing Assistant, Local Area Network Administrator, and Legal Secretary, among others. The focus is on providing courses that will lead to immediate employment in positions that are on career ladders, so that employees can return to school and build upon their initial classes

(<http://financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/vocational>).

With the advent of Wisconsin's welfare to work program, W-2, and based on the employer focus group, Moraine Park Technical College in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin revised its welfare training courses from longer-term vocationally focused classes to shorter-term classes focusing on soft skills such as cooperation, communication, and responsibility. The college offers a ten-week hospitality/housekeeping course, a six-week child care course, a twelve week basic office course, and a twenty-four hour retention workshop focusing on soft skills. The college reports a much higher graduation rate for the shorter-term programs than for the longer courses that they used to offer the welfare recipients.

To measure program success and communicate student proficiency to employers, the college uses the Workplace Success Skills assessment instrument. The college is now focusing on post-employment services that will enhance job retention and self-sufficiency. An eight-week, twenty-four hour retention course is being offered to new employees at eight companies (<http://financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/vocational>).

The Moraine Park Technical College District was selected to pilot the Work Not Welfare (WNW) program by then Governor Tommy Thompson. The Colleges within the district were asked to customize and modularize short-term training for WNW participants. WNW provided temporary cash assistance, job training and job placement, child care, health care, and transportation support.

Nitschke (2001, pp. 42-3) relates that :

Between 1995 and 1997, the college piloted and modified a number of different training efforts. During the first year, MPTC attempted to customize its offerings to serve WNW participants but had not yet effectively listened to the participants and employers. It attempted to make minor modifications to existing curriculum and courses and did not in fact customize the short-term training to meet the specific needs of participants and employers. The result was moderate success, with half of the participants completing the training. In the second year, there were significant changes in the content and delivery methodology as reflected in the earlier explanation of changes made to hospitality and housekeeping training. The results in the second year showed considerable improvement, with an 80 percent completion rate, which

represented a 30 percent increase over the first year.

Because they listened to both the participants and the employers, MPTC staff witnessed a marked improvement in year two of the project. Here is a list of outcomes from the year two (Nitschke, 2001, pp. 42-3):

- The focus of the training changed to soft skills and job retention skills, not job training. It was not so much an intellectual exercise as it was one of the staff's connecting, caring, and mentoring participants.
- The college incorporated the workplace skills assessment (pre-and post training) to document changes and levels of ability in these work-keeping skill competencies. The results were then used to adjust curriculum, develop benchmarks to measure student success, and create a hidden transcript that participants could use with possible employers.
- Businesses took on an expanded, visible role to pull the participants toward employment. This was a new role for most employers, who were used to "catching" students off the education and training line (a shift from supply-side hiring to demand-side hiring).
- A one-week workshop on self-esteem building was piloted prior to the formal training program, with very positive results. The workshop helped participants understand the requirements and changes associated with WNW and established a connection with other participants and with the College. The workshop served to welcome the participants as MPTC students and introduced them to the requirements of WNW, the resources that were available to them, and other participants. Essentially, WNW was

not something being done to them. It was being done with them and through them. This was the new paradigm.

- The aspect of promoting cross-training and skill building in multiple areas within a given occupational area was part of all training. This activity was focused more on developing the concept of skill security, not just job security, and gave participants many more opportunities for employment in the future.
- A series of work-related certificates were built into the training programs, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid, the national sanitation and safety certificate, customer service, and fire extinguisher training. This training (for example, emergency first aid, how to put out smaller fires, and general sanitation knowledge) had application at home as well as in the workplace. It also provided more credentials for participants to put in front of a possible future employer.
- At least five days of workplace tours were led by business leaders, with feedback from these leaders on participant behavior and general interest. These tours involved some half-day job shadowing for participants to see both what work was being done and the ways in which employees were doing the work.
- At key points in the training, participants were given an opportunity for an internship for up to two weeks of full-time experience, involving on-the-job training with frequent feedback on performance from the employers.

- Wherever possible, MPTC hired a business employee to serve as a part-time trainer along with the college's trainer. This added constant reinforcement and application of classroom training to the real world. It also created an great private sector employment reference for the various program participants.
- Participants were given daily feedback from the college trainer and peer participants on their soft skills. This feedback is crucial in helping participants identify and change unacceptable behavior.
- All training received college-transcribed credit. This created a permanent MPTC record for the participants and served as a recruiting instrument for future education and skill upgrading of the participants.
- The college, employers, and social services emphasized career ladder opportunities for further education and advancement. Participants learned that the transcribed credits, along with the future life experiences to be gained through employment, presented them with a tremendous amount of opportunities for advanced placement in several college programs. Indeed, the participants options were increasing exponentially.
- As participants completed their training experience, the college held graduation ceremonies to celebrate achievements. Friends, family, potential employers, the media, and faculty all attended this celebration which helped make this training part of a positive transitioning experience from welfare to work.

What Moraine Park Technical College has done very well is glean an

understanding that “soft skills” are significantly more important than occupational skills with regard to the welfare to work population. Nitschke (2001, p. 44) explains in 1988 a survey of area employers identified seven critical soft skill areas: work cooperatively, work productively, communicate clearly, learn effectively, value self positively, act responsibly, and think creatively and critically. He notes that when employers are asked why people get fired from jobs, it usually involves the inability to cooperate and work well with others, or act responsibly or a lack of adaptability. Nitschke notes (as do many other college welfare to work program staff) that a major element of success for many new employees rests with soft skills as well as the appropriate level of technical, or hard skills. Although the concept of soft skills is not a new idea at MPTC, the college had not adequately addressed how it would adapt short-term training or individual noncredit courses to incorporate soft skills. MPTC was able to determine changes in the level of soft skills through the development of a video-based Workplace Success Skills assessment instrument administered before and after training. This instrument was already being used by employers nationwide to assess the employability of potential employees, and was based on SCANS (Secretary ‘s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills). This tool was crucial in that it allowed MPTC to have benchmarks for learning and growth.

Oakland Community College in Pontiac, Michigan received an award from the American Association of Community Colleges and the U.S. Department of Labor for its Advanced Technology program, which offers work-based instruction, work readiness skills, and mentoring to welfare recipients. Students

are able to choose from training in systems administration, machine tool technology, and robotic assembly technology. The program works in concert with employers, including EDS corporation and Kelly Services, and has an incredible placement rate of 86%. Entrants must have a high school diploma or GED and read at the tenth grade level. Among other factors, the awards panel found this program notable for being one of the few to target high technology jobs for TANF recipients. The Michigan Legislature has appropriated \$4 million to expand the program statewide
(<http://financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/vocational>).

Daytona Beach Community College reacted to welfare reform in Florida by developing short-term, ten to sixteen week training programs that incorporated the material offered in the first part of an existing certificate program in areas such as office technology, electronics repair, boat lamination and nursing. While they are in training, participants are provided with work experience placements that are in their chosen fields and that satisfy Florida's requirement that students be employed as well. The college also lowered its reading requirement for such programs to seventh and eighth grade and is combining adult education with vocational training. Graduates of these programs are marketable to employers and are encouraged to return to the community college once to finish their education. The college also has a grant to provide job coaching to TANF recipients who are placed in employment situations
(<http://financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/vocational>).

Defining Poverty-Images of the Poor

Poverty can be a relative term. For that reason, it is important to bring discussion to the notion of poverty, and the pragmatic relationship it has to welfare, and by default, to the community college. Hoult (p. 245) defines poverty as (1) “a scarcity of the means of subsistence” and (2) “a level that is below a particular minimum standard.” The Theodorsons (p.307) state that it is a “standard of living that lasts long enough to undermine the morale, health, and self-respect of an individual or group of individuals.”

Basu, and Segalman (1981) suggest that there are three levels of poverty in the United States of America. The transitional poor are the group that only experience poverty temporarily. They are able to climb out of poverty rather quickly and with little difficulty. Unemployment, medical situations, and legal problems are some reasons that they may experience temporary poverty. Community college students may move in and out of this group routinely. The next group, the marginal poor, can often include the transitional poor as well. The “working poor” are a big part of this group, they have just barely enough to meet their basic needs, and sometimes a little bit more. They often fall prey to economic fluctuations, or a sudden family emergency. Although many do climb out of this circumstance, others may find themselves drifting into the ranks of the residual poor. The last group is the residual poor. They are defined as individuals who find themselves mired in the direst economic circumstances for extended periods of time. Transgenerational poverty, as in the case of some welfare recipients, is not an unusual phenomenon for this group. Their children, or

perhaps grandchildren, are supported by public funds.

Another group to consider is the immigrant poor. There is a notable difference between the other groups and the immigrant poor. The immigrant or refugee poor arrives in the United States under various immigration restrictions that preclude welfare dependency (Basu and Segalman, 1981). Thus, the early immigrant poor (1930's-40's) were motivated to develop patterns of self-sufficiency, rapid assimilation, and a high degree of socio-economic status improvement (Basu and Segalman, 1981). Blacks, the descendents of slaves, on the other hand were punished for similar patterns of behavior. If the slave had any thought of self-sufficiency they were viewed as "uppity" or even rebellious, and could lose their life. As a consequence of this circumstance, the immigrant poor and the refugee poor assimilated into American life faster and easier than have Blacks, Mexicans, Indians, and other minority groups (Decker; Briggs; Griffin; Yanis-McLaughlin, 1978). Another observation is the notion that the American image of the poor gives rise to the views of poverty-stricken immigrants coming to America (Glazer, 1965). Glazer (1965, p.138) observes "the next wave of ethnic self-consciousness must reflect....the growing estrangement between European ethnic groups and the Negroes. It is certainly interesting to look at history, and the parallel of today's welfare to work demographics. Basu and Segalman (1981) take note of the key differences between the Black poor and the immigrant poor. They note that Blacks were torn from Africa and transferred to slave-breeding farms, where they were separated from their families. Family life was destroyed and the male head of the family

was psychologically castrated. The southern slave system was put in place to destroy any degree of Black self-determination. Blacks, it should be noted, have dwelt longer in poverty in America, and in greater proportions, than any other ethnic group (Basu and Segalman, 1981).

The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a self-described expert on welfare, viewed the original goal of welfare as a rehabilitative tool to assist helpless victims of uncontrollable circumstances. He lamented that it had become a “highly anti-rehabilitative” mechanism for unmarried younger women who are unprepared for self-care and self-sufficiency, much less for responsible parenthood (Moynihan, 1968, p. 22).

To be sure, the face of poverty has changed over the past twenty years (Blank, 1997). Only about 12 % live in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, half are either below the age of 18 or over the age of 65 (Blank, 1997). About 40 % of all poor families with children are headed by married couples; and about 43 percent live in families with a single parent; 48 percent are African American or Latino; 48 percent white, and the remaining 4 percent are Native American, Asian, and other persons of color (Blank, 1997). In 1994, there were some 38.1 million people in the United States who had incomes below the poverty line. It is worth mentioning that (1979-91) two thirds of all blacks had experienced at least one year of poverty, while only one third of whites had (Blank, 1997). The 2003 Poverty Guidelines (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2003) stipulated that the any family of four that had a household income of \$18,400, was considered below the federal poverty level. The poverty

rate rose to 12.1 % of the population in 2002, up from 11 % in 2001 (Star-Telegram, 2003). The poverty rate increases for 2002 were concentrated among African Americans, suburban residents and Midwesterners. By the end of 2002, 35 million Americans met the government's poverty criteria. Among those, 12 million were children (Star-Telegram, 2003). Clarence Page (1998) cites recent analysis by New York Times poverty reporter Jason DeParle that shows that Black families now outnumber Whites on welfare, although, he points out, in the stereotype-riddled world of the welfare debate, many people mistakenly thought Blacks outnumbered whites all along.

The 2002 Texas Fact Book reveals the following statistics relative to poverty in the state of Texas:

- In 1999, Texas ranked 7th in the nation in the number of school age children in poverty with 21.4%.
- In 1999, Texas ranked 8th in the nation with regard to percentage of population in poverty at 15.6%.
- In 2000, Texas ranked 20th in the nation in the percentage of population receiving food stamps at 6.4%.
- In 1999, Texas ranked 32nd in the nation with regard to the percentage of the population receiving public aid at 3.5%.
- In 1999, Texas ranked 47th in the nation with regard to the average Social Security payment at \$302.99.
- In 1999, Texas ranked 47th in the nation with regard to the average monthly TANF payment per family of three at \$188.

- In 1999, Texas ranked 48th in the percentage of the population enrolled in Medicare at 11% (Texas Sate Fact Book, 2002).

The state of Wisconsin, often touted as the national leader in welfare reform, mostly because of the number of families receiving cash assistance has fallen so dramatically. It has in fact seen a growing number of families trapped in extreme poverty (Moore, Selkove, 1999). Research by Moore and Selkove (1999) indicates that while the Wisconsin Works program (W-2) is credited with decreasing the welfare rolls, the vast majority of welfare roll reduction actually occurred between 1986 and 1997, before the implementation of W-2. During this period the welfare rolls declined by two-thirds, or more than 200,000 individuals. Moore and Selkove's (1999) study was the first to examine the impact of the welfare roll reduction that occurred in the last decade. Their study wanted to know if the decrease in welfare caseload was accompanied by a comparable decrease in the number of poor, and what changes had occurred in the real incomes and economic well-being of the state's poor population. What they found was that despite a rapid overall growth in the state's economy and the dramatic declines in the welfare rolls, there was only a small reduction in the number of poor. Between 1986 and 1997, while the number of people on welfare fell by 67%, the number of people in poverty fell by less than 12%. The study found that Wisconsin's dramatic caseload declines have not been matched by a similar improvement in poor families' standard of living. It was found that Wisconsin was more effective in moving people off of welfare than moving them out of poverty.

Moore and Selkove (1999) note that Wisconsin families in poverty are receiving less assistance than ever before. They explain that in 1986, nearly 60% of Wisconsin's poor received monetary assistance, a level far above the national average. By 1997, in a significant reversal, over 75% of those in poverty received no cash assistance from the government. This, Moore and Selkove (1999) remark, is an unparalleled reduction in welfare receipt per poor individual and reveals that the bulk of poor families no longer have the support they need to meet the growing costs of housing, utilities, clothing, and other essential needs. In 1989, only 10% of Wisconsin's food stamp families with children were living at a level of extreme poverty, with annual incomes of less than 50% of the poverty level (\$6,665 for a family of three in 1997). Indeed, by 1997, 32% of Wisconsin's food stamp households with children found themselves in extreme and dire poverty. Between 1989 and 1997, the estimated number of people living in extreme poverty had more than doubled.

Employment Barriers

Historically, the greatest inhibitors to welfare reform have been the many employment barriers faced by welfare recipients. The community college is certainly not alone in discovering that overcoming employment barriers is a first step to any successful welfare to work effort. Child care is probably the most significant of all barriers associated with welfare programs. It is also a major cost to these programs as well as reported by the General Accounting Office (1994). The report indicated that child care subsidies were a key factor in the poor getting and keeping a job. Another such cost was transportation. Reichert (1997) relates

that only about 6 % of persons on welfare owned their own vehicles. This is a real concern because most employment is located in urban and suburban communities, while many of the recipients reside in rural areas. Also, many of these jobs will be on weekends and non-traditional working hours and days; nights, weekends, and holidays.

There are other barriers that community colleges discover or will experience as they work to educate, train, place, and provide job retention services for welfare recipients. A study by the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) found that a significant number of women receiving welfare benefits experienced at least one of the following barriers: physical disability, low basic education skills, mental illness, or some health limitation (Kramer, 1998). Women on welfare were found to have low levels of cognitive skills. Longer-term recipients were found to have lower cognitive skills than the short-term welfare recipients (Zill, 1991). Schorr (2001) reports that recipients tend to find work at the lower tiers. It is noted that the average welfare recipient reads at the sixth-grade level and one-fifth to one-third have learning disabilities.

Increasingly, substance abuse plagues many welfare recipients involved in community college welfare to work programs. Sisco and Pearson (1994) indicate that about one-third of a group of 206 female adult recipients had alcohol or drug abuse problems. More significantly, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University in New York City (1994) suggests that it is estimated that about one in every four welfare recipients has a drug or alcohol problem.

There have been a multitude of local, city, state, county, and national programs that have attempted to address the welfare quagmire in the past. Education, training, community-based activities, faith-based activities, job readiness, job search, job development, job placement and retention have all been part of previous efforts. Rector (1993) explains that there was actually very little in the way of work-based activities. There was little impact on the actual caseloads or costs according to Hamilton and Freidlander (1989). Most of the programs did not place persons in the kinds of skilled employment necessary for self-sufficiency (Ellwood, 1988). Moreover, it is crucial to take note that any reflection of increased earning is essentially the result of more hours worked, and not necessarily more income (Grossman and Mirsky, 1985). Gueron and Pauly (1991) further discuss the notion that a great deal of these programs sped up entry into the workplace for welfare recipients, but did not lead to employment that was long lasting or paid a good salary. The programs also did not benefit the most disadvantaged welfare recipients.

Brock, Grossman, and Hamilton (2001) maintain that community colleges be prepared to deal with the multitude of personal participation barriers including depression, domestic violence, criminal histories, non-custodial parents, and unresolved immigration issues. They go on to explain that community colleges are already prepared to provide a full range of services. If they are not, they should be ready to refer the client to another service provider. They also suggest that welfare recipients form peer support groups at the community college. Sacramento City College in California is cited for their Ambassador program that

connects college and community resources, in addition to providing the emotional support that students need. TANF students are paid for providing counseling and support as part of their work study assignment. Parenting is yet another huge barrier for welfare recipients. Welfare recipients struggle (as many non-recipients do) with competing responsibilities of family, work, education, and training commitments. Quint, Musick, and Ladner (1994) studied young mothers on welfare and found juggling school, family, and often work, as well as pregnancy, and the children(s) father, were all barriers to the successful completion of college certificate and degree programs. The more the community college can consider these concerns, the greater the likelihood of success in any role the college will play in the recipient's life. Programs may wish to involve children and other family members in programs and services (a holistic approach if you will).

A paradoxical barrier for the welfare recipient is the "work first" requirement mandated by the 1996 Welfare Reform law. Many recipients already attending college when the law was passed were forced to drop out, as many as 20,000 in New York City alone (Schorr, 2001). Because of "work first" and time limits, state policy makers became interested in the characteristics of individuals who remained on the welfare rolls. Research findings consistently point to the fact that women who remain on welfare despite a strong economy face multiple barriers to employment. While these barriers include traditional human capital variables, such as limited work histories, and/or minimal employment skills, they also include factors such as poor health, substance abuse, histories of domestic violence, and mental health disabilities (Chandler & Meisel, 2000; Danziger et

al., 2000; Danziger, Kalil & Anderson, 2000; Kalil et al. 1998; Polit, London & Martinez, 2001; Social Research Institute, 1999; Zedlewski & Anderson, 2001).

States have categorized many of the hard-to-serve as individuals with mental health disabilities and have paid a lot of attention to the relationship between mental health and welfare use. Research on the occurrence of mental health problems in the welfare population is a somewhat new but popular development, and has produced a significant variety of estimates ranging from 12% to 57% (Derr, Douglas & Pavetti, 2001; Lennon, Blome & English, 2001). Welfare reform continues to focus on who is able to work and who is not. This body of literature is limited, but some early reports do suggest that recipients who have psychiatric illness may be as much as 25% less likely to work than other recipients (Jayakody & Stauffer, 2000; Social Research Institute, 1999).

It can certainly be argued that a preexisting mental illness contributes to poverty, in so far as it limits or restricts employability. Still there are others who contend that poverty plays a casual role in the development of psychiatric conditions, most notably depression in women (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1969; Dohrenwend, 1990; Dohrenwend et al.,1992). In other words being poor can make you sick, or you can be sick of being poor. Those seeking to bring some degree of explanation to this casual relationship sometimes address: the role of poverty-related stress in the production of mental illness (Dohrenwend, 1990; Mechanic, 1975); the vulnerability of low-income individuals to physical and psychological disease given their lack of economic and social resources (Link & Phelan, 1995); and the impact of traumatic or cumulative negative life events

on mental health (Turner & Lloyd, 1995).

Identification of mental health disability usually happens through self-report with supporting medical documentation (General Accounting Office, 2001). Interviewing and observation of client behavioral indicators by TANF staff, referrals to outside professional mental health assessment, and clinical inventories and questionnaires are also employed as assessment methods (Derr, Douglas & Pavetti, 2001; General Accounting Office, 2001; Johnson & Meckstroth, 1998; Pavetti et al., 1997; Thompson & Mikelson, 2001; Holcomb & Thompson, 2000).

Addressing mental health concerns may be helpful to low-income individuals who experience psychiatric disabilities. There is mounting evidence that suggests that time limitations may not take into account the large number of individuals with mental health barriers. What may be ignored are the complex relationships between poverty, mental health and employment. There may also be a failure to address the fundamental social problem of equal access to and the distribution of economic resources that accompanies welfare use and poverty. More importantly, little is known about the hard-to-serve population and the effectiveness of clinical interventions in moving recipients from welfare to work.

Indeed Layne Stromwell's (2001) work on the mental health needs of TANF recipients suggests that the public welfare system (and by extension, community college welfare to work intervention staff) should screen applicants for depression and other mental health conditions and make timely referrals for

treatment. Stromwell further argues (p.134) that “public welfare workers need to be educated so they can recognize major symptoms of psychiatric disorders as such, instead of interpreting them as deficits in motivation or attempts to circumvent the system.” Stromwell notes that they need to understand the implications of mood and other psychiatric disorders for the recipient’s ability to comply with requirements such as time limits. Finally, Stromwell (2001) finds that female TANF recipients receiving behavioral health services are significantly more likely to be seriously mentally ill than non-recipients.

Jayakody, Danziger and Pollack’s (2000) research credits David Ellwood’s *Poor Support* as laying the groundwork for much of the time limit aspects of welfare policy for the Clinton administration. They point out that Ellwood and other architects of work-oriented welfare reform realized that some recipients would not do well in the labor market. There was the assumption that time-limited benefits would allow most recipients to become self-sufficient with proper transitional support and other types of aid. Jayakody’s et al. (2000) research on time limits as policy found that substance abuse was a barrier to self-sufficiency. They referred to an Inspector General study of twenty-five AFDC offices that found substance abuse to be among the most frequently cited functional impairments preventing recipients from leaving welfare and finishing job training programs. These findings also cited mental health disorders as being common among welfare recipients. An evaluation of the JOBS program reported that 42 percent of welfare mothers (twice the rate of the general population) reported high levels of depressive symptoms. Many studies revealed that low-income

person, single mothers, young adults, those with little education, and the unemployed face a greater risk of mental health related problems (Bruse, Takeuchi and Leaf, 1991; Catalano & Dooley, 1983; Hall, Williams, & Greenberg, 1985). They concluded that substance abuse/dependence and mental health problems are important barriers to economic self-sufficiency. They argue for effective services to address and prevent anguish in this important subgroup of the welfare population.

Olson and Pavetti (1996) point out that substance abuse is a covert behavior. As a direct consequence of this, the actual numbers of welfare recipients who are substance abusers may not be known. Published prevalence estimates vary considerably, from 6.6% to 37% of those receiving public assistance. The 1992 NHSDA indicated that 15.5% of AFDC recipients were substance abusers, a rate that was twice that of the general population.

Sachs (1999, p. 1) explains that “while domestic violence affects women from all sectors of society, many studies demonstrate that the percentage of welfare recipients who are victims of domestic violence is much higher than among the general population.” She further explains that “recognizing this reality meant that many victims would not be able to meet the strict work requirements dictated by the passage of PRWORA.” As a consequence of this, Congress passed the Wellstone/Murray amendment as part of the new welfare law. This amendment essentially provides temporary waivers to the work requirements for victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence is a huge barrier for welfare to work recipients. Sachs (1999, p.2) suggests that “finding and keeping a job is

extremely difficult for women when their lives are continually interrupted by violence.” She (1999.p.2) further states that “ victims often suffer from low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, anger, and other behaviors associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, all of which may cause women to be less productive at work than they might be otherwise.” She adds that tardiness and frequent absences, which can lead to termination, are often the result of domestic violence. Sachs (1999.p.2) remarks that abusers may feel intimidated by their partner’s employment or training activities which can lead to self-sufficiency and escape from the abusive relationship. Consequently, the abuser may attempt to sabotage a woman’s efforts at self-sufficiency. Examples of attempts at sabotage may include promising child care and/or transportation and then failing to do so. The abuser knows that physical marks may embarrass the woman, and she may not want to attend school or work activities as a result.

Moore and Selkove (1999.p.1) relate that many victims of domestic violence have utilized the welfare system as an economic support mechanism when leaving violent relationships. They explain that recent national and state legislation has established welfare replacement programs with strict time limits, work requirements and rules, mandating that women cooperate with state efforts to collect child support from fathers. Domestic violence advocates in Wisconsin have voiced concern about the potential inability of abused women to comply with the various work requirements of Wisconsin Works (W-2), and about the capacity of W-2 to effectively identify, support and protect victims so they can successfully move from welfare to work.

Prevalence of Abuse That Negatively Impacts Employment and Education Efforts

TYPE OF ABUSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Abuser kept respondent from sleeping	207	84.5%
Respondent was threatened to the point that she was afraid to go to work or school	137	57.8%
Abuser refused child care at the last minute	112	47.1%
Abuser called respondent at work repeatedly	102	41.5%
Abuser refused transportation to work at last minute	82	34.0%
Respondent was beaten so she could not work	82	33.9%
Respondent is afraid former partner will return and harass her if the state attempts to collect child support from him	61	26.8%
Abuser forces respondent to do illegal things	49	20.9%

(study conducted by The Institute for Wisconsin's Future in 1998)

Moore and Selkove (1999) discuss a study from the Fall of 1998 where 274 victims of domestic violence from around the state were surveyed. Most of the respondents were single mothers, and more than three quarters had a high school diploma or less. More than 90% had received AFDC at some point in their lives, and nearly 61% had been or were currently enrolled in W-2 (Wisconsin's welfare to work program). The major findings from this survey included the fact that domestic violence has a severe negative impact on low-income women's ability to maintain jobs and to succeed at education and training efforts. Nearly 30% of respondents to the survey related that they were fired or lost a job because of domestic abuse, and 35% reported that the abuse hurt their education and

training efforts. More than half (57.8%) of women surveyed indicated that they were threatened to the point that they were afraid to go to school or work.

Respondents also detailed specific behaviors on the part of the abusers that have clear and dramatic effects on the women's ability to find and maintain employment or achieve self-sufficiency.

The study also revealed that women who are currently being abused are less likely to be employed than are women who were abused in the past, regardless of situation or age. Employment rates of women who had been abused in the past were considerably higher (54.9%) than those of women who were currently being abused (38.4%). All victims of domestic violence suffer physically and emotionally in ways that could effect their ability to work, even after they have left an abusive situation. However, women currently in abusive situations face daily disruptions that prevent stable participation in the work force or education programs.

The Wisconsin W-2 program had several provisions to address the needs of victims of domestic violence, but alarmingly, about 75% of the respondents who disclosed abuse were not made aware of available counseling, housing funds, or other important information. About 4.9% of those who indicated that they had been victims of domestic violence were told that they might have good cause for non-cooperation with child support enforcement rules if it would put them or their children at risk for further violence. More than one-fourth of the respondents related that they were afraid that a former domestic partner would return and harass them if the state attempted to collect child support from them.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature reveals historical efforts of the government to address poverty, welfare and associated issues. The literature reveals that community colleges have developed new programs to address the mandates of the “work-first” philosophy of welfare reform (Katsinas; Banachowski; Bliss; & Short, 1991). Many of the community colleges reviewed saw their role as short term training providers. They designed new programs that have a significant amount of continuing education and non-credit courses. Community colleges that link short-term vocational training to long term education and structured advancement opportunities, can overcome some of the most critical limitations of past work-based welfare reform efforts (Greenberg, Strawn, & Plimpton, 1999).

Community colleges have a history of providing education to disadvantaged groups, and serve a dual role as both education and training providers. This duality provides clarity for their role as partner in the provision of skills enhancement (Freidman, 1999). The roles of the community college will vary. Some state TANF plans do not have clearly defined roles for community colleges, while there are others that have very specific goals for education and training. This has a direct relationship to the amount of funding that community colleges are given for welfare to work programs and services. Grubb (1999) relates that most states have decided to let welfare funds go through the local workforce boards, as opposed to going directly to the community college.

The literature takes note of the various barriers that inhibit the likelihood of self-sufficiency and positive outcomes for welfare recipients. Child care,

substance abuse, criminal history, domestic violence, transportation, depression and mental illness, all remain part of the lexicon of the welfare world. These barriers portend of the ongoing issues that confront community colleges as they face this new era of welfare reform. Community colleges are reaching out to other community-based service providers to meet this challenge.

Moreover, the literature reveals the role of the community college regarding partnerships that foster collaboration, and lead to positive outcomes for welfare recipients. Roberts (2001) suggests that the role of the community college is to partner with community-based organizations in serving their welfare clients. He theorizes that there are essential reasons why community colleges are moving in this direction:

- Community colleges are under enrolled and are seeking new populations of students;
- Community colleges see that occupational training programs can generate new sources of revenue, as can programs that serve targeted populations;
- Local businesses in their search for qualified labor are putting more pressure on public educational institutions to produce more and better prepared graduates;
- Community leaders are insisting that such public institutions as community colleges serve a more diverse population, and produce better completion and placement outcomes for these participants;
- Some community college leaders believe that their institutions can take action to address the growing inequality in wages among U.S. workers.

This chapter also points out that the challenges of providing service to clients in a time-limited, “work first” environment are considerable. It is noted that there is current and evolving literature on the mental health concerns regarding welfare reform. This is a huge concern because of the real potential for public policy makers and community colleges to treat all clients as if they had the same barriers, and needed the same amount of time and services to become self-sufficient. Cheek and Piercy (2001) argue that they are fearful that policy makers may take the “one size fits all approach” to time limit policy. They were also concerned about TANF clients whom they termed “bubble people” or those cases that were nearing their time limits and were about to close. Cheek and Piercy (2001) caution that administrators want TANF clients off of welfare too fast. They note, just as the chapter has, that many barriers do exist. They remark that if these clients do not get help with these barriers, they will return to the welfare rolls.

Many of the community colleges discussed in this chapter demonstrate the need to find work-based learning activities for welfare to work clients. These activities appear to foster a workplace mindset and encourage employment readiness. Examples of work-based learning include short-term training programs (paid and unpaid internships), apprenticeships and job shadowing opportunities (Villadsen & Gennett, 1997). Finally, the continued need to foster and nurture relationships that facilitate these activities remain crucial to any welfare to work success. Roueche (1995) speaks to the value of community college partnerships, and cites the Midlands Technical College linkage with 15 other colleges. This

collaboration, through the Governor's Workforce Initiative, offers basic skills training that can be customized for the workplace. Pre-applicant training, employment skills training and workplace literacy are three components of this workplace literacy training.

Chapter Three Methodology

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter three delineates the specific research methodology that is used in this study. A discussion on why qualitative research was selected as a methodology follows. Also, there are discussions on how the data was collected, who the participants in the study are, how they were selected, what the interview questions are, the data collection timeline, the data analysis procedures, limitations and a summary concludes this chapter.

RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH METHODS

The research used a qualitative case study design that is written from the interpretivist paradigm, and included the stakeholder's voices using narrative and open-ended questioning techniques. Giddens, 1984; Layder, 1993; Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Miles and Huberman, 1994 explain that the role of qualitative methods in seeking and providing explanation is widely recognized within a wide range of different epistemological approaches. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 41) explain that they "prefer the case study reporting mode (over the scientific or technical report) because it is more adapted to a description of the multiple realities encountered at any given site because it is adaptable to demonstrating the investigators interaction with the site and consequent biases that may result (reflexive reporting), because it provides the basis for both individual naturalistic generalizations." Moreover, Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Robson, 2002) note that qualitative research's major features are their facility to describe and display

further explain that the major strength of the qualitative approach is that it is very flexible, which allows for exploration, discovery and creativity (1989. p.110).

Ritchie and Lewis, (2003), note that qualitative methods can fine-tune detail in the study participant's own terms, and therefore can "unpack" issues to see what is inside and explore how they are understood by those associated with them.

This study utilized the multiple case study design with twelve former welfare recipients who have attended the Houston Community College System since the passage of the 1996 Welfare Reform Law. Case studies by their nature lend themselves to qualitative investigation, and this study makes no exception to that notion. Merriam (1998, pp. 19-20) suggests that qualitative researchers and case studies "are primarily concerned with *process* rather than outcomes or products," and further reasoned that with "qualitative research one is interested in process, meaning, and understanding" (1988, pp.19-20).

According to Yin (1989, p.52), "The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust." Yin remarked that these multiple cases "should be considered like multiple experiments" and added "If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed" (p.38.). Yin explained that "case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes (p.21)."

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.40) "elect qualitative over quantitative methods (although not exclusively) because they are more adaptable to deal with multiple realities." They (1985, p.40) add that "qualitative methods are more sensitive to

and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered.”

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Yin suggested that the data come from six sources: 1) documents, 2) archival records, 3) interviews, 4) direct observation, 5) participant-observation, and 6) physical artifacts. Specifically, the expectations, aspirations, and actual experience of students (in welfare to work programs) will be explored based on a review of the literature, interviews, with twelve former recipients, and a review of selected documents including college and employment records. According to Yin, the interview is one of the most important sources of case study information. It is crucial to the qualitative research process. One type of interview is the focused interview, in which a participant is interviewed for a brief period of time. Yin explains that “the interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but the interviewer is more likely to be following a certain set of questions...” (1989, p.89.). Yin discusses a central principle in data collection which is the use of multiple sources. This study utilized the triangulation approach which is desirable in qualitative research. Triangulation is possible when one side and two angles of a triangle are known. Therefore, a multiplicity of sources and methods and a convergence of data or lines of inquiry at a central point should occur. Multiple sources may be combined to increase validity of research findings (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). As a result, the review of literature was combined with direct observations and interviews to generalize data, analyze data, and report research results.

POPULATION AND SETTING FOR THE STUDY

Ritchie, Lewis & Elam suggest that the first stage (2003) of sample design is to identify what is to be sampled. This will involve people at some stage. It is the key to identifying the parent population. That is, the population from which the sample is to be drawn (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). Ritchie, Lewis & Elam (2003, p. 77) relate that three key questions should be addressed in defining populations for study:

- “Which group or subgroup is of central interest to the subject matter in the study?”
- “Are there subsets of the central population that should be excluded?”
- “Are there additional groups or subpopulations that should be included because their views, experiences and so on would bring contrasting or complimentary insights to the enquiry?”

Ritchie, Lewis & Elam (2003, p.77) fortuitously suggest that “If the study were an evaluation of a welfare to work program targeted at lone parents, it might involve past and current participants in the programme.” With this in mind, the study population was selected from past and current students that are, or have been involved in the Houston Community College System’s welfare to work programs. Twelve current or former participants of these programs were selected utilizing the purposive sampling approach. Lincoln and Guba, (1985) explain that purposive sampling increases the scope or range of data exposed. They charge (1985, p.40) that random or representative sampling is likely to suppress more data, and that purposive sampling “can be pursued in ways that will maximize the

investigator's ability to devise grounded theory that takes adequate account of local conditions, local mutual shapings, and local values (for possible transferability)."

Ritchie & Lewis (2003, p.53) state that "because interviews generally take place at a location of the participant's choosing, in-depth interviews are more accessible to potential participants than group discussions. The need to come to a common location will inhibit the attractiveness and accessibility of the research for some populations." Because of these phenomena, participants in this case study were given the option of having the interview conducted at their home, place of employment or other suitable location. The location selected allowed for the interview to be conducted in a quiet, comfortable, mutually agreed upon location.

THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were twelve current or former TANF recipients who are, or have been, participants in welfare to work programs at the Houston Community College System. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003, p.107) point out that "...quality research samples are small, for good reasons. There is a point of diminishing return where increasing the sample size contributes to the evidence. The sample does not need to be large enough to support statements of prevalence or incidence, since these are not the concern of qualitative research."

SELECTING THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Participants of the study were selected using the purposive sampling technique. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.102) suggests that the "thoughtful

investigator is needed to find those cases that match the purpose: unusual cases, typical cases, cases that display maximum variation and so on.” To that end, the twelve participants were selected from a pool of about 400 current or former HCCS welfare to work program participants that have the following attributes:

- are long-term (3+ years) TANF recipients
- have been involved with HCCS for at least two years
- are enrolled in, or have been enrolled in a HCCS welfare to work program
- initially came to the college via welfare to work
- have custodial rights for at least one child
- have had at least one of the commonly known employment barriers
- have a willingness, and the time to be interviewed
- have some (6 months or more) work experience

This purposive selection criteria has been prioritized in order of importance as suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). This step is important as touted by Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 98) because we need to “decide which are the most important in terms of achieving a sample that is inclusive of the demographic structure of the population being studied, that contains the key constituencies, and that is sufficiently diverse for comparative analysis to be undertaken.” Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 105) caution that “as people identified in the initial sample fall out, either because of unwillingness to participate or because they do not meet quota requirement, they need to be replaced by others with as similar as possible characteristics.” Ritchie and Lewis (2003) state that participants need to meet the requirements of diversity and “symbolic representation.” Both of these elements

were considered when selecting the twelve participants who took part in this study. Selected participants were contacted via telephone to explain the purpose of the study, and were asked if they would be willing to participate in the research study.

INTERVIEWS

Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) explain that there are various stages to the interview: arrival, introducing the research, beginning the interview, doing the interview, ending the interview, and after the interview. They explain that the interviewer and participant have different roles in the interview process. Each needs to clearly understand their respective roles. Legard, et.al (2003) explain that the researcher is a facilitator who enables the interviewee a chance to talk about their feelings, thoughts, views and experiences. They further explain that this is an active, not passive, role. Open-ended questions are preferred because they allow the interviewee a chance to “open up.” The researcher should take care so as to avoid asking leading questions.

While empathy may be a noble goal when conducting an interview, Rubin and Rubin (1995) stress that qualitative interviewers should attempt to be empathetic without becoming over-involved. The key is to learn to empathize with different points of view, but be cautious enough to draw boundaries around the kind of research you are undertaking.

Each of the twelve participants were asked the same questions over a one and a half to two-hour interview. These questions (Appendix A) were designed to solicit information regarding the participant’s expectations, experiences and

actual outcomes from their involvement in Houston Community College welfare to work programs. Kvale (1996, p.4) suggests that the researcher is taken on a journey with the interviewee. It is opined that the “traveler asks.... questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as *‘wandering together with’*.” Thus, the researcher is a very active player in the development of data and meaning. Moreover, Holstein and Gubrium (1997) explain that the researcher is not just a “pipeline” by which knowledge is passed. They see the knowledge as being constructed in the interview through the collaboration of the researcher and the participant.

Each participant was provided an opportunity to ask questions prior to agreeing to do the interview. Each participant was provided with all of the required informed consent documentation before taking part in the study. A copy of this documentation was provided to each participant of the research study. Each participant was informed of, and agreed to, the use of audiotape as the principal method of recording the data.

DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

The time frame for data collection was about one month. Many of these participants had employment, education, training, child care or other concerns that required significant coordination to arrange a suitable time and date to conduct the interview. Since these were expected to be single research episodes, the imposition on the lives and families of the participants was kept to a minimum. Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 53) remark that “even if there is a dynamic or

changing quality to what is being studied, a single episode of fieldwork may be sufficient. Because qualitative research involves probing and clarification, fairly detailed retrospective accounts can be collected.”

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

“Qualitative analysis asks such questions as: what kinds of things are going on here? What are the forms of this phenomenon? What variation do we find in this phenomenon? That is, qualitative analysis is addressed to the task of delineating forms, kinds and types of social phenomenon; of documenting in loving detail the range of things that exist.” (Lofland, 1971.p.13).

The data analysis process was divided into stages, the first of these stages was to sort and reduce the data to make them more manageable. (Lewis, 2003) It is during this stage that themes and concepts were generated according to which data are labeled, sorted and synthesized. After the data management stage, the synthesized data was used to prepare descriptive accounts, identifying the key dimensions and mapping the range of diversity of each phenomenon (Lewis, 2003). The actual words and the substantive accounts of participant’s experiences, in terms of both descriptive coverage and assigned meanings formed the basis of qualitative evidence.

Data analysis included the use of typologies. That is, specific forms of classification that explained and described the segmentation of the social world, or the way something was characterized or differentiated. Patton (2002) suggests that typologies are classification systems made up of categories that separate some aspect of the world into parts of a continuum.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.242) caution that “data analysis must begin with the very first data collection in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases. The design statement should indicate familiarity with this fact and should make provision for the convolution of data collection and analysis throughout all phases.”

Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and several others agree with the notion of data collection and analysis throughout the process. This researcher employed this method to some extent throughout the data collection process. Member checks, document analysis and researcher observations were conducted to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

The following methodological limitations are acknowledged in this study:

1. As a former welfare recipient and a Houston Community College employee, inherent biases were likely present in the primary research instrument, the researcher. This may impact how findings are generated, interpreted, and reported.
2. The participants chosen could tend to generalize about their experiences, thereby it appears that they are speaking for the entire welfare to work population.
3. Audio taping and taking notes during the interviews may have distracted the persons being interviewed or otherwise influenced their behavior and/or responses.

4. Allowing the interviewee the opportunity to choose the interview venue may influence their responses. This may be due to interruptions by family members, climatic conditions and other conditions that the researcher does not control.
5. There are inherent weaknesses in all research designs and methodologies, including case studies.
6. The selection of interviewing as the primary data collection instrument was prompted by limitations of time and money, and by considerations of convenience, affordability, access, and accuracy.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Snape and Spencer (2003, p.22) explain that “qualitative research covers a broad range of approaches which are linked to different beliefs about what there is to know about the social world and how to find out about it.” They further state that “...although definitions vary, the aims of qualitative research are generally directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world by learning about people’s social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories.” The researcher, then, suggests that qualitative is the best approach methodology to probe the meanings and contexts grounded within the social world. Moreover, the interpretivist adds that the researcher and the social world impact each other.

This chapter explores the case study as a qualitative research method.

Ritchie (2003, p. 36) relates that “individual interviews are probably the most widely used method in qualitative research.” She explains that “they take different forms but a key feature is their ability to provide an undiluted focus on the individual.” She goes on to suggest (2003, p.36) that “they provide an opportunity for detailed investigation of people’s personal perspectives, for in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena are located, and for very detailed subject coverage.” The topic was appropriate for qualitative research methods, particularly case study from an interpretivist perspective, with extensive use of narratives.

This study was not structured to comprehensively generalize about all welfare to work experiences at community colleges. Rather, it was conducted to provide a glimpse or snapshot of selected welfare to work participant experiences in Houston Community College System welfare to work programs.

Chapter Four: Findings

INTRODUCTION

Included in this fourth chapter are the findings of the study, which begins with an overview of the study. This chapter will present themes generated from the responses to the research questions in this study. The interpretivist approach suggests that meaning is developed jointly by both the researcher and the participants involved in the study. Consequently, study findings will be presented using themes developed directly from the participants own words and experiences.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study involved obtaining a sizable sample pool from which to select the twelve former TANF clients that would become the study participants. Records and artifacts from various HCCS welfare to work training programs were used to gather the names, phone numbers, and addresses of over 400 former TANF clients previously or currently enrolled in these training programs. These training programs included the period of time from 1999-2003. The training programs included training in areas such as job search skills, job retention, customer service, healthcare, computer repair, microcomputer applications, commercial truck driving, certified nurse aide, call center, advanced job readiness, phlebotomy and retail training.

TANF clients (including those selected for the study) were initially referred to HCCS via their TANF case manager, a career center (The WorkSource) or

through recruitment by a specific HCCS training program at places like the Texas Department of Human Services. HCCS recruitment included marketing through program flyers, word of mouth referral, on site in apartment complexes, community centers, newspaper advertisement, television and radio advertisement. HCCS is the largest of the 200 or so authorized training providers in the Gulf Coast region, and is one of nine community colleges in the region. TANF clients are free to choose any training provider, but typically choose the one that is most convenient for them, and one that offers the training they desire. TANF clients are mandated, as part of the 1996 Welfare Reform legislation to seek employment, or training if they are unable or unprepared to find employment. There is no cost to the TANF client for the training. Classes are taught throughout various HCCS sites in Houston. Typical training classes range from four to sixteen weeks depending upon what is being taught. Short-term training is strongly encouraged by the TANF case managers, and falls within the spirit of the “Work First” edict of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. Cohen (1998) notes that the federal policy towards a “Work First” approach can make it difficult for welfare recipients to pursue a college education.

It should be noted that during the telephone solicitation process the researcher discovered that nearly 25% or 100 of these former recipients had disconnected, changed, or unlisted new phone numbers. The remaining 300 phone numbers were able to yield the 12 research participants.

Participant Screening and Selection

Each potential study participant was contacted by telephone with

consideration for gender diversity and ethnicity (which was listed on HCCS records and artifacts). The ethnicity of the study population pool consisted of 55% African American, 35% Hispanic, 5% Anglo, and 5% other/not-disclosed. The pool of potential male applicants was small (less than 5%), and did not yield any males who met the established research criteria (custodial rights for at least one child and long term, 3+ years on TANF, etc.). Potential study participants were asked questions to determine if they met the minimum criteria (discussed in Chapter 3) to participate in this study. If they met the criteria they were told that they would be considered for the study. Many were screened out because they did not meet the minimum criteria to participate in the study, or were unable to meet with the researcher face to face. A pool of twelve was selected, taking care to consider the diversity of the final selections. The interviews averaged just under two hours.

Each study participant was told about the dissertation and research project. They were informed about confidentiality, and that their names, addresses, and other identifying information would be excluded from the study. They were read an Informed Consent Form and agreed to sign the document before the research began (they were also given a copy of the document). They were asked if they had any questions regarding the study, informed of the expected duration of the interview, and were allowed to review the questions prior to the beginning of the interview. After these preliminary formalities, they were read each of the broadly focused questions that were designed to use storytelling as a form of narrative inquiry to stimulate an open-ended interview situation.

The interviews were done over a thirty-day period in December 2003. Each study participant had a chance to play back segments of the recorded material for interpretation accuracy, and to allow the researcher to ask additional questions. The twelve study participants were assigned random markings to identify their material for study participant identification throughout the coding and data analysis process.

Qualitative Analysis: Coding the Data

Data was coded by sorting similar themes into groupings and comparing them. Similar comments and themes were grouped together, counted, and marked. Themes emerged from the congruence discovered by comparing and analyzing participant data. Additionally, study participant's responses to follow up questions were grouped together whenever there was any congruence that was noticed between them.

The researcher reviewed each tape repeatedly listening for voice inflection or other audio information that would offer emphasis, intent, and meaning to the study participant's responses. This was most beneficial when participants talked about their experiences with the welfare system. Meaning was made from not only the taped material, but from visual observation by the researcher of family interaction in study participant's homes, by voice fluctuations, and facial expressions. Themes were solidified by much of the visual observation found in the domestic milieu of the study participant.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Twelve former welfare recipients who have attended the Houston

Community College System (via welfare reform) participated in the interviews. The interviewees had diverse backgrounds, and all had come to HCCS via a welfare-to-work program. Questions asked before, during, and after the interviews were helpful regarding ensuring a diverse group in terms of socio-economic status, experiences with HCCS, experiences with the welfare system, culture, language, marital and domestic partner experiences, parenting experiences, academic and job placement related experiences.

Characteristics of Interviewees

The final twelve selected were all female. There was one Anglo, two Hispanics, and nine African Americans. They ranged in age from twenty-two to fifty-two years old. Their length of time on TANF was between three and seventeen years. All but three were currently employed (two are back on TANF). The study participants held such jobs as laboratory courier, real estate post-closing clerk, domestic engineer, office manager, certified nurses assistant, elementary school cook, administrative assistant at HCCS, child care worker, and community services agency clerk. Most attributed their employment acquisition directly to their relationship with the Houston Community College System. They indicated that HCCS had directly assisted in obtaining employment, or motivated them enough for them to conduct their own independent employment search. Their hourly wages ranged from \$8.35 per hour to \$15.62 per hour. The average hourly wage was about \$10.35 for the study participants that were employed. Only half of those working had comprehensive benefits with their current employers. Their job tenures ranged from several months to four years. All 12 of

the study participants, in different ways, said they expected to get training and job skills from their Houston Community College experiences. All study participants self-disclosed at least one employment barrier (socio-economic status, child care, transportation, education, mental or physical illness etc.). One participant discussed a heart condition that prevents her from working (she receives SSI, her children receive TANF). This participant, however, did have the requisite six months of work experience to be included in the study.

All of the participants lived in apartment complexes in Houston, Texas, most in neighborhoods that would be considered on the lower rung of the socioeconomic ladder. One study participant lived in Pasadena, Texas, a town just southeast of Houston. All but one preferred to be interviewed in their homes. One study participant chose to be interviewed at her place of employment. Only one participant related that she was currently married (to the children's biological father) with the spouse living in the household. No other participant self-disclosed a domestic partner living with them in the home. In fact, several discussed a previous history of domestic violence and related an intent to remain unattached and uninvolved in a domestic partnership of any kind.

All of the participants had at least one child living with them. Two study participants were caring for grandchildren as well. The average number of children the participants in the study cared for was three. Collectively, there were forty-one children that the study participants were responsible for. One study participant was born outside the United States (Mexico). One was from Alabama, and another from Louisiana. All others had roots in Texas, mostly in the greater

Houston metropolitan area. Many, if not all, expressed a belief in a higher being. Several openly discussed how faith has played an important part in their survival, as well as the good things that have come their way. The researcher was able to observe numerous religiously oriented artifacts in the homes of many study participants. Pictures of Jesus Christ, crosses, candles, Bibles and religious wordings were observed. There were also many references to a deity by some study participants during the interviews. One statement that stands out is one regarding how a study participant could find someone to watch her children in the event that they should ever get sick while she was at HCCS (day care centers typically ask parents to come and pick up sick children). She responded “ I guess it was just the grace of God that helped me get through because I really didn’t have many people that I could turn to.”

Characteristics of Interview Responses

Study participants were, to a person, very forthcoming in their responses and desire to share their experiences. In many cases they went beyond the questions and elaborated on other aspects of their lives. The bulk of the study study participants wanted *their* story told, in their own words , and were not hesitant about “telling it like it is.” This is the basis for the narrative format used in this study. Each spoke with great care and concern about their children. This was a common theme throughout all twelve interviews. Children appeared to always be their first concern.

Some study participants shared very personal experiences such as domestic violence, abandonment, and substance abuse in the home. Many were remarkably

candid about their HCCS experiences, good, bad, or indifferent. Each of the twelve appeared very concerned that they provide truthful and factual information. This was evident to the researcher by the care and thoughtfulness with which they each responded to the questions. It was also evident by their willingness to provide ample time, without any remuneration consideration, to agree to the interview with a virtual stranger (in their homes or place of work).

Thematic Responses

Much care was taken to find themes that were consistent in most, if not all, of the twelve of interview participants, although each of the participants assigned a different level of importance to them. For example, each had something to say about the welfare system, whether good or bad. The welfare system evoked a response from all twelve study participants. The themes reflected the fact that not all of the study participant's experiences and expectations regarding HCCS were confined to the classroom. An example of this would be the kind of information and the treatment that they would receive from the welfare offices, prior to, and during their HCCS experiences. These experiences can, and did, shape many of the expectations study participants had about HCCS and self-sufficiency prior to attending. To be sure, study participants provided a holistic view of their global experiences relating to situations and circumstances before, during, and after their involvement in HCCS welfare to work programs. Many talked about how their home environments, children's needs, support systems, aspirations, experiences with the welfare bureaucracy, family history and relationships, domestic partners (or lack thereof), health issues, personal barriers,

and employment concerns related to, and helped shape their overall HCCS experiences. This data was rich with material that provided significant context, and helped to weave a tapestry that provided meaning for the study.

Generally, the study participant's responses were predicated on their own unique personal experiences. Very few of the participants attempted to make broad, sweeping or general statements. It should be noted that some participant's views were limited to just them. Although this perspective may not be included as a common theme, it may add to the meaning, context, and understanding of some data. Consequently, there may be some reference to these limited views in Chapters Four and Five. The section on findings is quite lengthy because it includes many of the participant accounts used to generate thematic data. The researcher felt that the qualitative analysis data emanates best from the context found within the study participant's substantive accounts and experiences (Lewis, 2003). Consequently, the findings are richly replete with voluminous perspectives and detailed narrative accounts from the study participants themselves. The researcher took care to balance the need to conduct quality data analysis with the desires of the study participants to have their story told. This is why the narrative format was used to capture the study participant stories. Each of the themes is preceded with summary remarks regarding the responses. This section concludes with a summary of the overall chapter.

FINDINGS

Analysis of interview and observation data revealed a number of themes. The following themes were found in the interviews and observations expressed

by the twelve interview participants:

1. Welfare is a mixed blessing
2. Faced with competing responsibilities
3. Children are a major concern
4. Barriers and challenges exist
5. Support services are important
6. HCCS was a good experience
7. HCCS met their expectations
8. Want to stay connected to HCCS

Theme # 1: Welfare is a Mixed Blessing

The study participants had varying years of experience with the welfare system (from 3 to 17 years). Of the twelve study participants, only three had anything positive to say about it. None had a clear understanding of the new “Work First” welfare reform mandate, or any idea about the specific length of time they have left to receive welfare benefits. So, in many ways, welfare has been a “mixed blessing.” It has provided a minimal safety net and gateway to the community college, but it is a system that may not be communicating policy effectively to clients, and may be intrusive and personally demeaning to them. Many of the study participants discussed the welfare system in this sort of contradictory fashion. It should be noted here that it is through the study participant’s interactions with the welfare system that a thorough understanding, or lack thereof, of TANF regulations are obtained. It is also through interactions with the welfare system that they are supposed to be given information about

possible training providers (to help get them training and off of welfare), including the Houston Community College System. These interactions are a prelude to future interactions with training providers and/or potential employers. Moreover, recent studies reveal that welfare recipients lack knowledge about both transitional Medicaid and child care benefits (Hardina & Carley, 1997; Rofuth & Weiss, 1991). Other studies have shown that low-income people, in many cases, under-utilize and have inadequate information about the earned income tax credit (EITC), food stamps, state tax incentives, and other programs (Coe, 1983; Katza, Gutek, Kahn, & Barton 1975; Olson & Davis, 1994; Swanson, 1975). Here is what one study participant noted:

I have been a welfare recipient for the past 17 years. Well, the fact that it asks you a lot of personal questions. They want to know all about your finances and, it just seems, they're personal and it's degrading to have to tell everybody everything about your finances and your life. I don't like that aspect of it. The system is there for when you need it, but then its not, to me it doesn't seem to help you because there were instances where I wanted to try to help myself by buying a vehicle, a better vehicle and that's a penalty, then you don't qualify for these services because you have this resource, so to me that's not helping. "Work First" I've heard that phrase before, but I don't know what that means. So, I mean I can't elaborate on that.

Another study participant talked about her welfare experiences this way, and was not clear on TANF benefit time limits:

The least I like is when you have to wait for a long time to see a caseworker.

You have an appointment at 7:30 am and the office opens at 8:00 and they don't call you until about 9-10:30 am. "Work First" actually the caseworker didn't tell me about that at the welfare office. The woman that got me interested in school which worked at Gulf Coast was the one that told me about it and she was really trying to push. She just told me that she felt like I would benefit from going to school because I was looking for a job way before I got on welfare and she was dealing with me for so long that she should understand the transition, the transition that I was going through as far as trying to find a job, not getting a job, and she felt like maybe school would help me more at first than going to work right now. My understanding you have a maximum of three years. If you don't get off the system, they will cut you but not what they cut you off, but my dependent decides that when he grows up if he needs assistance it will cut into his benefits. It's a three-year time limit. If I stay on it, which I'm not on it, but if I was to stay on it, if I was on welfare, I had three years. After the third year they will cut you, but they want cut you off. It's more like a struggle. Either get a job or you'll get less benefits than what you receive. Yet my dependent was to get on welfare when he becomes of age and need assistance, my understanding they would go into his account. They would take from him because I took from him when I was on it.

Still another talked about her welfare experiences this way:

The welfare system is pretty fair at this point. "Work First" I'm not aware of how long, you know, they give you without working. I have no idea. Yes, I am on TANF. As far as the TANF that I get, I receive Medicaid for both my

children and we receive \$370 in food stamps.

Another study participant chimed in:

Well, what I like about this system Medicaid and the Food Stamps which has helped me a lot because at that time I was, I got involved in a car accident with my two boys and had a broken arm and a broken leg and it was pretty bad so I lost my house. I lost my furniture. Everything but that's why assistance from the welfare and they helped me a lot. The only thing I don't like about it is that you have to survive on a little bit of money and then, it was around \$112/month. Well, after about 1999, I got into this program, which was the Institute For Excellence and they helped me pretty much a lot. I got a part-time job with the Houston Community College, and after six months the position for full- time became open so I applied for that position, and got that position and I am very happy about it. Right now I do make about five times more than I was getting on TANF. "Work First" well I really don't know.

Another study participant described her welfare experiences this way:

The least thing I liked about it was the way people treated you. You go down, there when you call them on the phone like your caseworker, they talk to you in a demeaning way. They make, it's already, for some people, I can only speak for myself but I know a lot of people that are in my situation and you have some people who really don't care about going down there but people like me, it's like you go down there and you already really don't want to be there. And then you get there and they make you feel like a piece of trash and it's like they make you feel worse about the situation then it's kinda discouraging.

That was the least thing I liked about it. The amount of money they gave, I mean it was enough to get by. I didn't really have too much of a problem with the amount of money they gave, I guess until I started, of course I had more children was kind of a problem because they really didn't give me much more than what they were giving me to begin with. I really didn't have a problem with amount of money they gave me. "Work First" from what I understand about it, they gave you like twelve months to be on TANF and after that twelve months you couldn't apply again for like five years or something like that. I know it was something like in that area when I first heard about it I went in and I applied and you have to go through like an orientation and they sit you down with other people and they explain to everybody, this is what's getting ready to happen. If you're like a high school graduate but you have a GED, you have like 24 months or something like that and then if you were just somebody that didn't have a diploma, nothing, they gave you a little longer. But I fell in class with the people that could only be on there like twelve months and so I just kept remembering, man, you know, it kinda scared me a little bit because at the time I was in a situation of where you know I was kinda like down and didn't really have things. I didn't have a job. I had kids and didn't know how I was going to take care of them and I just kept. Every time I would go and apply for a job, I wouldn't get a job and I was like, you know, how am I going to take care of these children and I can only be on this for a year, you know. What am I going to do? Because I felt like, you know, like I said, I was down, and I didn't have people in my circle like family

and friends. I may have had more friends encouraged me but definitely not family that would say well, girl, you can get out there. You can do it. You can make it. Just go do this or just go do that. I didn't have a lot of people to tell me nothing and then my mother wasn't there so I didn't have that, you know that mother that I could turn to and say, well mom I need you to do this or I need you to help me do this because she wasn't there and then you don't have anybody else that's going to step up to the plate and be like, well I'm going to stand in because your mama's gone, you know. I didn't have older sisters or brothers. I didn't have any. I didn't have, like, everybody was pretty much wrapped in their own life with whatever was going on to say, well, girl this is how you do this or this is how you do that.



Work First/TANF time limit policy is not clearly understood.....

This same study participant talks about her reaction to TANF benefits time limits:

So when I heard about the twelve months, that I only have twelve months to be on, it kinda scared me because I knew whatever I was going to do, I had to do it in those twelve months. So my first thing was to go to school because I was like well, if I could go on and go to school, I'll be out before the twelve months is up, and I'll be able to get me a good job. That way, I was like, well if I go to

school, I'll be finished by the time twelve months is up and I won't even need you know to worry about the government aid because I have a job. But that fell through because the first program I started with I didn't get through it. So, you know, but basically that was what was going through my mind when I heard about the "Work First." I knew after that there wasn't going to be no more help so I had, you know, I was working towards that trying to get in school and get some kind of training so I could get a job.

This study participant talked about the intrusive nature of the welfare system. She was obviously disturbed by questions relating to the children's father and her finances. Here is what she said:

They're too personal meaning that they ask about the absentee father, your bank assets, why you're not employed. Just very personal. What made me unhappy about it is the people that really need it versus the person that didn't need it in my experience in talking to other women that is in there, they didn't ask a lot of personal questions as far as benefits, cutting benefits, and if you didn't bring this type of paper, your benefits was cut or job readiness.

This study participant talked about the attitude of the welfare system workers, but also had some positive things to say about it as well:

I guess the only thing I could say I don't like would be the way the people there talk to you and treat you. Most of them, not all of them. But just they sorta seem to have an attitude. First none of them act like they really want to be there. They don't love their job, you know, and just kinda like you're a criminal the way they talk to you, you know. They seem to talk down to you.

But you know when your going through the process of trying to get your benefits but other than that, I mean, it's been great. I really don't have any complaints. I am on Food Stamps and my children are on Medicaid. "Work First" I don't know anything about it. I heard from somebody else they were cut off, their time had run out, but I don't know anything about it.

The study participant is a also a grandmother with nine grown children of her own. She talked about how much she hated going over to the welfare offices:

Least I like about the welfare system, I think it's the way they schedule appointments and the way they talk to you. You're treated really pretty bad at the welfare offices you know where you go for interviews and stuff. I hate to go over there because you're not treated fairly. You're talked to ugly and rudely and the time frame is difficult. If you have an appointment at a certain time, you might, they might not call you for two hours, so I do have a problem with that. "Work First" my understanding with TANF is I know there is a time frame now. You have a limited time to be on TANF and get in their work program or something. In other words, I feel it's a good program because that makes you more dependent on yourself instead of depending on just TANF, you know, and also help you, maybe get ahead, you can get, you're ahead better in life instead of sitting there on TANF because it's on a fixed income. You're just not gonna get no further, you know. I just felt with myself, you know, that's why I got up and did something for myself, you know to help me and my children even though my kids are grown now, you know, I'm still working to help me.

There were some study participants that truly saw welfare as a blessing including this one:

Well, to me the welfare system is a great system because it depends on how you are living, a lot of people need assistance, you know, to help us get on our feet, it is a good support for our children also. "Work First" my understanding is that they give you so long to look for a job, they will assist you, you know they can, but it is up to you to look for a job. I think it is five years, but they don't want you to be on welfare for five years, but if something bad was to happen, you will have to get back on it.

This study participant talked about the money she receives from welfare, and also harped about the attitude of the welfare workers:

The money is not enough. I get \$170 a month for four kids. I am with HUD. I pay one-half, they pay the other half. I pay \$52 dollars a month. I get \$378 in Food Stamps. Their attitude stinks. When you go down there, they talk to you all good and then they say...How much money you got in your pocket now? You tell them a dollar and they say you got more than that. They don't know what you have in your pocket, but they'll tell you have more. I'm like ma'am I came with a bus pass and two dollars in my pocket. But she is like.....all right..... it is just an attitude that they have you know. To me I say it is sometimes because I have some good ones and some bad ones. They don't give me enough for four kids. "Work First" I think mine is like six months or six years with my situation, but you know if it wasn't for welfare. I'm not saying I wouldn't be here today, but sooner or later I am

going to be on it. But when I got pregnant in 1992 that is when I turned to them.

This study participant, also a grandmother, emphasized the mixed blessing of welfare. While she was glad to be able to get welfare assistance, it was clearly not enough to meet her needs. Here are her thoughts:

When I was on there they gave me a lot of help, but when I was on there it was not enough to provide for me and my three grandkids. They wasn't giving me no more than \$187 a month. No housing assistance. It wasn't enough.

That is the reason I worked to make ends meet.

Yet another study participant talked about not receiving enough money from the welfare system. She was also one of the few who knew she was affected by time limits, and connected that realization with training through HCCS.

They don't give you enough money, so, basically, that is what I don't like about welfare. "Work First" TANF you only have a length of time to be on it. My time was up and I had to work first. I had to go through a training which was HCCS, and once I go through training I found a job at the Houston Independent School District, and have been working ever since.

Theme # 2 Faced with Competing Responsibilities

It became clear that the study participants had multiple responsibilities that are often in conflict and competition with each other. Work responsibilities, family activities, children, and training were often in competition with each other. Study participants talked about how important scheduling was in their lives.

This situation is further exacerbated because of the lack of the father(s)

involvement in the family. Indeed, only one of the twelve study participants had the father in the home to provide assistance and support. Many study participants related that they are overextended regarding responsibilities and have little personal time to relax, relieve stress, or just have time for themselves. A few of the study participants related that they would often be fatigued or stressed as a result of this delicate balancing act. Fatigue and stress can be significant factors regarding persistence in community college training programs and job retention. The competition of responsibilities was a theme that was heard from all of the participants in one manner or another. Here is typical day for one study participant:

Now I am working for the Houston Independent School District. I have been working there for 2 ½ years . OK, I get up at 5:30 in the morning, I get them (the children) ready for school, um , basically I drop them off at my neighbor and she takes them to school, I get off of work at 2:30, I have to pick my kids up at 3:00 from school, my little girl stays for cheerleader practice. I help my kids with they homework, I pick I up my little girl from cheerleader practice, cook , and then get ready for the next day. I go to bed around 9:30 pm. I have really no time for myself. My kid's grandmother lives in Louisiana, but they don't see her everyday, but we go see her when we can. They call her just about everyday.

Another study participant talked about her competing responsibilities:

Right now I'm doing cleaning homes and its part-time work and I've been waiting, I have taken a test and applied with Memorial Hermann Hospital to try

to get on with the nursing program or the surgical technician and I was put on standby.....I go to work, it depends on my jobs, but I usually have to be there by 8:00 am. Get my children up...get them to school and go to work and sometimes I have two jobs a day which would be from 8:00 am to 12 noon and then from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Come home with my children, cook dinner. Oldest son plays football for school so we had, you know, a lot of games and I'd go and maybe work concessions.....

Still another study participant discussed the balance between her need for a social life, and her role as the mother of school-age children:

I try to stay active in their school with them like whenever they have little programs, I try to go to each one of them if it doesn't conflict with my work schedule. I try to do that and then I try to have my own little social life as well because I like to go places and just you know, by myself without the children sometimes. I like to go shopping or shop for them and just be by myself and clear my head. I want to start working out more so I do that off and on too. I do exercising just to, that's all I do.

Having to go it alone with three children adds to the responsibility load as reported by this study participant:

They (her three children) all have the same father and he does not help me at all and that makes it a lot harder because everything I do I have to do by myself, but it encourages me to really get out there and really work as hard as I can to maintain what I have because when I see that he doesn't contribute. I know that's just extra work I have to do to make up for his part.

Another study participant talked about handling responsibilities alone:

I have four different fathers for my kids. They step in and out every now and then. My baby and my oldest daughter, those are the ones really helping, really doing anything to help. I think two of the fathers have a criminal history. By me being a single parent its hard, but my parents help me with my kids.

Theme # 3 Children are a Major Concern

To be sure, much of the established literature on welfare to work programs (including what is discussed in this research) underscores the importance that children play in the lives of welfare to work participants. This research study is no exception to that revelation. The word children or kids came up repeatedly in every one of the study participant interviews. All of the study participants predicated nearly all of their decisions in life on the affect they would have on their children, or in two cases, grandchildren. This study found that no matter what dire circumstances the study participants experienced, the children in their lives were always of paramount concern. Decisions regarding travel distance, training times, work hours, support services, salaries, domestic relationships and other activities/situations were predicated on the concern and needs of their children. The researcher was able to observe the voice tones and facial expressions change whenever children were discussed by the study participants. Each study participant, without exception, wanted a better life for their children.

Children are a major concern



My children come first.....



Children are a major concern.....

All of the participants, at various points in their interviews, were able to connect their Houston Community College experiences with a better life for their children. One study participant who has been employed at HCCS for four years talked about that connection, and the better life for her children:

Well, it made a better life for, especially for my boys and myself. It means that my self esteem was very low and now, you know, I'm very happy here. Especially your self-esteem, you know, but we do have a better life. We can buy things that we couldn't afford before. I'm probably making about close to \$30,000.

Here are some thoughts from another study participant regarding her children:

My younger son, he's had problems in school, just not doing his work and things and so trying to help him get caught up and that's about it. I don't have a lot of spare time. My eleven year old has gone through a period lately where he's told me he's making good grades or he doesn't have homework, or he's completed his homework, and then I found out he's making good grades and he's made a lot of F's, 0's, just not completed, not turned in any homework and so we had to go back through chapters and chapters trying to catch up on work and I've just had a lot of problems with him lately. Right now it seems like he's doing better but it's been, you know, constantly. He is one grade behind. Well, he started school when he was 3 ½, 3 years old. He had a speech problem and so because of his speech he started early and he just, kinda that. Not wanting to do it, not to do anything and it's hard to work and really know what's going on until there's already a bunch.....No, I think he's going

to pass. I believe he's going to pass. In math his teacher said a couple of days a week she might could help, but then now it's like she can't have him right now. She's too full, there's just been me having to help him a lot, you know. There's been nice teachers in giving us extra work but it's kinda like for me to do it with him, you know. So it just takes a lot of time.

This same study participant was optimistic about the life she wanted for her children in the future:

I want both of them to go to college and have good jobs. My oldest son has played football since he was about four and I'm hoping that he will get a scholarship. My younger son, I don't know yet what. I don't know yet. He's not interested in sports and things and I don't know what's going to happen to him right now. Me and their father were divorced before I had my second son and we've gone back together and I got pregnant with him and when I was five months pregnant, we broke up and have been ever since.....they are good boys.....

Another study participant talked about having church in the children's lives:

I'm trying to get more into church. I'm not really where I want to be with that either but I am trying to get more into church. I go every other week maybe want to get more back into church because I want my children to be with that. I want my children to have that in their life. I want them to be in church all the time.

Another study participant discussed her Houston Community College experiences and her concern for child care:

When I was going to school, my son was in school. He was in Pre-K 3 but my daughter was only two years old so I had to always worry about, you know, who was going to take care of her.....I believe our courses were from 8:00 in the morning to like around, I believe it was like 3:00 or 4:00 and she'd be there all day. And he'd be in school over here in Pasadena and he gets out at 2:45. So after my aunt would have to pick him up from school until we get back here.

Another study participant talks about the need to have ample income to support her children:

And I've been, like I said I make \$11.50/hour. We work 40 hours a week pretty much before I started there I really wasn't getting good jobs. I was getting jobs that were only paying like \$5 of \$6 an hour and just wasn't enough for me to take care of my kids with so that's a lot of reasons why I would end up back on welfare because jobs just wasn't paying enough, maybe for somebody that was single and didn't have kids, but because I had kids I needed more money than that.....I have my own place to live now... ..So if you can't pay for daycare, you can't keep a job. But now I can afford to pay my daycare. I can afford to pay my bills. I can keep a roof over our heads and put food in their.....

This same study participant talked about the future she wanted for her three children:

I want my children to have, I want them happy. I want them to one day have a house and a backyard to play in. I don't want to always have them confined

into an apartment. I want them to have a happy life. I don't want them to worry because I know a lot of times they see me stressed out sometime and worried. I don't want them to have to worry about....you know, what's wrong with mama or why is this like this is because a lot of times they ask me for things and I provide them with what I know they need but I want them to be able to start having a lot of what they want because they're children and they want them to be able to start having a lot of what they want because they're children and they want to do things that I can't always afford for them to do. One study participant with four children talked about seeing something better for her children. Faced with a disability (heart condition), she remains confident about her children's future.

I want my children to have a good experience life. They have it now, but they are going to college.....I see something good for my kids.....

Another study participant talked about her teenage sons and her concern for their education:

.....I really want it for my boys to get, after they graduate from high school to go to college. My 17 year old he's no longer a student and he got about fifty awards and certificates. He's in the Who's Who book and he is planning to go to the University of Virginia. They're waiting for him. He got a scholarship and they sent him a letter from the University of Virginia asking him to go over there, he's welcome to go over there, four years. That's his dream and my dream is.....if not, he wants to go to the military institute. They've already given him a scholarship, \$6000. He wants to be one of those DEA. He

is in the 10th grade. He'll be 17 this December. I have a 30- year old son. He's not living with me. And I have a 27- year old daughter. She's married, and I have a 24- year old daughter. She is not with me, she's married. And I have an 18-year old son and a 17-year old son. The 18-year old is in school. He is not doing too good. He's with the youngest one, but he wants to withdraw from school, and I said no... 10th grade. But I told him if he dropped from school, he's going to have to leave the house. No problems, but he is lazy. He doesn't want to do the work. I don't have any problems with, no fights, no gangs. Not good academically. I mean he doesn't do his work. All he does is play, play, play. I think he is going to pass. Sam Houston High School. I'm pretty sure, I mean ... I hope this year.....I have two grandchildren...two boys...5 and a 7-year-old.....

Still another study participant envisioned great careers for her children:

My kids. I would like them to graduate from high school, also to go to college, become something, a lawyer, fire-fighter, baseball player, football player, my girl, a cheerleader, work for the City of Houston, a doctor.

This study participant and mother of five talks about her desires for her children, and the emotional impact absence of the father in the home has had on her children. This underscores the theme of how the children's well being is a major concern for the study participants. She also laments about the problems her teenage son is having regarding school:

Well, I want them to be able to get an education and hopefully I will be able to assist them. Right now I'm having a problem with my oldest son seeing

that education is important and me having my son right with my education. I realize how important education is and I've tried to share that with my children so I am hoping they will continue on with their schooling, go to college, because you need further education besides just going to regular school. I think it's a good experience to have and I'm hoping that I will be able to be of support for them by being self-sufficient because they're going to need support and I'm hoping to be that support. My husband and I separated, it'll be five years this coming April, and it's had a big emotional affect on all my kids, some more than others. My kids were used to having a father around and now they don't, so that's been a major problem. They missed their father once in their life but right now he's just when he can or wants to be. I'm hoping that in the future they will see that it's an obstacle they can overcome. It's not something that can keep them down because he was not there, but they can move on and still become the people and do the things they want to do.

Another study participant, after living with domestic violence finally decides, for the children's sake, not to allow the children's abusive father back in the home:

I grew up without my daddy, but luckily I had a mama who was strong and she filled that void for me, so I didn't miss my daddy when I was growing up. But I know that if I would have had a father you know, if I would have had that strong male role model in my life, I wouldn't have ended up with this man. . I wouldn't have stayed with him and let him do me like that so it affected me in this way. But as far as just missing my daddy, no, I didn't miss him but I

would have had him, you know, to be there as a role model for me, I don't think I would have stayed with my kid's daddy as long as I didn't want my children to fall into that same path.I did not want my sons to grow up to hit women.....

Theme # 4 Barriers and Challenges Exist

Much of the current research regarding challenges and barriers to self-sufficiency talks primarily about child care and transportation. Indeed, only two of the twelve study participants did not express these as concerns. In those two cases, the children were either old enough to care for themselves, or the study participant's grandchildren. Both transportation and child care were concerns for ten of the study participants as it related to employment and training hours. Overall, every one of the twelve study participants discussed some sort of barrier relative to employment or training. At least half discussed a history of depression. In every case, save for one, there was a history of the children(s) father(s) abandoning the family and/or not paying child support. In the one case where the husband/children's father was in the home, he was not gainfully employed, and appeared detached and lethargic during the study participant interview. All of the participants in the study came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. One study participant, the mother of nine adult children and several grandchildren related these challenges:

Some of my greatest challenges was at my age going to school, getting up, going there, carrying a backpack, books, climbing stairs. It was, you know, I had to get myself back in the groove because I hadn't been in school in years

and years. And eventually I got the hang of it. I had younger people in there and it was all mixed but I kinda felt embarrassed at first but then when I got the hang of it, my teacher talked to me and told me, you know, it's nothing wrong with you coming to school at this age. Everybody do it, you know, as long as you're doing something for yourself. It worked out pretty good. I'm blessed because my baby is 19 so I don't have any small children, so I don't need the daycare or babysitters or anything.

This same study participant talked about her diabetes which she disclosed to the researcher during the interview. She also related that she is not eligible for Medicaid because she is working (her grandchildren are covered though). She explained that her job provides medical benefits for her. This study participant also discussed an injury she suffered on a previous job:

Well, my diabetes is under control. I do what I need to do. I watch what I eat and I take my medication. I'm always going to the doctor when I'm supposed to. In December of 1999 I was injured on a job. I worked for Volunteers of America at the drug treatment facility where I was a counselor intern and I fell down a flight of stairs, and had to have surgery on my right side. My right shoulder and my right knee and that was a challenge for me too because I was disabled then. I was receiving a small check every week from Workman's Comp and I was trying to get myself rehabilitated where I could go back to work, and that was a big challenge for me also. I didn't mention that but, I'm not, I have some pain, but I exercise. I walk four miles in the morning everyday and that's to work my knees and stuff and I'm pretty well in good

shape because I'm a health nut. I like to exercise. I do a lot to keep myself in good shape.

This same study participant completed phlebotomy training at HCCS and did her clinicals through the Harris County Hospital District. She also completed the EKG (electrocardiogram) program at HCCS, and moved briskly into the Certified Nursing Assistant training there. She related that she will be taking the licensing exam for all three programs. This is part of a new program at HCCS which combines these three specialties to create a position called PNT (patient technician). It is a rigorous (6 month) program that enhances the skills of a C.N.A. to allow them to draw blood and read the EKG . Most of all, it pays more and adds value to the employee. What follows is the part of the interview where she discusses some of the challenges and responds to the researcher's question about how many people started the Houston Community College System (HCCS) program with her:

It should have been like 19 all together. It started out 29 but some of them dropped out so it was just 19 of us left. It will be 19 that will have been completed. One of the challenges with EKG was that we had to memorize over 40 electrocardiograph readings and some of them felt they couldn't do that so they dropped out while I stayed in it. It was a challenge for me but I did hang in there and I completed it , and I'm looking forward to going through my clinicals in that as soon as I complete my C.N.A. clinicals.

This study participant went on to explain how she is able to manage to attend HCCS and work full-time as a child care worker, where she earns \$9.00 an

hour. She explained that she borrows a neighbor's car to go from place to place. Although she is employed (at a job she stated HCCS had obtained for her), she expressed unhappiness about her salary, and raised an interesting issue regarding a ongoing challenge. She explains it this way:

I'm having difficulties with my pay. When I get paid, when I go to their bank to try to cash my monies (paycheck), they don't have any monies there and no store around will cash it. None of the stores will cash their checks (her employer). Even the check cashing services, so even if you take, you have a bank account and put your money in the bank, your bank won't even fool with it. The cost, they're known for not paying, they don't have the funds in. They'll give you the check, but it you might take you three or four days to cash it and its really sad, you know. I really want to leave, but I do know I need a job to pay my bills and I'm looking real hard right now to try, I'm praying that I get something else because I'm just tired of dealing with it. Right now I make \$9.00 an hour. Before I came to the college (HCCS) and before I got injured on my other job in '99, I was making \$10.81 an hour as a counselor intern. At this job I'm presently working in now I make \$9.00 an hour. Child care worker, I work with children that are born addicted to drugs and alcohol. The job, I love it, but I can't stay there if I'm not getting paid, right? HCCS is looking....I talked to HCCS (program management) and they also called and talked to my supervisor and asked why all my checks are bouncing. HCCS said they don't want to send students over there and you can't pay them.....
.....I'm sending resumes out and I'm on the Internet too.....

Overcoming depression was a challenge to at least four of the twelve study participants. The literature mentioned earlier in this research speaks to this issue as well. The findings in this research strongly link poverty to hopelessness to depression, and, very often despair. One study participant told the story of her rise and fall at a previous employer and the affect it had on her. She also discusses her past history with substance abuse, being diagnosed with clinical depression as a teenager, and being homeless while attending Houston Community College:

.....and so I lost my job (at Metro transit)This happened in 1999.....
.....I worked there five years. I loved it. I was making \$14.95 an hour.
Lifestyle was good. I felt like I was really on top of the world. That was my first time ever making money like that especially coming from making \$3-\$4.00 an hour and then when I first started at Metro we wasn't making no money. I came in making \$5.35 and moved up to that within five years.
Benefits were excellent. The only thing that I disliked about it was the early morning part. They wasn't organized as far as being a single parent, a child, like I say I had a young child so daycare was always an issue or sickness or like that and that's something they just don't tolerate. That was one of the main reasons why my record was kinda bad.

Another study participant, who cares for her grandchildren, talks (her voice tone and facial expression change to a look and sound of regret during this segment) about being terminated from employment because of her sick grandchildren:

I got [name of previous employer]. I was almost three months (probationary

period is 90 days). I was in housekeeping. I worked there about three months. I told the lady that I couldn't work late. She knew my schedule. I told her everything right up front. I got two kids that had strep throat, and I had a doctor's note. I explained that I could not come in that weekend. They were contagious and I could not leave them with anybody. But when I went back to work I was terminated because I missed too many days. Out of my whole time, I missed three days. I had no healthcare during that time. Welfare people did not cover me with Medicaid because I was working. I choose to work. After that, I kept praying and praying and I went back over to the college (HCCS) again. They helped me out a lot. College told me to go in and I got an interview and they [new employer] hired me the same day.

A recent survey by the National Organization for Women underscores this barrier as well. The survey includes the case of a nineteen-year old mother with a one-year old son who was frequently sick and was only allowed so much time off from work before being terminated. Another case involved a twenty one-year old mother with a child who had cerebral palsy who was sanctioned for not meeting her mandatory twenty-hour school week due to the hospitalization of her child (National Organization for Women, 2002). This study participant continues to talk about her depression:

Alcohol, social drugs, when I was a teenager, probably once or twice but other than that, no. Being a social drinker, but no drugs. Well earlier in my childhood I had depression. I wasn't a perfect child. I basically grew up on my own, you know, I just had to live on my own. I had more of a street life, but not

a bad street life as far as drugs and crime, prostitution, all that stuff. But I had to learn fast. The depression came at a young age for me as far as when my grandmother passed and I was 13 and that's when I felt depressed then I actually was going through therapy for that. For years all through school I was like that. After I lost my job, yes, I was very depressed. I went through therapy, MHMRA (Mental Health Mental Retardation Association), and Gulf Coast. Went through therapy and they diagnosed me with being chronic depressed, clinical depressed. Paxil. I believe it was 25 mg. I took it for about a month. I didn't like, as they call it, it was happy pills, but I didn't like the affect of it so I stopped taking it within a month of course, I was still depressed. I couldn't get out of it. Friends kept telling me to go on with life.....I went from something to nothing. Would calm me for a while..... matter of fact when I was going through school, I was homeless. Houston Community College I was homeless. That was in 2001. I was living at the shelter. Started out living with friends, then I ended up at a shelter and from that point on that was it. I'd say about nine or ten months. TANF. That was during the period of time I lost my job as well. His father (her son's) was sick so as of now he's deceased. But during that period of time he.....before he got sick he was, when I lost my job, he was, you know making ends meet as far as having a roof over our heads and after he got sick and passed, that was it. That was a whole different type of depression coming on as well. As a result, we had, matter of fact the same month he passed, we became homeless. From there it just went downhill for me. I wasn't working, trying to find a job. I lost everything from

car to living situation to being in a shelter catching the bus.

Another participant discussed her barriers and challenges this way:

Well, finances. Because I was going to school full time. I wasn't working so finances were one of my greatest challenges. So I decided to work part-time and go to school full time, but that didn't work out for me because I started to get behind in my courses and I didn't want to do that , so I wound up quitting the part-time job and just continuing full-time and just trying to make it. I didn't have a car. I rode the bus there was a program where they offered you a bus card through being a college student. You were able to get a free bus card and I think it was like about nine months or so, the card was.

Another study participant talks about how the lack of finances can be a barrier as well. She also talks about depression, the use of Prozac, and having chronic fatigue syndrome. As participants in this study spent more time talking about the challenges they faced regarding their HCCS experiences, they all, for the most part, began to recall even the most minute details. This study participant recalls not taking Prozac for depression while attending HCCS, only because she did not have health insurance. Her experiences also speak to the challenges that many study participants share regarding attending HCCS and working at the same time. Here is part of the conversation she had regarding the variety of challenges and barriers she recalled regarding her HCCS experiences:

I didn't have a car and my sister let me use hers to go to school so it was just having, being able to give her car, she works too, so having a car and trying to work part-time to, around my hours was. It was financial. Just financial worry

about not being able to pay my bills, you know. And go to school at the same time. I was working whenever I could around, yes, I had to work. Cleaning. I was doing cleaning and right now, me and my two boys live with my sister and pay \$400/month, so I have to have that amount of money. My sister works at night and so I'm usually working in the day, so it works out really pretty good. Like I said, I didn't have a car and she let's me use her car. I lived on my own before I came here and paid my own rent, but I can't do that right now and so I pay her half. No chemical dependencies for me. I have had depression for I'd say about three years now. And well at first, I thought I was sick. I just, you know, wanted to sleep all the time and I was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome and I just like, it wasn't a fear. I had a job. I'd worked at this job for ten years and I was just like, could almost fall asleep early in the morning at work, you know. And then I had gone to a doctor and they wanted to put me on Prozac for depression which I didn't disagree. I told them I was depressed, but I felt like I was depressed because of the chronic fatigue because I was afraid. All I wanted to do was sleep and I had two children to support, but that with B-12, I just feel like I've, you know, do not have the chronic fatigue syndrome anymore, but I do recognize it as depression. I took Prozac, but I don't believe I took it in school (HCCS) because I was not on Medicaid and did not have any insurance. I would get on Medicaid but it seems like every time I would get on Medicaid, they'd let you be on it for a month and then they send you a letter saying oh we don't have Medicaid for adults anymore.

The mental health barriers that were found in the research findings are consistent

with the barriers found in other welfare to work programs throughout the country. Indeed, the Virginia Department of Social Services notes “some barriers are personal in nature such as physical, mental, or psychological conditions and others are situational” (<http://www.dss.state.va.us/benefit/welfarereform.htm>). Child care concerns were a continuing challenge and potential barrier for the ten study participants that had children needing care. This finding suggests congruence with a post-welfare reform study relating to childcare conducted by the University of Michigan. The study found that:

As primary care-givers, women students who are parents often carry the added financial burden of child care, which averages \$460 per month in Michigan child care centers. “In addition to cost, availability of high-quality care is an acute problem, particularly in the evening when many students attend class and study”, said Susan W. Kaufmann, senior author of the report and CEW associate director. According to the report, welfare reform policy since 1996 also has presented a serious barrier to recipients continuing their education, and college enrollment of single mothers receiving public assistance has declined in Michigan (http://www.umich.edu/~urecord/9900/Feb07_00/4.htm).

The research found an interesting quagmire for many of the study participants regarding childcare. The welfare system pays for childcare as long as you are receiving TANF, but you lose this important benefit as you become employed and your wages increase. This participant, a mother of two children under the age of three discusses her situation regarding this issue:

Ah, the greatest challenge that I had was child care. And I didn't realize that it

going to be so hard to get until I found out about NCI (Neighborhood Centers Incorporated provides free child care for TANF recipients). But the only thing is I was on TANF I had a chance to get on NCI, but once you are off TANF they completely take you off, so it is really hard. You know right now is so expensive. Child care is \$125 a week just for one child. They are real expensive. Yes, I had NCI for a while, then I would have to come out of my pocket and pay, and that is another thing. That is another thing about welfare, it is good when your on it, but when you get off it and are trying to get on your feet, it is so expensive for child care and food. I feel that once you get off welfare at least give you a little leeway and then you can take care of your business. Once you get off, that is it.

Still another study participant talked about the child care challenge, and she had a suggestion as well:

The only thing that I could think of that would have been helpful to me at the time is maybe, I'm sure if they even have the option, to be able to bring your children with you and maybe if they would have had a little daycare or some type of facility or put your kids in like a daycare while you were at school, that way women that have kids wouldn't have to be worried about, you know, who would keep their kids or be discouraged about going to school because I don't have anybody watching my kids or it don't make no sense for me to keep coming to school and don't have anybody watching my kids so I'm just going to quit school.

At least two of the twelve study participants disclosed a history of domestic

violence. This finding certainly connects domestic violence concerns with former welfare recipient's ability to attend training at institutions such as HCCS. It may also effect their ability to remain in self-sufficient situations after they have completed their training and found gainful employment. So it is, that this section details two study participant's somewhat similar, very detailed, accounts about a history of domestic violence, and having to make choices in their lives that had a profound impact of the direction their lives took.

These choices, while allowing them to move forward with education and employment, are certainly worth noting relative to the continued ability to remain self-sufficient. Domestic violence is discussed by Kaplan (1997) in terms of its effect on former welfare recipient's ability to remain employed . She indicates:

A substantial number of welfare recipients are the victims of domestic violence. Under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, they will be expected to work and be subject to the state time limits unless excepted. However, many of these recipients will face significant problems in finding or keeping work until this violence and its after effects are addressed (<http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/domesticissue.htm>).

This study participant, now 52, discusses domestic violence in her life:

.....then I married this other man. He's the father of my other three, two boys and my daughter. The relationship doesn't work. We split. He went back to Mexico and I stayed with the boys so I've been on my own almost all my life, but I think I went last year to Mexico. I saw him. He wanted me to go back with him and I told him, you know, we don't need you. Whenever I was

asking him for help you know he was never there so I've been single for the last 15-16 years. I don't want to know nothing about. That marriage wasn't a good experience. My first husband went to Vietnam and when he came back, he came back crazy you know. He used to beat me everyday, everyday. No no, no, I live happy now.

Another study participant, a 26 year old with three children, all under the age of 5 years, detailed the domestic violence in her not so distant past (it is worth noting that the domestic violence she experienced was not just physical, but also psychological/emotional):

He was abusive towards me in all kinds of ways. Not just physically. He just wasn't, its like everything he could do, he did... Anything. He was a liar, he was a liar, he was irresponsible. You know, I was pregnant. I was pregnant with the kids so there was times when I couldn't work and he would have a job, and he wouldn't pay bills where we lived. He would take his money and spend it on other women and their children. He wouldn't bring food to the house so I would have to go and get food for me and the kids from outside places like charities or whatever, or like his mama.She would bring food to the houseIt was just times when he do stuff like he didn't have to. He would hit me. He would talk to me any kind of way. Curse me out. Emotional abuse. All kinds of abuse. In a lot of ways that made me at the time weak because I let that bring me down, but now its just giving me the strength I need to get out here and do what I know I need to do because I know I am not going back to him. Even though now he wants me to come back, but I know if I go back

I'll be in that same situation and so, you know, I'm not going back to him. I'd just rather be by myself and raise my kids on my own and so that's the reason..
.....he put me through a lot.....it was a lot of emotional, like I said, abuse, mental abuse, manipulation, physical abuse and a lot of that.....I mean it was like daily. (Here she talks about depression as well) Every day I had to go through something with him and it made me depressed. It was times where I did not want to live.....I felt worthless.

The aforementioned example happens to be the story of one of the nine African-Americans in the study participant population, who, by the way, are disproportionately represented in the overall HCCS TANF population.

The researcher found that one of the problems in poor communities, particularly African-American communities is the lack of resources (this is addressed more acutely in Theme # 5). Cornel West (1993, p.56) discusses possible reasons for this:

.....is the gross deterioration of personal, familial, and communal relations among African-Americans. These relations, though fragile and difficult to sustain, constitute a crucial basis for the development of a collective and critical consciousness and moral commitment to courageous engagement with causes beyond that of one's self and family. Presently, black communities are in shambles, black families are in decline, and black men and women are in conflict (and sometimes combat).....There are few, if any, communal resources to help black people cope with this situation.

Theme # 5 Support Services are Important

The researcher, while conducting the interviews and developing thematic data from them, could not help but think about Cornel West's statements regarding the state of the impoverished, urban dweller. West (1993, p.9) speaks to the importance of support networks very eloquently. In his discussion regarding the breakdown of family and neighborhood bonds, he argues that "we have created rootless, dangling people with little link to the supportive networks-family, friends, school-that sustain a sense of purpose in life."

It was clear that from the data that all of the study participants needed, and in most cases, received, some level of support services on their road to self-sufficiency. It was evident that the Houston Community College System is not equipped to handle all of the problems that TANF clients bring with them as they move through the various training programs. Partnerships and collaboration are needed to meet the many needs discussed by study participants. The State of Virginia Department of Social Services has found similar findings regarding this need. They suggest that "no single program or agency can adequately address the diverse needs of TANF recipients with multiple employment barriers. Only collaboration among agencies can help ensure an effective effort on behalf of this group" (<http://www.dss.state.va.us/benefit/welfarereform.html>). All 12 of the study participants found ways to obtain some of the support services they needed to attend the Houston Community College System, and for the most part, to find employment. Many of these support services were provided by family, friends, community based organizations, churches, career centers,

government agencies, and the Houston Community College System. For instance, HCCS provides academic and employment assessment, tutoring, study groups, job preparation, but is not equipped to handle mental health counseling, domestic violence counseling, or provide money for car repair. HCCS does not provide financial housing assistance for TANF recipients. HCCS is able to, and does, provide referral services in these areas for clients. HCCS also offers study groups in their welfare to work training programs. This is a support service that mirrors that of the traditional community college student, and was highlighted in the comments by a study participant. She recalled (with a huge smile) that “we had study groups....you know it was real good.....we were just there for each other..”



Support services important....tutoring...study groups, etc...

Another finding regarding the need for support services is that HCCS is only required (by grant funding mandates) to provide follow up and outreach services for a maximum of six months after program completion. Ten study participants related that they were contacted by someone from HCCS a few months after they completed their training, but have not heard from HCCS for sometime. At least half of the study participants related that they had not had any

contact with HCCS in the past year. The researcher got the sense from all 12 of the study participant's responses that they were not aware of the full array of services available to them while in training, and available to them as former students. Some of these services include information about future training, job search assistance, job fair dates and information, use of the library (which has Internet access), financial aid information, academic counseling/assessment and college enrollment dates and times.

Only five of the study participants talked about receiving support or assistance from extended family. The other eight relied on friends, church and charities. One study participant, who lives with her grandchildren, talked about how she gets assistance in the absence of extended family support:

My oldest grandson is 6, then I have two, a granddaughter and a grandson of 4, and then I have three of them that are two years old and then I got two small little grandbabies, they're like six months. It's just me and my children. My family is not here. On my father's side, his family's in Alabama and my two sisters that I have living and my brothers, they're in California, so I am really the only one here in Houston. My church helps me a lot and I try to participate in my grandkid's school down the street here. I still go down and participate. They have things. Yeah, I like to participate and help out. I've been in the Fifth Ward (a neighborhood in Houston) all my life. I attend, small Baptist church.

Another study participant also talked about the lack of extended family support:

.....46 years old....My parents are both deceased and I have three sisters, two of them here in Houston.....I have a cousin and an elderly aunt. She's got Alzheimer's. Just seems like most of my family passed away that I am, you know, close to, other than my sisters. I am from Houston....I don't have a lot of friends.....I don't have a lot of time for.....

Still another study participant talked about having family as a support system:

Well my sister, her name is.....she is going to AIU right now, she is majoring in business, and she is a good support system also. Anything I need she is willing to help. She is a good guidance. If I need someone to talk to, she is there to give me any advice that I need. I don't have any brothers. Actually, I am close to my mom and somewhat my stepfather, but I am most close to my mother and grandmother.

All 12 study participants discussed the lack of time that they had because of their various activities, responsibilities, and endeavors. This lack of time appears to limit the amount of time they have to explore support services that are vital to their continued self-sufficiency. Some study participants have relationships with churches in their community that offer them assistance that HCCS cannot. Another study participant, a mother of five, discusses the support services her church provides her family:

Well, basically church is it. I work. I go to church. That's basically it. I'm involved with a lot of activities at church. I try to keep my kids involved as well with activities at church and that's basically it. I use my skills, my secretarial skills to help the church.....they also offer tutorial programs for the kids, help them with schooling and so they've been involved with that program ever since it began, started, like a couple of years now. Whatever activities that the church has, I always try to attend and have my kids with me attending. Well I have been involved in this church pretty much all my life. I was raised up in the church. Yes they do help me financially. If I need I will go to the church and ask for financial assistance and I receive financial assistance. Members of my church know my situation and they're always offering clothing, whatever they feel would help me and my kids, so they are a very supportive church.

Theme # 6 HCCS was a Good Experience

Only 2 of the 12 study participants talked negatively about their HCCS experiences. In fact, all study participants, including those who are not currently employed, had something positive to say about their experiences. There were a few comments about their experiences relative to transportation and child care. It should be noted here that these are the two biggest barriers in welfare to work programs across the globe. Moreover, they (transportation and child care issues) also appear to be prevalent among the non-welfare community college student population. The research data suggests that the majority of the study participants felt that their experiences at HCCS were life changing in that it provided them a direction toward self-sufficiency. Many talked about the friendships they made while at HCCS. All 12 participants were able to recall at least one former classmate that they maintain some degree of contact with today. These relationships appear to have fostered the kinds of bonds that are generally found in similar cohort groupings.

The study participants really made it clear that being treated well made a difference in their perceptions of HCCS, regardless of whether or not they completed training, or found self-sufficient employment. One study participant (who smiled as discussed this) called her HCCS experience “great.” She, as did the majority of the study participants, made a point to talk about how well they were treated:

My experience at HCCS was great, actually I was pregnant with my daughter, like seven months pregnant with my daughter when I entered it, everyone accepted me for what I am, you know, the predicament I was in, the counselors was real understanding,in particular, she was real nice.

Another study participant stated “ the experiences I had, I met new friends, I like the teachers, it was a whole new place for me.” Still another study participant

talked about how she came to know about HCCS, and how much she enjoyed studying:

I started going to HCCS, I guess 2 ½ years maybe, maybe 2 years ago. I took English. I have always known about it. Just being in the neighborhood and.....time wise that I could take classes at a more convenient time and I took English and Algebra.....I love going to school and I enjoyed the classes. I guess I really enjoyed studying it on my own.....just getting the extra time.....but I loved it.

This study participant (also a Houston Community College employee for the past 4 years) talked about her HCCS experiences:

Well, I don't think I have nothing bad to say about Houston Community College. Good, a lot of good things. The only bad thing right now for me is that I didn't have a good transportation and to, sometimes they move me from one campus to another campus, but I'm pretty sure I'm going to get a better car, better transportation and good things about HCCS is that you can learn, you can get some free classes, free education if you want. And also your daughters or your sons can get 50% discount (available to children of HCCS employees). That's a very good thing and also which is good is that you can also educate yourself and at the same time be promoted to another position, better position. And good things about HCCS, all the benefits. They're good. The benefits which is health insurance, life insurance, medical insurance and oh, well, everything. I think I might stay there. I am going to stay with Houston Community College.

This study participant talked about the good experience and how the small classes allowed both teachers and other students to become fast friends. She also focused her response on the environment and how she was treated:

I had a lot of fun while I was there. It was a good experience for me because it

was kinda like a situation I hadn't been in before and really didn't know what to expect at first (initially she wanted training for a new skill) but when I got there it was a comforting situation and it was, like I said, I really didn't know what to expect when I first got there because you know I was kinda, not really scared at first, but I just didn't know what really was going to happen. But when I got there it was real calm and comforting like environment and everybody was nice and my class was small so we all kinda got to know each other real fast and the teachers were cool. The instructors were nice and they weren't, you know, real overbearing to the point where they were just constantly on you, on you. They were laid back but at the same time we were able to learn and have fun and whatever. And, I think I made friends with everybody that was in my class.....We learned a lot.....we had fun at the same time and I think when it was graduating time I really was kinda sad because I had I really didn't want to stop coming. We just had that much, it was cool.....As far as the staff went, I mean I liked everybody there that I met. She's (a staff member) take time out to help me.... I'm using the same resume to this day.....Every time we needed to go to our interviews, she (a staff member) would always volunteer like on a Saturday.....She would pick us all up from HCCS and take us where we had to go to our interview. When we would get there she would speak on our behalf.



Concerned, helpful staff make a difference.....



Public recognition for accomplishments is an important part of the learning experience

This same participant, who was part of an initial class, laments about not having a formal graduation ceremony. Public recognition is important to her (and others). The findings suggest that not only is public recognition an important part of the learning experience to the study participant, but it may be even more significant for the participant's peers and family, particularly their children, to witness this recognition. It may be the most significant positive public recognition they receive at that point in their lives. Here are more of her thoughts on it:

The only thing that I did not really too much care for is the way they, like when we graduated, because I think we was the first set of students to have finished the program and we didn't get a graduation. But the second class that came after us, they got one and then our names wasn't mentioned at all, so I was kinda like for them but we didn't get any kind of like a graduation ceremony or whatever you want to call it like a little dinner or anything you know when we left the school. And that was the only thing that, you know, we hung in there, we finished the program and you know, so we were kinda looking for that recognition but we didn't get one. I did go to the graduation ceremony that they had set up the second class I didn't like but that wasn't enough to just make a bad experience. That was just one thing that I didn't like.

Not all of the study participants were pleased with their experiences at HCCS. In fact, a few expressed disappointment because they were given information about training and employment that did not come to fruition. Here a study participant (who is now cleaning homes and offices) talks about her disappointment with regard to her HCCS experiences:

I came wanting to take the phlebotomy course and was told that I would get a job starting out around \$12/hour, but after getting in school, that changed to like \$7/hour and just, you know, I was told you know well, when I couldn't get a job and things, you know. You have to make sacrifices. I was told to go places and volunteer, work for free. Well, that would have been great and I have children and I have to support them you know. I didn't have any more sacrifices to make. So, it's just been real disappointing because nobody, I felt nobody really helped me. They could push me or tell me go on that Job Fair or call that place, but when they didn't want me because I had no experience or there was, you know, there was nothing else I could do and finally I just got discouraged and started cleaning more, it's been a year now and I haven't. I don't have a job doing that and I know several of the people they never got a job either.

Another study participant lamented about her inability to pass a qualifying test which appeared to shape the opinion she shared about her HCCS experiences:

The test was hard, I didn't pass it. I had to find something else to do. I couldn't do it.....I failed the test.....I could not retake the test. I had to dig down to see what I wanted to do with myself. No one contacted me after I left, but they said they would. I didn't get any employment because of the test...(she did add some positive comments about HCCS near the end of the interview).....I really enjoy working with computers because I work on computers all day.....every day. Well the best thing I like about HCCS,

I really enjoyed it because I never been inside a college. I went inside the University of Houston, but that was it. I want to go to school. I admire all the students there. I don't have anything least about it.

There were three study participants in the study that were over the age of fifty. Their responses and their disposition during the interview appear to suggest that generally they were pleased with their HCCS experiences. Some discussed being a bit apprehensive about returning to school at their ages. Each one related that both the staff and students acceptance of them was key to their feeling included, and motivated them to stay. In fact, one of them has been employed with HCCS since she completed her welfare to work training program. Another is currently continuing her training at HCCS, and the other is working in a position with a community service organization where she earns a livable wage, and has a comprehensive benefit package. All three of them noted that stability is most important for them at this point in their lives. One of these three study participants commented on how she found out about the HCCS training program, and how helpful the staff was:

I was at a grocery store one day and they (HCCS) had flyer in there that asked if you want to advance your education and your life to come and visit, so I peoples there was very helpful to me, very helpful. This was three years ago. I was working at a Tee shirt shop and I got laid off, and I went there and the peoples helped me out a lot, they gave me a lot of information in how to go and how to fill out a resume. They helped me review my resume and how to look for jobs. They was very helpful.....they really boost my self-esteem. I had three kids I was raising (grandchildren), it was very hard. If it was not for them I don't know what I would do. It was hard, not being here that long (she is from another part of Texas and has no other family here). I really did not know that many people. But I was working and lost my job, it was

really stressful, I didn't know what I was going to do.....(she goes on to talk specifically about going back to school).....The classes were nice. The peoples were nice. Going back to school after those longer years.... It was nice. I like going back to school.....

Theme # 7 HCCS Met Their Expectations

In all but three cases, study participants reported that they got from HCCS what they originally came for. To the researcher's surprise, the three study participants that did not have their expectations met, spoke favorably about aspects of their experiences, and more importantly, want to stay connected with the institution in some beneficial manner. The other nine participants report that they sought training and ultimately a pathway to self-sufficiency. This group, for the most part reported having had their training expectations met, but only two related that they were in self-sufficient situations. The two that reported self-sufficiency earn an average of \$13.50 per hour between them. One of these individuals is a fifty two year old former TANF recipient who has been employed at HCCS for four years and earns nearly \$30,000 annually(with comprehensive benefits). She has also received at least one promotion during that tenure. She, by far, is the most successful former TANF recipient (in terms of expectation and actual outcome) of all of the participants in this study. She is also the one most connected to the institution by virtue of being employed by HCCS. The study found that the most successful study participants (in terms of wages and/or completion of training) either had frequent contact with HCCS, or had significant support services that augmented their individual efforts. There were varying degrees of success reported by the study participants, including this one who explained how her needs were met:

My only expectations were that I would learn what it is the course that I wanted

to take and that was my only expectation. Yes, it was met. The teachers were good. I learned what I needed to learn. Employment was met because I, they offered job assistance through IFE (Institute for Excellence-an HCCS welfare to work program) and I was able to get a position in my field of study. I was able to get a position with a clinic called TOP where I worked for about five months as an administrative assistant/data entry. Self-sufficiency to me is being able to meet all your needs. Being able to pay your rent, provide food for your family, provide transportation for you and your family (she has five children and is a single parent), and not need the assistance of the government to do that. I am still not totally self-sufficient because I am still needing assistance from the government but it is my goal, hopefully, to become self-sufficient.

This study participant talks about having her training expectation met, but not the employment expectation. She is one of the ten study participants not currently in a self-sufficient situation (not still needing help from the government). She is back on TANF today. She talked about her expectations:

When I first called about the program, I was explained to that it would be a three or four month course (phlebotomy training). (This study participant reported finding out about the HCCS phlebotomy training through an advertisement in a local newspaper). We would get training at a hospital which we did and they would assist us in finding a job afterwards. Everything went fine until looking for a job afterwards. Obviously, I haven't found a job from that I expected them to help me find a job, yes.

Still another study participant, a grandmother over age 50, talked about HCCS meeting most of her expectations, and having friends who allow her to use their vehicles to go to HCCS for training. She also makes the connection between further education at HCCS and goal attainment:

I feel that my expectations, most of them were met. They will be met more so

when I get this associate's degree in early childhood development, when I complete that, and then I will be complete but yes, so far, I mean that HCCS helped me a lot. I have three children of my own and two grandchildren and myself that live in my house, so it's like six of us. I support everybody. It does get somewhat stressful because I be trying to make bills, meet my bills where I can keep my bills on my house note paid and things like that and sometimes I do have transportation and sometimes I don't. You know, I have friends that will flex with me and let me use their vehicle and I also have bus cards. I ride the bus because I'm not too far from the bus line. Sometime I take the bus, sometime I don't. Most of the time I'm driving, let me put it just like that. No I haven't had any problems going. I don't do child care. I don't have any children I have to have child care with. Their mothers take care of that. This same study participant talks about the latent benefits that her HCCS experiences have given her. She talks about becoming more dependable and self-reliant. She speaks passionately about (as do at least two other study participants) how the lack of a contributing male companion has not stopped her from pursuing her education at HCCS:

I just wanted to add that Houston Community College made me more dependable on myself. It made me to want and go out. Right now I can stand on my own without depending on a male companion. I know I can do this on my own now. I'm 50 years old. My children are grown and I'm a grandmother and I'm fed up about the male companion because none of the fathers have really been there for the children. They were there but weren't there financially, mentally, yeah, but basically I raised my children on my own. They just didn't do a whole lot for the children, you know and I just felt I had to become dependable on myself to help myself. I couldn't depend on a man, you know, at least help me, meet me halfway. So most of it I did on my own..

I know I can get out there and do it for myself now with my education I have. Even though I don't have a whole lot but it is a blessing to get that much where I could get me a better job. My HCCS experience changed my life. All the medical training I got, the CNA, the EKG and the phlebotomy and with me completing, going to complete and get my associate's degree in early childhood development.....

At least half of the study participants verbally castigated the children's absentee fathers for their lack of support and participation. This is a sub-theme, if you will, that came up repeatedly, particularly in study participants with multiple children. Most of the comments were not positive (regarding these absentee/negligent fathers), and spoke to the remarkable resiliency and fortitude of the study participants.

Another study participant characterized her HCCS experience this way "Well, coming to HCCS meant to me a future, a career. I mean lots of experiences and basically it helped you with your life, a longer life for 5-10 years from now." Another study participant talked about going to HCCS instead of the community college in her service area (North Harris Montgomery Community College District):

No, everything has been summed up. I mean. I like HCCS. It's a good college. I chose HCCS because from the first time I went there for my CNA classes and I liked it from there. Also, from my second experience for my computer class, so instead of going to North Harris I picked HCCS because I thought HCCS was the best college over North Harris. So that's why I picked HCCS.

Another study participant talked about how her skills were improved at HCCS:

I was able to gain work as a secretary. I went, I started working at Weiner's corporate office. The position was called Buyer's Assistant. It was secretarial

work where I did a lot of data entry, and then also through HCCS I was able to obtain a position with the clinic where I worked in the medical field and I did data entry and medical billing which is what peaked my interest to go back to Houston Community College to get more training as a medical biller . I've worked as an office manager which is probably the reason because I've upgraded my skills through Houston Community College.

Theme # 8 Want to Stay Connected to HCCS

The participants, having been given the opportunity to tell their story, good, bad, or indifferent, all appeared to want to stay connected to HCCS. Even those that had completed their training, had found significant employment, and were doing well, had a sense of incompleteness. Just as traditional college students have, they felt as though there was more to accomplish, and that HCCS is the pathway there. It was most interesting to find that the most ardent critics of HCCS in this study related their desire to stay connected. In fact, in every interview, save perhaps one, the researcher (a current HCCS managerial employee) was asked (and provided information) about contact numbers for various HCCS programs and services. In one instance, the researcher was asked about new training program contact numbers. In another instance, a study participant inquired about exam dates for CNA licensing. Still another study participant (an employed, single mother with five children) talked about how she might have to juggle her schedule to find time to return to HCCS. Still other study participants remained connected to HCCS, or the experiences they had there, through their relationship with other former and current HCCS classmates. A study participant comments on those friendships:

.....gotten so close to everybody and it was, you know, like a bond. We all bonded ...some people we lost contact, I lost contact with because maybe their number changed or something like that and couldn't get their new numbers but

I'd say about a handful of the people I still talk to, to this day. I call them or they call me and you know the people that you know, two of us are in the same kinda like dealing with the same thing we went to school for.....we both got hired on at the company that they partnership with.....

All study participants were asked what they wanted to achieve five years from now. This question served a three-fold purpose, the first was to determine if they *saw* a future for themselves, the second was to see if they would connect HCCS to their future, and the third was to determine whether they had an internal or external locus of control regarding their future. Essentially, all participants related that they saw a future for themselves and for their children. Despite past barriers and challenges, each put a positive spin on the way they viewed the future. All, either viewed HCCS as part of their experiences, or linked further education and training with future goals. About half had an internal locus of control, the other half will rely on a higher being, or are simply "hoping things will be better." Here is one study participant's response:

At five years from now I'm hoping that I can. I'm hoping that at five years from now I will be totally done with government aid. I want to lead an independent life. I want to take care of my kids on my own. I'm hoping that between now and another five years I'll be back in school because I really want to go into cosmetology. That's what I've always wanted to do ever since I left school but just didn't believe in myself to follow through with it but I want to go back to HCCS and take up cosmetology classes. I'm hoping that one day I can have my own business and provide for my children on my own and not have to worry about outside help.

Another study participant talked about being fully self-sufficient in response to this question. She talked about how her current job (one that HCCS motivated her to get) offers her growth:

As I said before, I want to become totally self-sufficient where I do not need the assistance from the government and that would mean being able to support my children and myself, pay my rent, buy my groceries, buy clothing and other things for my family, having transportation and hopefully within the next five years. I will be totally self-sufficient to be able to do those things for me and my family. My current job offers me the opportunity. I'm really hoping it works out.

Hope, is yet another word used as this study participant discussed wanting to be a nurse five years from now. She used very specific language in detailing when she will become a nurse:

Five years from now, hopefully, I will be a Vocational Nurse for approximately three years and I'll be a Registered Nurse. My hobby is cooking. I like to bake and I like to cook. Hopefully, I'll be able to put my kids in a safer home, pay our insurance for me and my family. I hope to be in my house and car, and my dream house, and my kids in school making good grades and just having a good life.

Still another study participant connected her HCCS experience with nursing in the future. She, like all of the other participants, saw themselves off of welfare in five years:

In the next five years, if I had my way, like I would say, I'd be a nurse probably working at Texas Children's Hospital or M.D. Anderson because I enjoyed working there the little time I did. Owning my own house, not being on TANF, and just living my own life.

This participant, the most successful of the twelve, and a HCCS employee is connected to the college via her work over the past four years. This long-term connection has apparently fostered an understanding of college operations. Moreover, it has given her access to the full array of services available to current

and former students. Based on this study participant's experiences, and to a limited extent, the other's, this research study has found that remaining connected with the college (HCCS) may be a pivotal aspect in increasing the likelihood of self-sufficiency. Here, she talks about her job and her connection to HCCS and what her five-year goals are:

Well, my job is to provide students with basic information. I direct them to the right departments and faxing, filing, issue transcripts for, unofficial transcripts for students, mail graduations, assist the counselors, in general. Thank goodness I usually don't have major problems. I ask questions, hard questions yes, but.....I work Monday-Friday, 8:00 to 4:30. That's the best thing about Houston Community College that you can get holidays. December 19 we are going, and that's our last day, and we don't come back until January 5 so that's one of things that I like from the college, you know, that with my boys out of school, I'm out (off from) of work. We spend a lot of time together. I used to get off very, very tired. I was making about \$500 bi-weekly, every two weeks. I make about \$2000 almost, close to \$2000 every two weeks. Well, five years from now I hope that I get a higher position where I would be making about \$40,000-\$50,000.

The researcher would often ponder during portions of the interview how the lives of the participants would have fared had HCCS not entered their lives. The following study participant had the same inquiry, and talked about what the HCCS connection has meant to her, and why she is going to come back:

I mean, it's meant a lot because I think back on it sometimes and I wonder if I hadn't of went, if I would have ever found the job that I am at. I think it opened up a door for me to find a job that I'm at because when I went to take my, when I went to the, I started out with a staffing service and while I was in school, you know, they would give us opportunities to do like job searching on

the Internet and I got on there and one of the companies I applied to was the one that ended up calling me and it was a staffing service and they had this job opening up and so they wanted me to come in and take, we had to take the Microsoft test on a computer in Excel and Word and I didn't think I was stronger in Excel than I did in Word . But they were real impressed with what I made on my test and I know that was because of the training because before that, I wasn't really in to computers, I've always liked them, but I didn't stay on a computer enough to know the programs so they were real impressed with that and did real good on my typing test and so the next thing I know like two weeks after that they called me and they wanted me to start this job. Like I said, I don't really think if I hadn't went to the program (HCCS). I always wonder, you know, if I would have ever gotten a good job if I hadn't went because before I started I wasn't really getting good jobs and then back when I went there (HCCS), it, you know, the next thing I know I had this job (she currently works as post-closing clerk at a mortgage company, making \$11.50 per hour with full benefits) and I just think that, you know, I was there. It made me wonder why I hadn't went to school like when I first left high school I really didn't think I could make it in college. I felt like you know, what's the use. I mean, it's not that I was a quitter or I was going to give up, it's just, you know, I was scared and didn't have anybody in my life at the point to, that was encouraging me or that was, you know, telling me you can go out there, you can make it, you can do it. I didn't have any encouragement. I didn't have any support so I kinda let that intimidate me. I didn't feel like I could make it in college. I thought, well, I can't make it out there. I'm not going to make it and then once I went to HCCS, when I went, I went, I was like, man, you know, I didn't, I realized that I could have made it. I should have went over here and went to school when I graduated (high school) and you know,

I didn't know it was going to be like that. It just opened my eyes up to the point of it. I could have made it. I could have did it. And now, even now I think about going back there and following up on some classes that relate more to like to what I like to get into. And so I think that's a possibility for me and once I get my life stabilized a little bit more, I'm going to come back there and take up some more classes.

Another participant, currently employed as a home cleaner, related that she wanted to "... have a good job, something with benefits. I would like for it to be in the medical field and a home of my own for me and my children. They're getting older you know. Just work and financial." She recently got a letter from HCCS and showed it to the researcher during the interview. The letter stated that she had been selected for the mentor program.

Another study participant talked about staying connected to her former classmates, and her plans for the future:

Five years from now I would like to be a nurse, to have my own and let my kids see something else, let my kids know that you have to earn things, I would like to be in a different position than I am in now. Well, I think we covered everything....I think HCCS is good if you want to make something out of your life. I really think that it is a good college. I keep in contact with some of my classmates. They are doing good and have their certificates. I think the HCCS staff is nice, I can talk with them.

There were a few study participants who, while expressing dismay that their expectations were not completely satisfied, did talk about their dreams and aspirations. More significantly, they expressed a desire to return to HCCS.

The following study participant is a case in point:

I want from five years from now, I want a good job, not staying in an apartment, I want to grow my kids up in a backyard, something I have been

dreaming of for a while. I am tired of living in an apartment. There is too much happening in apartments. Right now you have drugs, molestations, abuse, you get mugged, people steal from you. I haven't seen it here, but it happens everywhere else. This is my first time in an apartment. I have been on my own since 1997. I moved out when I was 23. The kids like it, but they are outside I am sitting on the porch, everyday, all day. School days they don't go outside. The only days they go outside are Friday, Saturday and Sunday. My goal is to go to college. I see myself coming back to HCCS, but I want to do right by my kids. I don't trust nobody with my kids but my parents and sisters. I don't leave them in the house by themselves. I never had CPS (Children's Protective Services) in my life and I don't want them in my life. So, you know, when the Lord bless me, I'll be back.

This participant, a grandmother of five, talks about staying connected to HCCS .:

The classes were nice, going back to school after those longer years, it was nice. I like going back to school, I want to go back again and get my teaching certificate, and learn more about computers because that's what everybody is learning right now. I really need to go back for that.

Another participant in the study, a mother of four, linked her children getting older to her eventual return and reconnection to HCCS:

My children are getting older and they want more. I want to find me something than food service. I want to go back to Houston Community College for my commercial driver's license (she dropped out of HCCS' CDL training to take her current position nearly two years ago). I don't want to drive buses for the school district, maybe UPS or FEDEX. I need something better to better myself for me and my kids.....hard with four kids.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter involved an overview of the study, an explanation of the participant screening process, context of the study information, the characteristics of the participants, the characteristics of the interview responses, and extensive interview narrative. It also included an explanation of how the data was collected, analyzed, reported, and how themes were developed from the data.

Essentially, the study participants talked candidly about their welfare to work experiences in relation to their Houston Community College experiences. Eight themes were developed from the extensive oral accounts and stories of the study participants. This thematic data, while very exhaustive and extensive, was not meant to represent the totality of their Houston Community College experiences, or that of non-study participants similarly situated. Rather, the data reflects themes developed at a particular point in the ongoing lives of the twelve study participants selected for the study.

This chapter intentionally includes large blocks of text as told to the researcher by the study participants. The goal was to have *their story* told with emphasis on developing common themes from which meaning can be gleaned. After having considered several approaches, the researcher felt that the narrative approach was the most effective way to hear the participant's voices and derive meaning from them. Chapter Five will provide more analysis by comparing thematic data with previous literature. Chapter Five will also provide further discussion on the findings, implications for future HCCS welfare to work training programs, recommendations and a conclusion of the study.

Chapter Five- Conclusion and Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

This study started with an overview of welfare, the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, and the Houston Community College System's involvement in it. Chapter One discussed how HCCS was positioned well to respond to the new welfare reform legislation, and that it had a thirty plus year history of serving low income students. Chapter One detailed how HCCS was able to get grant money to serve the welfare to work population, and how barriers such as legally imposed time limits would hamper efforts to move individuals into self-sufficiency. This study was deemed significant because it would help fill the void that currently exists in the research literature between the services that the Houston Community College System provided for welfare recipients since the welfare reform law, and the outcomes obtained by selected former recipients who were HCCS students.

Chapter Two answered the first research question by explaining what the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act is. Chapter Two also gave an overview of HCCS' historical involvement in welfare to work programs, an overview of selected welfare to work programs from around the United States, and potential barriers to welfare to work programs. It also provided a definition of poverty from a variety of perspectives, and the related literature on the topic.

Chapter Three discussed the qualitative research methodology, interview process, data collection, analysis and methodological limitations. Chapter Four analyzed, coded and developed themes from the data. Chapter Five will compare the themes developed from Chapter Four with the related literature from Chapter Two. This comparison will afford conclusions and recommendations to be made

which may be helpful in identifying effective techniques for serving future welfare to populations. Moreover, these conclusions may have policy and practice implications. This chapter will include a summary of the most salient theme found in this research study.

Thematic comparison

Welfare is a mixed blessing

The study participants related that welfare was a mixed blessing of sorts. It clearly provided them with a minimal level of assistance, but they often felt mistreated and demeaned by the system. The general theme was that there was a need to be respected and they felt that they were not respected. This notion is somewhat relative with what the Theodorsons (p. 307) found relative to poverty. They relate that is a “standard of living that lasts long enough to undermine the morale, health, and self-respect of an individual or group.” Although this is not an exact parallel with the theme of mixed blessing, it speaks to the notion of self-respect which was found to be a sub-theme within the larger context. Many of the study participants took great pains to note that they did not like being poor because of the way they feel about themselves. They often talked about dreaming of a better life.

Another sub-theme relative to the theme regarding welfare was the percentage of African-Americans represented in both the pool of candidates for the study and the actual study participants. Both groups reflected the Clarence Page (1998) citation of *New York Times* poverty reporter Jason Deparle’s report that shows that black families now outnumber whites on welfare. While this study does not support this claim with any comprehensive quantitative data from all HCCS welfare to work clients, it does point out the numbers represented in the indicated groups. The research in Chapter Two does reveal the fact that a paradoxical barrier of “work first” is part of the new 1996 welfare reform law. This literature

also reveals that many recipients already attending college when the law was passed were forced to drop out, as many as 20,000 in New York City alone (Schorr, 2001). What we found with the study participants is that almost none had a clear understanding of “work first.”

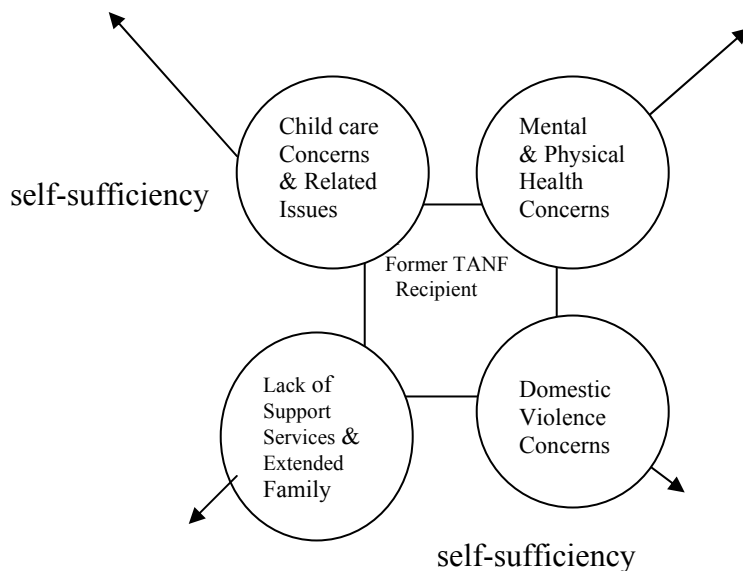
Faced with competing responsibilities

The NW Regional Education Lab (2001) has a program that supports the research finding that welfare to work students have competing responsibilities. This California program called welfare to work through service is funded by the Corporation for National Service in collaboration with the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. This program relates that participants share their thoughts (as they have done in this study) about balancing homework, child care, and other family responsibilities.

Other research literature found in Chapter Two also parallels the study findings. Many of the research study participants talked about coordinating school responsibilities with work obligations and child care. In fact, many have lost employment because of the inability to manage this effectively. Brock, Grossman, and Hamilton (2001) remark that welfare recipients struggle with competing responsibilities of work, education, and training commitments. The literature also includes work by Quint, Musick, and Ladner (1994) that studied young mothers on welfare and found juggling school, family, and often work, as well as pregnancy (one of the study participants was pregnant while attending HCCS), and the children(s) father. This literature is very consistent with the findings related to this theme. The study findings were in congruence with the literature as most of the study participants reported issues with the children’s fathers and competing responsibilities.

Children are a major concern/Challenges and barriers exist

The literature in Chapter Two is extremely consistent with the findings of the study regarding the challenges and barriers that exist for former TANF clients that are seeking self-sufficiency. As the illustration below illustrates these common barriers include such things as child care and related concerns, mental and physical health concerns, lack of support services and extended family and domestic violence concerns.



The literature suggests that these barriers are significant inhibitors to any successful move to self-sufficiency. Both the literature and the study found that child care is probably the most significant of all barriers associated with welfare programs. The cost of child care is also a concern as well. Indeed, the literature reveals that a General Accounting Office (1994) report found that child care subsidies were a major factor in the poor getting and keeping a job. The study also found that several study participants had concerns about the cost of child care. Moreover, several relate that they lose their child care subsidy once they begin working, and their income increases. This is an obvious concern because it is both ironic and paradoxical, in the fact that it penalizes

individuals as they climb the economic ladder. One study recipient suggested that TANF clients be weaned off of child care as they make wage gains, instead of being abruptly cut off from this vital assistance. The literature, as did the study participants, spoke to the fact that many jobs, particularly those in the service and medical industries, involve jobs with non-traditional working hours such as evenings, weekends, and holidays. This situation has an adverse impact on former TANF recipients and their transportation and child care needs.

Other common barriers found in both the research study and the literature are domestic violence and depression. Depression was noted in a significant number of the study participants. Many, as did the literature, suggested that they went through depression at some point in their lives. One study participant talked about being on Prozac at one point in her life. Another talked vividly about the physical, emotional, and verbal abuse that she suffered as a result of being in an abusive relationship. This same study participant even talked about the suicidal ideation that she had as a result of the low self-esteem she attributed to this abuse. Still another study participant supported the literature in this area when she linked her sudden poverty (loss of a good job) with bouts of depression.

Yet another barrier found in both the research findings and the literature is the lack of support services that former TANF recipients have. Many study participants related that they did not have an extended family to assist them. Some indicated they were not aware of, or did not know how, to access support services. Brock, Grossman, and Hamilton (2001) cite the Ambassador program at Sacramento City College in California that connects college and community resources, in addition to providing the essential emotional support that students need. This literature supports much of what was discussed in this area by study participants. Each one talked about their emotional needs while

transitioning into self-sufficiency via the community college route. Study participants, particularly those that had not been in school in several years (one, almost thirty years) reported not knowing what to expect, needing to fit in, and to be accepted. The literature discusses how the Sacramento City College model pays TANF students for providing counseling and support that students need.

At least one study participant related the inability to pass a required test in one of the training programs. She essentially had low basic education skills and was unable to proceed without further tutoring and assistance. Zill (1991) reported that women on welfare were found to have low levels of cognitive skills. Longer-term recipients were found to have lower cognitive skills than short-term welfare recipients. The aforementioned study participant was a long term welfare recipient. Indeed, an AACCC Research Brief (1999) found that 63.9 percent of welfare recipients enrolled in community colleges lack basic literacy and numeric skills, and 63 percent lack personal management skills (soft skills if you will). The lack of these skills, as suggested by the study participant's responses and the literature, is a significant barrier to self-sufficiency.

Support services are important

This theme was found throughout the study themes and the literature in Chapter Two. The notion here is that the likelihood of success in self-sufficiency programs increases with support services. Study participants cited study groups as being an important factor in their experiences at Houston Community College. Job development, placement assistance and retention support services were all mentioned by the study participants as being an extremely significant part of their HCCS experience. These needs are consistent with the literature as well. New York City's LaGuardia Community College is cited in the literature for the learning communities it has established. Through

these learning communities or “clusters” students report that learning has been made easier.



Job development, placement, retention key to success.....

Jenkins and Fitzgerald (1998, p. 5) explain that each student is required to complete two terms of internship. This allows them entry into the world of work. The internships are work-based learning experiences that help to enhance what is taught in the classroom. The literature suggests that the project has been so successful that nearly 65% of the students report being hired by the company they intern with. The work based learning opportunities and learning communities are thought to be key reasons why retention and graduation rates are so high at LaGuardia.

HCCS was a good experience

This theme is certainly consistent with much of the literature as well. Overall, the majority of the study participants reflected on their HCCS experience as

being a generally good one. These experiences correlate very well with those of the former TANF recipients enrolled in California's AmeriCorps program. NW Regional Education Lab (2001) reported that a student in that welfare to work program related that her experiences had not only been good for her career, but it has helped her really understand her own children a lot better.

HCCS met their expectations

The study participants, for the most part, suggested that HCCS met their expectations. Most, say they came for training that would provide them with a skill that would move them toward self-sufficiency. The majority of them got what they initially came for. In the research literature, Mota (1999, p. 246) details the success of TANF recipients in Massachusetts Community College's Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children who have entered the workplace. This program meets the needs of students through the delivery of intensive, high caliber, short-term academic skills training and employment services. Students can access employment opportunities that will assist in the transition from welfare to self-sufficiency.

Want to stay connected with HCCS

To a person, each of the study participants explained that they would like to continue on the road to a better future. The majority of them connected HCCS with that future. Although much of the literature does not speak that directly to this theme, it does suggest that individuals exhibiting a willingness for economic improvement will need continued linkages with institutions such as community colleges. One community college cited as an example of such a linkage is New York State's Corning Community College's Learn to Earn program. This program has a seamless process that focuses service delivery through a progression of education and workforce development activities that begin with the development of an individualized development plan.

It then adds a work-based component which can include volunteer and work experience opportunities combined with post-secondary education. Job readiness and skill assessment is the next stage followed by linkage with short-term training to obtain critical entry-level employment skills. This is followed by employment readiness, placement, and most importantly, post-employment training and assistance. Referrals are made to community based organizations as needed (<http://corning-cc.edu/learntoearn>). The significant part of this process starts with the development of the individualized development plan (none of the study participants mentioned this in their HCCS experiences) which links them inextricably with the college through post-employment training and assistance. This is certainly an opportunity area for HCCS that will be discussed in more detail in the recommendations section in this chapter.

A sub-theme found throughout the participant data is that they all were enrolled in short-term, non-credit, continuing education programs. The research literature provides rich explanation as to why this is, and is a growing trend with TANF recipients. Roberts (2001) explains why HCCS and other community colleges have embraced this population:

- enrollment concerns make seeking new populations of students more attractive
- grants and occupational training programs generate revenue (Texas also provides additional revenue through contact hour reimbursement)
- local businesses are requiring better trained students
- community pressures are demanding service for these populations

A paper by Bailey et al.(2003,p.5) entitled “ Community Colleges and the Equity Agenda: What the Record Shows” presented at the 2003 AACC National Conference in Dallas, Texas suggests some concerns regarding short-

term, non-credit training. They suggest that:

while most community colleges offer extensive job-related training through non-credit, continuing education or contract training programs, certificate and degree programs account for the largest share of activity (in terms of budget and staffing) in nearly all community colleges. Certainly the lions' share of the public funding that community colleges receive is intended to support college-credit education leading to certificates and degrees. Publicly funded financial aid is explicitly designed to help students complete degrees, not merely to support them in taking a few job related courses. If most students only wanted short-term training then community colleges are generally not well organized to provide such training cost-effectively. Their academic departments, tenured faculty, and degree major requirements are too rigid and slow-moving to allow for training that is responsive to rapidly changing workplace needs. Community colleges have developed continuing education and contract training divisions precisely to meet the demand for this sort of training. While non-credit training may help them become better workers or advance in their jobs in an economy that rewards both competence *and* credentials, community colleges would not serve the long-term interests of their students by emphasizing short-term, job specific training over degree education. And, indeed, community colleges show no signs of seeking to abandon their degree missions.

Conclusion

The general conclusions of this research study are that a) experiences and interactions away from HCCS can shape the HCCS experience, b) children are a key factor in decisions that are made by TANF clients, c) HCCS made a difference in the lives of the study participants, and d) the most salient factor to

emerge from this study was that study participants were able to connect HCCS with future experiences that may lead to self sufficiency.

The overarching theme found throughout this research is summed up in the following metaphor and grand narrative.



HCCS can be a vehicle to self-sufficiency

The research revealed that participant's treatment by welfare agencies was often viewed as unpleasant and demeaning. Study participants related that they were talked down to and made to feel belittled. Moreover, not one single study participant was able to fully explain the "work first" or time limit policies that have a direct affect on them. This reality, and supporting literature, suggests that interactions with welfare officials may not be yielding information essential to them and their families. Also, some study participants report that social services agencies may be providing them information about HCCS training and services that may be inadequate or inaccurate. At least one participant discussed being physically abused by her domestic partner. She did not relate to the researcher any knowledge of the Family Violence Option (FVO). The Wellstone/Murray amendment gives states the option of adopting the Family Violence Option, which allows states to waive work requirements and time limits, and to increase services to victims of domestic violence and their family without

being penalized financially. This allows victims of domestic violence the time needed for a successful transition off of welfare by allowing flexibility in complying with work and job training requirements. This waiver also allows victims to receive TANF benefits, without having to identify the father of their children or supply child support enforcement agencies with other pertinent information. It did not appear to this researcher that any of the study participants were made aware of this domestic violence provision by their TANF case managers.

Other experiences such as mental and physical health concerns, child care concerns, unemployment, family problems, substance abuse, and transportation have a direct impact on classroom performance, attendance, attentiveness and other HCCS based experiences. Several study participants reported histories of depression. One had self-disclosed previous thoughts of suicide. Several study participants reflected on being homeless. One, while attending HCCS. Good self-esteem, being respected and treated well by other agencies (before they came to HCCS) was a key element to how they perceived their HCCS experiences. Additionally, experiences after the completion of training were a factor in their experiences at HCCS. Many connected their inability to find suitable employment and other post-training activities with their overall HCCS experiences.

Children are the center of the study participants' lives. Albeit, all of the study participants were female and mothers. Nevertheless, they predicated almost all decisions on the effect they would have on their children. Many placed the children's needs and desires first, and at least two had been terminated from employment situations because of issues involving children. At least three study participants reported being consumed by their concern for a child who was having academic difficulty in school, or who had dropped

out of school all together. Nearly all study participants linked their ability to seek training and other self-sufficiency efforts to the needs of their children. Children were also major factors regarding whether to drop out of HCCS. Several talked about this being a concern regarding their HCCS experiences. Many have to choose employment over training and education because of the need to feed and cloth their children. The majority of the study participants have multiple children, several have four or more. The fact that eleven of the study participants are single mothers simply adds to the concerns they have for their children. This concern is made even more real because of the lack of extended family and support systems for many of the study participants. The researcher visually noted that during the visitations to the various neighborhoods of the study participants, the majority lived in high-density, high-crime, low income areas. This can obviously be a concern for the study participants and their families. One study participant remarked that she does not let her children go outside unless she sits on the porch to watch them. She expressed concern for the possible criminal activity that is probable in her apartment complex (the researcher should note that some home visits were made at night). Nearly all of the study participants indicated that their children are on their minds constantly while they are involved in work and school activities.

The cost, quality, and unavailability of child care is of particular concern to many of the study participants. This appears to be significant because many expressed a desire to return to HCCS, but prefaced their comments with “if I can get my kids situated.” Many of the study participants have chosen to work in occupations with non-traditional hours such as healthcare. Their continued growth and development in their occupations may be contingent upon their flexibility in working various shifts. This obviously will have an affect on their children as well.

Good, bad, or indifferent, each study participant, in various ways, related that they were better for having made their way to HCCS. Their varied experiences reflect a wonderful mosaic of shared encounters with other students, faculty, administration, staff, and an environment that many had seen for the first time. One talked about having a “life changing experience,” still another remarked how she “never thought she would make it in college.” For her, the experience was a demystifying one. It allowed her to tap into heretofore unrealized and untapped potential to achieve her goals. While only two of the ten considered themselves in good paying employment situations, all thought that self-sufficiency was now a realistic goal. Moreover, they were able to quantify what matters most in their lives and realized that the HCCS experience contributed to that realization. One study participant wondered out loud how her life may have been different had she not made her way to HCCS. She related that she now laments about not having come directly to HCCS immediately after high school. The research found that, for the most part, welfare reform has had some positive outcomes. Much of what was found in this research supports that assertion. In fact, many of the findings parallel Kaufman’s view that:

The overhaul of welfare has been a success. Seven years after Congress rewrote the rules in an effort to end long-term dependency on benefits, hundreds of thousands of Americans have moved from welfare to work, many of them substantially raising their incomes (Kaufman, 2003).

One of the underlying sub-themes within the positive experiences at HCCS was the sense of worth that it had given many study participants. Many reported having their self-esteem shattered by domestic violence, through unfulfilled expectations by their children’s father, or through being castigated and chastised by the welfare system. This was something that many claimed independent credit for. They felt their HCCS experiences were something that they were

able to do on their own. It is almost as if it were a catharsis for them. Some talked pointedly about how they did not know they could accomplish something of this magnitude, others remarked that they were actually in a college environment for the first time. Another point to be made regarding their experiences is the notion of recognition. One study participant made it clear that she wanted to be publicly recognized at a graduation ceremony. She explained that it was important to her to have her accomplishments validated. It was almost as if she was not complete until she formally graduated in a public forum. This, by the way, is what almost all students at any level desire. Former TANF clients are no different in this regard. It is vitally important that they feel validated, and, more importantly, it is significant to have their children and families recognize their successes.

The literature gathered for this research supports the need for public acknowledgement and recognition for participants who have completed their training experiences. Indeed, participants in the WNW (Work Not Welfare) program at Moraine Park Technical College have a graduation ceremony to celebrate training completion. Moreover, they not only invite family and friends, but also potential employers, the media, and faculty. It is important to invite non-program faculty from other areas of the college as well. This way the programs and program participants become part of the organizational culture of the institution. Celebrations at Moraine Park Technical College helped make the training part of a positive transitioning experience from welfare to work.

Welfare is a cyclical phenomenon. Jason DeParle, former welfare reform writer for the *New York Times*, related to this researcher that true welfare reform may not be measured by the welfare recipient but whether or not their children become welfare recipients (Personal communication via telephone with Jason DeParle, Oct. 1999). Accordingly, every opportunity that the

children of welfare recipients have to observe the success of their parent (s) is a step in a positive direction.

Another aspect of the study participants' experiences is that it was such a contrast to the life they had on welfare. They are able to see alternatives to their life chances. One study participant captured the essence of this with these comments in response to her understanding of welfare time limits and "work first:"

I know there is a time limit now. You have a limited time to be on TANF.....and get in their work program...you can get ahead better in life instead of sitting here on TANF, you know,...because it's on a fixed income. You're just not gonna get no further, you know.....I just felt with myself, you know, that's why I got up and did something for myself, you know to help me and my children.....

This study participant, like many others, because of her HCCS experiences, is now able to perceive a life without limits. This quote from another study participant sums up how HCCS has made a difference in her life: "HCCS is really a good system. They offer you many things, there are no limits to what you can do....."

The most salient aspect of this study is the study participant's ability to connect HCCS with any future activities related to self-sufficiency. Study participants, for the most part, feel HCCS is a vital link to any efforts that will improve their lives. Their collective experiences, however long or short, have provided them with the ability to see options in their future. Indeed, HCCS is seen as the vehicle that can lead them to a better future. Many study participants related that they had no direction, no focus, no real understanding that their lives could be transformed. The central theme of this study is that because of their experiences, good or bad, at HCCS, they now realize that there is a method to

obtain a better life. HCCS is the vehicle that pointed them in a direction very different than the one in which they were headed. Several study participants related that they were mired in poverty, still caught up in the cycle of problems that continue to plague their lives. Many now explain that they see a road to self-sufficiency through HCCS. It was important for this study to capture the experiences of the study participants in their own words. Far too often, systems, organizations, and other bureaucracies rush to speak for them. But, here, in their own words, they cry out to let others know that they too, have needs and desires. These desires, the research has found, are no different than those of non welfare-to-work community college students. Perhaps, that is the greatest conclusion and revelation of this study. The characteristics of the study participants:

- Low income;
- single parents;
- in need of child care;
- in need of support services
- low self esteem;
- have mixed feelings about the welfare system;
- many, are first generation college students;
- apartment dwellers;
- mired in poverty and hopelessness;
- many, are victims of domestic violence;
- homeless at times;
- physical and mental health concerns;
- residing in high risk areas;
- concerned for their children;
- some, caring for grandchildren;

- view the community college as a vehicle to self sufficiency, and are no different, for the most part, from the issues and concerns expressed by traditional community college students. In fact, some would argue that the traditional community college student is the former TANF recipient in many urban and rural community colleges. The fact that they are able to connect the community college with a positive future is rightly a good thing. This bodes well for community colleges, for it is that they are situated in the community, and are positioned well to meet the educational and training needs of these students. Moreover, they are uniquely positioned in most communities to provide referral services that will further enhance the study participants' opportunities for self-sufficiency. Consequently, the community college can, and does, put former TANF recipients on the road to self-sufficiency. This is echoed by the research collected for this study in other community college welfare to work experiences. The PACE program at Dutchess County Community College in New York is an example of this notion. Having moved nearly 400 people from welfare to work, they estimate that more than half of their non-program graduates found employment due to the first step that the program provided (<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/workforce/welfare/wfdcc.html>).

Answers to Research Questions

With regard to the three research questions asked in this study, the first question regarding the definition of the 1996 welfare reform law is detailed extensively in Chapter One of this report. With regard to the second and third questions, the effects of the 1996 welfare reform law on HCCS were both challenging and instructive. HCCS was challenged, and did respond, to the new laws by securing millions of dollars (through the competitive grant process) from the state of Texas and the U.S. Department of Labor. This funding allowed

HCCS to develop non-credit, customized, short-term training for hundreds of TANF recipients. The overall effect on HCCS is that, as an institution, it responded proactively and favorably to the new law. HCCS touched the lives of students that, heretofore, had little or no connection to a college environment. Regarding the third question, outcomes. The 12 former TANF recipients who were part of this study, although not meant to be representative of all former TANF recipients served by HCCS, reported, for the most part, that their expectations were met. More importantly though, they have begun a relationship with a training provider that can be a vehicle to self-sufficiency. HCCS, now entering its sixth consecutive year of receipt of self-sufficiency funding has been able to develop programmatic methodology that enhances the success of future TANF recipients (who may enter future HCCS training programs). Lastly, HCCS because of its foray into the welfare to work arena, has been able to incorporate many of the lessons learned into other areas of the college. The “mainstreaming” of these best practices can only reflect positively on current and future students who attend the Houston Community College System.

The challenge for HCCS was to provide short-term, customized, training to former TANF recipients in a “work first” environment. The instructive part of this process taught HCCS that longer term training leading to certificates, licensing, associates and bachelor’s degrees greatly increases the long range probability of self-sufficiency. HCCS is quickly learning that today’s economy is a “knowledge economy” and that postsecondary education is the gateway to economic opportunity. Good paying jobs that pay more than subsistence wages require at least some education or training beyond high school, even at the entry-level. The best paying jobs with the brightest prospects for career advancement require college degrees (Bailey et. al, 2003, p.1). The net effect to HCCS is that it must continue to find creative ways to balance the paradoxes found within the

new welfare reform laws, while continuing to achieve the mandated outcomes required by the various funding sources. HCCS' experiences and outcomes with welfare reform virtually mirror that of community colleges in Wisconsin thought to be the standard for welfare reform initiatives. Dennis Nitschke, the former vice president of corporate and community services for Moraine Park Technical College (from 1992 through 2000), oversaw many of the college's welfare to work initiatives. Nitschke (2001, pp.46-7) responds to the question of: Has welfare reform worked in Wisconsin? And to the question of: Has it affected the technical colleges? He answers yes on both counts, but with certain qualifiers. He explains that:

Wisconsin's transition into W-2 (welfare to work) has been well publicized and has resulted in tens of thousands of individuals moving from welfare to work. The technical colleges, labor unions, employers, and partner agencies stressed the need to have coordinated training, though this proved to be a challenge. The driving force for change in W-2 continued to be work first. More recently, Wisconsin has elected to apply some TANF funds for a program entitled Workforce Attachment and Adjustment. Ten million dollars has been allocated for the purpose of training and other support systems necessary to attract new workers and then retain incumbent workers qualifying for the funding (both employer-sponsored training and individual initiated training). This represents a major opportunity for college involvement. The Wisconsin welfare reform experience is still unfolding, as it is in other states. State legislation must be coordinated with the federal Workforce Investment Act, the Welfare to Work Act, and many other complementary and sometimes conflicting laws. The task of educating and training Wisconsin's workforce has not diminished; rather, it has increased. The rules have changed, the technical colleges are now having to work to establish new and changing

partnerships, and the funding levels to accomplish this challenge are diminishing. As before under JTPA, the two-year colleges will find a way to remain a key player in building a comprehensive workforce.

Implications for Policy

Certainly there is much to be gleaned from the data collected for this study. The most glaring of which is the fact that all twelve of the study participants reported significant misunderstanding of the “work first” and time limit policies related to the 1996 welfare reform act. Policy in this area is certainly not as clear to them as it should be. This is a troublesome concern at best that does not reflect well on a system designed to move recipients toward self-sufficiency.

Perhaps another policy implication is the current policy requiring grantees (such as HCCS) to only provide follow up services to students for only a short time. Many of the participants in this study related that they desire more, and frequent, information from Houston Community College. Many of the grants that HCCS obtained have a follow up period that is usually from three to six months. Many of the study participants had not had any contact from HCCS in over a year or more.



Former students need frequent contact from HCCS.....

Perhaps, it is in no small coincidence that the study participants who reported the highest level of satisfaction, and in some cases success, are the ones with the greatest amount of contact with Houston Community College. This contact is beneficial to both sides. It allows the former student to be informed and feel valued. It also allows Houston Community College an opportunity to discover what kinds of services the former student may need. More importantly, though, to the institution, it allows the college to re-enroll the former student in more classes. These classes may be credit-bearing classes that may lead to transfer to a four year college increasing the chance for greater self-sufficiency.

Wisconsin's Moraine Valley Technical College's staff learned a series of new paradigms that have potential policy implications. Nitschke (2001) relates that these new paradigms relate to training, partnering and community change initiatives. He suggests that:

Change through welfare reform must follow more of an agricultural change model than a mechanical change model. In a mechanical change model, efforts focus on such factors as trying to fix people because there is something wrong; telling the participants they must try harder but without making significant changes in the support systems; establishing only short-term traditional measures of success; maintaining a management philosophy of control in which the county Department of Social Services has all of the authority; and spreading blame to others (individuals, agencies, and the state.)

In the preferred agricultural change model, efforts focus on recognizing that behaviors, attitudes, and paradigms must be changed; understanding that welfare reform is a community problem requiring broad systemic change; identifying long and short-term measures of success; placing authority with the community steering committee to influence the change process along with social services; structuring activities toward accountability as

opposed to tightening the control mechanisms; and focusing on solutions rather than blame.

Involvement in welfare to reform must be viewed as an economic development initiative rather than a social reengineering initiative. Having the proper long-term vision and mission for those involved in the change (welfare recipients as well as community partners) is essential for the necessary decision-making processes, development of measure of success, and sustainability of critical community partner involvement; businesses in particular. Employers would not remain committed unless there was some return to what was deemed important to their livelihood, and that was to build and maintain a prepared workforce for the community. The challenge was not simply to move people from not working to the world of work. It was moving them in a meaningful way to self-sufficiency as well as meeting the workforce needs to move the community forward.

Nitschke (2001) summarizes this view by indicating that success is measured in new ways, such as how success is defined by the participants and their new employer rather than simply the percentage drop in welfare rolls.

Implications for Practice

The lessons learned here are of significance for current and future practitioners. One overarching implication is that not everyone is suited to serve the welfare to work population. As a former practitioner, and welfare recipient, the researcher has witnessed practitioners whose own value judgments precipitated every encounter with a TANF recipient. The researcher recalls a comment heard several years ago by a fellow practitioner in another state (just after the reform law took effect in Texas in 1999) regarding this practice. He remarked to the researcher that this is truly “God’s Work,” and that it is not for everyone. He cautioned the researcher that it is not unusual to

have high staff turnover. Needless to say, many of HCCS' welfare to work programs and staff have come and gone. Practitioners should note that welfare to work recipients have a multitude of barriers when they arrive. Not all come with the same degree of motivation, and some come because they are forced to come by a caseworker from the welfare office. Many of the problems that welfare recipients arrive with appear intractable. However, staff have to believe that they can be overcome. This is important because many times the welfare recipient does not believe they can be overcome. Several participants in this study revealed that they lacked confidence because of depression, domestic violence, and a myriad of other challenges. Practitioners will need to have the ability to have programs that address barriers that keep these former welfare recipients engaged in learning. Practitioners should also note that the TANF population is a very transient population. Homelessness, shelters, frequent movement, disconnected phones, unlisted and changed phone numbers are part of the milieu of welfare life. The researcher notes that out of 400 potential participants contacted for possible participation in this study, nearly ¼ or 100 had disconnected, changed, unlisted or no phone numbers.

Practitioners should also be comfortable with the notion of poverty and what it can do to the human spirit. Being poor does not make you happy, it most certainly can make you depressed. The researcher conducted much of the research for this study throughout the month of December. The holiday spirit filled the air, however, many of the study participants visited did not appear to be in a joyous mood. Perhaps because the holidays bring with them the realization that they may not be able to provide for all of their children's wants and desires (many had multiple children). Being comfortable with poverty allows the practitioner to develop an empathetic imagination that helps focus on what the TANF recipient thinks and feels. This is particularly important

to practitioners in college environments who come to the practice with middle-class values, mores and behaviors. Shipler (2004,p. 24) explains that “ poverty is a peculiar, insidious thing, not just one problem but a constellation of problems; not just inadequate wages but also inadequate education; not just dead-end jobs but also limited abilities, not just insufficient savings but also unwise spending, not just the lack of health insurance but the lack of healthy households.”

Practitioners should also come to grips with the fact that real change in the lives of former TANF recipients sometimes is not manifested immediately. In many cases, welfare has been a multigenerational phenomenon for them. Change may come in very small increments. It is often relative to the particular former TANF recipient. The fact that they see themselves as someone other than a welfare recipient may be a significant change for them. Also, sometimes the change manifests itself in behavior long after they have left your program. One study participant noted that she finally came to the realization that living in an abusive situation was not how she wanted to live the rest of her life. She made an independent decision to change her circumstances. Sometimes all you do is plant a seed that may grow later on. Change may also come by the fact that their children are no longer on welfare when they grow up. Never underestimate the importance of children seeing a parent get up and go to work everyday.

Still, another point for practitioners to understand regarding services to the welfare to work student, is the notion of recognizing and celebrating achievements, however small. Study participants expressed the pride that they felt in doing something on their own. One vociferously stated that she wanted a graduation ceremony for completing her short-term training. Again, empathy allows practitioners to view the concept from the student’s perspective. Every six months that a former TANF recipient is not on welfare and is employed is worth a celebration, albeit, it may be just cookies and punch, but it is recognition.

Practitioners can take note from the lessons learned from the Moraine Valley Park Technical College experiences with short term training. Nitschke (2001, p. 39), former vice-president of corporate and community services at the college, provides a narrative account of their experiences:

The three college-identified customers; the Department of Social Services, WNW (work not welfare) clients, and area employers, caused the college to redefine its instructional roles and its measures of success, base of power, and breadth of relationships. MPTC serves over twenty-four thousand headcount students annually, is accredited by the North Central Accrediting Association, delivers programs approved by the Wisconsin Technical College System Board, employs faculty who meet carefully prescribed state certification standards, and is recognized by area businesses for its strong customized training capacity. The college thought it had the complete answer to WNW (work not welfare) short-term training issues.

Nitschke (2001, p.40) talks here about how collaborative experiences helped MPTC identify the real training needs of welfare to work clients:

MPTC had a food service and a culinary arts program with an active program advisory committee and felt confident that its staff understood what competencies the new ten-week training should address. A short-term training group was created consisting of employers, social services staff, other training organizations, and outside advisors. The college presented what it thought would be appropriate competencies and curriculum but found that it would significantly miss the mark.

Here is an important point for practitioners to catch regarding the MPTC experiences with short-term training needs, as Nitschke (2001, p.40) continues :

The overwhelming need was for soft skills (communications, interpersonal behaviors, teamwork, and problem solving). The short-term training group

wanted at least 60% of the training to focus on soft skills, this is not unusual. Employers said they would commit to training occupational competencies and sending employed workers back to MPTC if new workers showed up for work three days in a row, were productive when they arrived at work, and could get along with coworkers and their supervisor. This employer response was a result of the high staff turnover rates and cost of poor performance of some of their current workforce, not a direct reflection on the WNW (work not welfare) training participants. They expressed their need clearly. The college took time to listen carefully to an expanded source of stakeholders and then acted in cooperation with social services and employers, to modify the curriculum, support system, and accountability measures for these short-term training programs.

An important point for practitioners to understand is that it is important to have the same understanding of the various definitions that are attached to welfare to work language. Consider the example here from MPTC (Nitschke, 2001, p.41):

Part of the college's overall response was to clarify several key definitions. There was an obvious difference between the terms *job readiness* and *work Readiness* which need to be addressed. *Job readiness* indicates preparation of an individual for a particular job. The need for job readiness occurs several times in an individual's career and can result from technology changes, promotion, career change, and other factors. *Work readiness* indicates preparation of an individual for the general working world, in other words, having the required soft skills. Employers and others were telling the college that job readiness without work readiness was a sure guarantee for failure for both the employee and the employer. Once work ready, employees could learn on the job and learn job ready skills in a variety of ways.

Practitioners should note that the lack of agreement on terms and definitions in welfare to work programs can lead to failure. There should always be constant dialogue about definitions and understanding with all stakeholders, including the welfare to work participant. It is real important that everyone clearly have a common understanding of all operational definitions. Here, Nitschke (2001, p.41) talked about more definitions:

Two additional definitions were developed and used during this WNW (work not welfare) period. The terms *education and training* were often used interchangeably so the following definitions were developed: *education* is just-in-case knowledge and is similar to a suitcase on a long trip (you should have enough clothes to last you for a while); *training* is just-in-time knowledge and is similar to a carry-on bag on a trip (you must pick up more clothing when you arrive).

Implications for Future Research

This study is a snapshot of 12 former TANF recipients of the Houston Community College System. It is limited to that and is not intended to represent any other period in time, nor is it intended to provide all of the answers to welfare reform. Consequently, continued study is needed to look at several other aspects of welfare reform. The data from the study participants reveal a few possible suggestions. More research needs to be done on the fathers of the children to determine why they left their families, and why have they limited their involvement with their children, and what affect, if any, does their absence have on their children's view of fatherhood.

Another area in need of further investigation is to explore what employers who have hired former TANF recipients have to say about them, particularly long-term employees. A comprehensive study has not been done in this area by the Houston Community College System. Information from such a

study may provide important data regarding the quality and adequacy of HCCS training programs. This information may also help HCCS with their non-welfare to work population.

The researcher feels that this study can be further enhanced by continued tracking of these twelve former TANF recipients over a longer period of time, perhaps several years. This research may reveal at what points in the lives of these individuals barriers impede success most significantly. Long-term research will require funding that will allow the researcher(s) the needed resources to provide new, meaningful data. One suggestion is that the new study be made into a documentary detailing the lives of these recipients over an extended period of time. This new research might include video footage of study participants' engaged in family life at home, sort of "a day in the life of" if you will. Footage may include interactions at HCCS and interviews with employers of the study participants. One significant piece of this new research should attempt to capture study participants' encounters and experiences at the welfare offices with welfare caseworkers. It is hoped that the addition of video will add perspective and enhance the written data that has been and will be collected.

Recommendations

The study participants provided a significant amount of data from which to conduct data analysis, develop themes, and draw conclusions. This information was also useful in the formulation of recommendations. The first recommendation is that the Houston Community College System continue serving the welfare population by soliciting funding through grants and other sources. Continued service to former TANF recipients is part of the community colleges mission of being an open-access institution. Moreover, with the cyclical nature of the economy, there may always to a need to provide services to this

population. Here are some additional recommendations based on the study:

- Develop and maintain flexible on site child care for TANF recipients (and other HCCS students) at multiple sites;
- refer all TANF recipients for mental health screening prior to program enrollment;
- mainstream welfare to work program graduates into HCCS college alumni lists and send frequent college info to them;
- contact former TANF students and attempt to enroll them in credit courses;
- provide domestic violence awareness training to all TANF recipients and their significant others;
- work in concert with local agencies to develop a standardized assessment mechanism for program applicants to consistently identify abuse;
- make former TANF recipients aware of HCCS support services, including job development, referral, placement, scholarships, counseling and financial aid;
- gather information about current employment retention strategies; identify why former TANF recipients stay, leave, and what makes a difference;
- ensure former TANF recipients receive proper information about “work first” and welfare benefit time limit policy, coordinate this with Texas Department of Human Services;
- provide former TANF recipients with college I.D. cards and immerse them in college activities (where possible);
- include welfare to work persistence data in HCCS institutional effectiveness data and utilize the data to enhance program outcomes;
- contact successful former TANF recipients and have a public recognition ceremony that highlights their self-sufficiency efforts;

- ensure that all former TANF completers have a public graduation/recognition ceremony;
- conduct a survey to find out the preferred training times for former TANF recipients;
- have former TANF recipients attend College Day when senior colleges visit HCCS;
- continue to keep class sizes small;
- conduct a student satisfaction survey of former TANF recipients who have completed a HCCS training program;
- continue with study groups and add a peer mentoring component;
- have a drug and alcohol counselor conduct periodic workshops;
- develop computerized career exploration programs;
- make students aware of HCCS writing/reading/math labs;
- develop faculty mentor (faculty friend) program to mainstream students into HCCS life;
- give all former TANF recipients a tour of the Learning Research Center as part of their orientation to the program;
- ensure that welfare to work students are aware of their employer's EAP (employee assistance programs), and work with employers to ensure that abusers are not allowed to enter student's workplaces to intimidate them;
- ensure that every former TANF recipient enrolled in HCCS training program has an IETP, Individual Employment and Training Plan.

Here are some recommendations specific to overcoming child care barriers that were expressed by many of the participants in this study (Bender, 1998):

- Offer classes on weekends and in the evenings when alternative care is more readily available;
- combine training and child care with Head Start, Even Start, and Pre-K

programs;

- have local service agencies, unions, etc. purchase a slot in a local child care center;
- provide consumer education to parents on quality child care. Take students to visit various centers;
- create an emergency fund and/or a revolving loan program for students to access for short-term emergencies. Access transitional benefits from the local welfare agency;
- have a 1-800 number that can be accessed when child care is needed by students. Have a variety of “back up” plans available including drop-in and informal care that can be accessed within 60 minutes;
- train child care providers to care for children of other students;
- work with local child care resource and referral agencies to provide training, and access other child care options (see their website at www.earlychildhood.org);
- locate or provide drop-in child care. Purchase a spot for each age group for students to access in an emergency;
- look for, and advocate for child care options that provide extended care including 24 hour, weekend and sick child care;
- make sure that the employability or career plan and post-employment plan address child care, and a variety of options for child care including lists of providers;
- have a child care expert on your workforce development and advisory boards;
- incorporate distance learning into programs;
- develop home study modules;
- develop satellite centers throughout the local communities;

- co-locate training programs in housing developments;
- offer courses over the Internet;
- provide distance career counseling.

It is also strongly recommended that HCCS work intensely with the Texas Department of Human Services regarding the following job retention strategies:

- Ensure that all former TANF recipients are aware of the state and federal earned income tax credits (EITC). There are estimates that indicate that EITC's have increased work among single mothers (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2002). The average EITC refund in 2001 was more than \$1,600 per family. It is estimated that federal EITC lifted 4.7 million people above the poverty line in 1999 (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2002). These families used this money to pay off debts, increase their savings, make home repairs, and invest in education programs;
- provide the needed one-on-one contact with TANF recipients until they have successfully transitioned into HCCS training programs;
- provide assistance with support services such as child care, transportation, counseling, and substance abuse treatment before they come to HCCS;
- provide assistance with retention services and follow up after the former TANF recipient has found employment;
- work cooperatively with HCCS to identify and track all former TANF recipients who have enrolled in HCCS welfare to work programs;
- provide HCCS with this comprehensive data so that further study and services may be provided to increase the likelihood of long-term self-sufficiency.

Additionally, some of the participants who participated in this study appear to be prepared to move toward greater self-sufficiency. Increasing their

credit worthiness, access to home ownership and job advancement appear to be logical next steps for them. The Fannie Mae organization began a pilot program with Central Piedmont Community College about two years ago. The aim was to determine if welfare to work participants who had lengthy involvement in CPCC's Pathways program were ready for home ownership. Pathways program coordinator Lindsay Embrey (personal communication, February 16, 2004) explained that the Fannie Mae organization offered dinner and a \$80.00 stipend to attract the participants. He related that nearly 80 responded, and about 30 were actually invited to dinner. Mr. Embrey remarked that Fannie Mae helps educate participants about financial responsibility through a program called Credit Smart. These efforts, while not totally complete, may certainly be worthy of replication by the Houston Community College System. It is recommended that such programs be offered not only to welfare to work participants, but to the general student population at the Houston Community College System. Programs that offer job advancement are also strongly recommended.

It is also recommended that the HCCS welfare to work program staff educate employers on the notion of job bundling. Lovell (Personal communication from Sue Lovell, 2004), National Director, Mills M.A.T.C.H program, explains that Katy Mills Mall (in suburban Houston) employers share employees so that when one company is not doing well, the employee can work for one that is. This is a win-win for everyone. The model is working so well it is being developed around the country with other Mills Malls and community college welfare to work programs. The employers save on the cost of unemployment insurance, the employee remains on the path to self-sufficiency, and the community continues to develop economically.

Finally, it is suggested that HCCS continue to serve the welfare to work population and to find creative ways to mainstream the best practices into the culture of the institution. Lehman (2004), Texas Workforce Commissioner representing employers, explains that the research suggests that welfare reform in Texas is working (Personal communication on February 18, 2004). Indeed, Lehman reports that the research indicates that the unemployment rate for former welfare recipients who were employed is half that of the non-welfare to work population(Personal communication on February 18, 2004). That being the reality, it is recommended that HCCS continue to foster activities and programs that will continue this population on the path toward greater self sufficiency. These are but a few ideas that have been gleaned from research connected with this study. It is hoped that they will be of benefit to practitioners at HCCS and similar programs.

APPENDICES

Interview Questions

Questions that were asked of all participants in this study.

1. Please tell me how long you have been a recipient of welfare.
2. Please talk about what you like least about the welfare system.
3. Please tell me about yourself and your family.
4. Please tell me about your life now. What are you doing?
5. Please tell me how you became involved with Houston Community College.
6. Please explain what you expected from your association with Houston Community College.
7. Please tell me about what you like the best and the least about your experiences at Houston Community College.
8. Please tell me about your experiences at Houston Community College.
9. What were your greatest challenges while attending Houston Community College?
10. How long have you been associated with Houston Community College?
11. Please talk about whether your expectations were met while at Houston Community College.
12. Please describe the kind of training you received while at Houston Community College.
13. Describe in your own words what coming to Houston Community College has meant to you.
14. Please describe the kind of employment you have obtained (if any) since you have been associated with Houston Community College.
15. Please describe your understanding of the “Work First” TANF requirement.
16. Please talk about what you would want to achieve five years from now.
17. Please talk about what kind of life you want your children to have.
18. Is there anything else you want to add about your Houston Community College experience that you have not already been asked?

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03.

Vita

Craig Thomas Follins was born in Brooklyn, New York on September 7, 1957, the son of Wadine Miller and Bernard Follins Sr. After completing military service in the U.S. Army, Craig enrolled in New York City Community College. In 1992, Craig completed work on his Bachelor of Arts degree at Brooklyn College (New York). Craig completed his Master's Degree in Clinical Sociology in 1995 at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. He entered the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin in August 2002 in the Community College Leadership Program, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education. Craig is currently the Director of Business Development and Outreach Services for the Houston Community College System in Houston, Texas.

Permanent Address: 5015 Kleinmeadow Court, Houston, Texas 77066

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