

# **WV WORKS 2004: Information and Perspectives Provided by WV WORKS Recipients Nearing Their 60-Month Eligibility Limitation**

Presented to the

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by the

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## **FINAL REPORT**

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## Executive Summary

This is the fourth in a continuing series of reports concerning the lives and perspectives of West Virginians who have been, or currently are, enrolled in WV WORKS. Each of these research projects was funded by West Virginia's Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) and conducted by West Virginia University's Interdisciplinary Research Task Force on Welfare Reform.

The Task Force's first report, "WV WORKS Case Closure Study," examined the lives and perspectives of West Virginians who left WV WORKS in 1999. The report was presented to DHHR and the state legislature in 1999 and can be accessed on-line at: [http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/ipa/par/Report17\\_1.pdf](http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/ipa/par/Report17_1.pdf).

The Task Force's second report, "WV WORKS 2000: The Recipients' Perspective" examined the lives and perspectives of WV WORKS recipients who were receiving benefits in 2000. The report was presented to DHHR and can be accessed on-line at: [http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/ipa/par/Report18\\_3.pdf](http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/ipa/par/Report18_3.pdf).

The Task Force's third report, "WV WORKS 2003" examined the lives and perspectives of WV WORKS recipients who had exhausted their 60 months of program eligibility. The report was presented to DHHR and the state legislature in 2004 and can be accessed on-line at [http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/ipa/par/Report21\\_2.pdf](http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/ipa/par/Report21_2.pdf).

This report examines responses to a comprehensive, mailed survey of current WV WORKS recipients who have used between 25 and 60 months of program eligibility. The ten-page, 85 question survey was constructed with input from DHHR, welfare advocacy groups, and others with expertise in social-welfare policy. The survey was mailed in July 2004 to 3,297 WV WORKS recipients who had used between 25 and 60 months of program eligibility. In order to compare the experiences of recipients according to the length of time they have been on WV WORKS, surveys were mailed by three subgroups: (1) individuals who have used between 25 and 36 months of their TANF eligibility, (2) individuals who have used between 37 and 48 months of their TANF eligibility, and (3) individuals who have used between 49 and 60 months of their TANF eligibility. Forty-eight surveys were returned as undeliverable, creating a population size of 3,249. Forty-two percent (1,373) of the mailed surveys were completed and returned.

The survey's results provide information concerning the respondent's:

- WV WORKS and WVDHHR experiences including assessment of interaction, case management, Personal Responsibility Contract, and knowledge of and access to available programs;
- enrollment in available programs (Medicaid, Food Stamps, CHIP, school clothing vouchers, LIEAP, relocation and transportation assistance, child support enforcement, state child care payment, etc.);

- demographic and economic profile;
- assessment of their current economic and social well-being;
- assessment of their child(ren)'s well-being;
- work activities and employment experiences;
- identification of barriers to self-sufficiency;
- job training and education experiences;
- assessment of child care needs;
- views on what changes they would make to improve WV WORKS

### **Survey Findings**

Among the survey's more notable findings drawn from specific questions are:

- A majority of respondents (51.4 percent) have used between 25-36 months of eligibility;
- The most frequently cited reasons for being on WV WORKS were illness or disability (37.3 percent of respondents) and not being able to find a job (37 percent of respondents);
- Approximately 15 percent of respondents were employed in a non-subsidized, wage-paying job, with a mean hourly wage of \$6.32 and a median hourly wage of \$5.65;
- Most respondents anticipate a total household income of less than \$10,000 in 2004;
- Although a majority of respondents (57.8 percent) reported owning or leasing their own car/truck/motorcycle, nearly half (49.6 percent) indicated it was "very hard" (24.5 percent) or "hard" (25.1 percent) to find transportation;
- Most of the respondents (74.4 percent) rent their home; over half of respondents (55.2 percent ) reported problems such as leaks, broken windows, exposed wiring, plumbing problems, etc.;
- Over a third of respondents (36 percent) do not have a working telephone in their home;
- Approximately a third of respondents (31.4 percent) had participated in Adult Basic Education while on WV WORKS, with 60.8 percent reporting completion of the

program; the top three reasons given for dropping out of the program were lack of transportation (32.1 percent), a health problem (30 percent), and finding a job (21.1 percent).

- Although over two-thirds (69 percent) of the respondents were engaged in some type of work activity, most (65 percent) do not meet the federal threshold of 30 hours per week; the activities most frequently reported by respondents were in educational activities other than Adult Basic Education Program (18.6 percent of respondents) and job search activities (18.1 percent of respondents);
- Fewer than half of respondents (45.5 percent) indicated they had participated in a job training program. Of this group, over three-fourths (77.3 percent) reported program completion; 26.9 percent indicated that the training had helped them get a job, 36.1 percent stated that the job training would have helped if there were jobs available, and 37 percent indicated that the training did not help them get a job.
- The most frequently identified barriers to finding or keeping a good job, cited by over one third of respondents, were: living in an area where there are no good jobs available (52.5 percent), not having the right skills/experience (39.4%), not having the right education (34.9 percent), and not having nice clothes (34.3 percent);
- Over half of respondents reported times during the last year when they did not have enough money to pay the electric, gas, or water bill (63 percent), pay for telephone service (59.3 percent), or pay for transportation (54.9 percent); over 40 percent reported times when they did not have enough money to go to the dentist (45.2 percent), buy medicine (43.4 percent), get glasses (41.8 percent), or buy food (40.7 percent);
- Over two-thirds of respondents reported times when they did not have enough money to buy their children's clothes (69.8 percent), buy them Christmas/holiday gifts (66.3 percent), or let them participate in after-school activities (64.4 percent); over half reported not being able to buy them a birthday gift (57 percent) or their school supplies (55.4 percent);
- About half of respondents (49.6 percent) reported difficulties in finding childcare, with care by a family member being the most frequently cited arrangement (40.8 percent) by respondents needing childcare;
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73.9 percent) reported satisfaction with their treatment by their DHHR caseworker.
- Despite facing very difficult life circumstances, respondents maintained a degree of optimism about their personal, financial, and children's futures;

Analysis of the three subgroups - those who have used between 25 to 36 months of their eligibility, those who have used 37 to 48 months of their eligibility, and those who have used 49 to 60 months of their eligibility - indicated the following significant differences. Those who have participated in WV WORKS for 49 to 60 months were more likely to have a negative view of their personal and financial future. Those in this same group were also more likely to lack a working telephone or a driver's license; to report times when they did not have enough money to pay the heating bill, to take their children to the doctor or dentist, or to pay for their children's school supplies or their participation in after-school activities. These individuals are also more likely to find it difficult to find or keep a job due to a lack of available jobs where they live, lack of transportation, lack of a driver's license, and experiencing mental health problems and disabilities. This same group also appears to have greater activity with the case management process. For example, they are more likely to have been in job training, in ABE classes, receive clothing vouchers and emergency aid, be asked to seek work, know how much time they have left to receive benefits under the time limits provision of WV WORKS, seek help for children experiencing drug or alcohol issues, and experience a change of case managers. However, those in the 25 to 36 months cohort were more likely to rate their case manager as poor when compared to the other subgroups.

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# **WV WORKS 2004: Information and Perspectives Provided by WV WORKS Recipients Nearing Their 60-Month Eligibility Limitation**

West Virginia University Interdisciplinary Research Task Force on Welfare Reform

## **Introduction**

The Interdisciplinary Research Task Force on Welfare Reform designed, administered, and evaluated a comprehensive representative survey of West Virginians who are nearing their 60 months of eligibility limitation for the receipt of WV WORKS benefits. Under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program, adults and their dependents are limited to 60 months of federally funded cash assistance. The purpose of the survey was to gather information that can be used to evaluate and enhance the Bureau for Children and Families' case management practices, program development, and planning capabilities. The survey provided information on a variety of topics including the following:

- Experiences of respondents on WV WORKS and with other related DHHR programs including assessment of interaction, case management, Personal Responsibility Contract, and knowledge of and access to available programs;
- enrollment in available programs (Medicaid, Food Stamps, CHIP, school clothing vouchers, LIEAP, relocation and transportation assistance, child support enforcement, state child care payment, etc.);
- demographic and economic profile;
- assessment of their current economic and social well-being;
- assessment of their child(ren)'s well-being;
- work activities and employment experiences;
- identification of barriers to self-sufficiency;
- job training and education experiences;
- assessment of child care needs;

The sample is representative of the following three subgroups of WV WORKS recipients: (1) individuals who have used between 25 and 36 months of their TANF eligibility, (2) individuals who have used between 37 and 48 months of their TANF eligibility, and (3) individuals who have used between 49 and 60 months of their TANF eligibility.

## **Survey Design**

The survey was designed in cooperation with West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources' Bureau for Children and Families' personnel, welfare advocacy groups in West Virginia, and others knowledgeable about social welfare policy. In addition, the survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Subjects at West Virginia University, Office of Research Compliance.

Because the response rate for mailed surveys is typically low, especially for survey populations with limited formal education and/or income, respondents were offered \$20 to complete the survey. Respondents were notified in the cover letter that receipt of the \$20 would not affect eligibility for current or future assistance programs.

The use of telephone surveys to either replace or supplement information provided by the mailed survey was considered but dismissed, primarily because (1) between 34-43% of respondents in the Task Force's three previous mailed surveys of similar populations indicated that they did not have access to a working phone and (2) the Task Force's three previous mailed surveys of similar populations had response rates between 50-62%.

## **Open-Ended Questions**

In an effort to supplement the quantitative nature of the survey questions, the survey included the following three open-ended questions:

- (1) Is there anything that the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources can do, or do differently, that would help you?
- (2) Is there any program or service, either offered by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources or by any other organization, that you found particularly helpful?
- (3) If there was one thing you could change about WV WORKS, what would it be?

In addition, respondents were given five lines to "Please write any additional comments in the space below."

Most of the respondents provided written comments for each of these open-ended questions. A detailed analysis of their written comments can be found in the forthcoming supplemental report.

## **Survey Sample Size**

In July 2004, WVDHHR generated mailing labels for the total population of current adult WV WORKS recipients (N=3,297) who had used between 25 and 60 months of their TANF eligibility. Individuals in this population could be in their final month of eligibility or have between one month to three years of eligibility left. In order to compare the experiences of

recipients according to the number of months of eligibility used, three subgroups were created: (1) individuals who have used between 25 and 36 months of their TANF eligibility, (2) individuals who have used between 37 and 48 months of their TANF eligibility, and (3) individuals who have used between 49 and 60 months of their TANF eligibility. The surveys were mailed by subgroup July 12, 13, and 14, 2004, using the U.S. Postal Service's address service request forwarding program. Respondents were given approximately three weeks to complete and return the surveys, though surveys were accepted even when the deadline had expired. Of the 3,297 surveys mailed, 48 were returned undeliverable, creating a population size of 3,249. A total of 1,373 surveys were completed and returned for a response rate of 42.2 percent. This is considered an exceptional response rate for a once-only mailed survey to low-income populations.

The response rates for the three subgroups are very similar and thus no group's experience is over-represented in the findings. For example, 241 out of 631 respondents who have used between 49-60 months of TANF eligibility returned the survey for a response rate of 38.2 percent. For the 37-48 months of TANF use category, 417 out of 1,060 individuals returned the survey for a 39.3 percent response rate. In the final category of TANF usage (25-36 months), 696 out of 1,558 individuals returned the survey for a 44.7 percent response rate.

### **Survey Representativeness**

The working arrangement with WVDHHR allowed the Interdisciplinary Research Task Force to have a complete list of the study population as well as population demographic data on key variables. This complete list of all adult WV WORKS recipients who have used between 25-60 months of their TANF eligibility guarantees that every individual meeting the theoretical definition for the population received a mailed survey. Table 1 compares the total population demographics with the WV WORKS 2004 survey demographics.

The variations in the demographic characteristics between the population and the sample are quite minor. In fact, the population and sample demographics are identical in terms of sex, across five categories of age, and by the number of months of eligibility used. There is a 5 percent difference in response rate by household type with more two parent households returning their surveys than is actually represented in the population. It is possible that the \$40 incentive for a two adult household (each adult received a survey and would be compensated with \$20) increased this group's response rate. Also, there is a 6.1 percent difference in response rate by education with more individuals with a high school degree or GED returning their survey than what is actually found in the population. It is possible that the literacy demands of the survey reduced the chance that some individuals without a high school degree or GED filled out the survey. Given these minor differences between the sample and the population, the Interdisciplinary Research Task Force on Welfare Reform is confident that the survey sample is representative of the survey population.

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Sample Demographics with Population Data**

	<b>Total Population Demographics from WVDHHR</b>	<b>WV WORKS 2004 Survey Demographics</b>
<u>Sex</u>		
Female	86.4%	86.2%
Male	13.6%	13.8%
<u>Household Type</u>		
One parent households	76.4%	71.4%
Two parent households	23.6%	28.6%
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Married	30.6%	31.8%
Single	36.3%	31.9%
Divorced	18.0%	22.9%
<u>Education</u>		
Have HS Degree or GED	66.9%	72.8%
Do not have HS or GED	33.1%	27.2%
<u>Age</u>		
18-20 years old	0.4%	1.4%
21-30 years old	52.9%	52.1%
31-40 years old	33.8%	33.5%
41-50 years old	11.7%	11.9%
51 through highest	1.3%	1.2%
<u>Number of Months of eligibility used</u>		
25-36 months	52.4%	51.4%
37-48 months	30.5%	30.8%
49-60 months	17.0%	17.8%

### **Methodological Notes**

There were a few cases where two adults in the same household completed a survey. In these cases, the second person's response (N=142) to questions concerning their household characteristics (i.e., Q7 which documents how many months of cash assistance eligibility they have left, and Q16 which documents use of Medicaid, Food Stamps, CHIP, etc. by anyone in the household in the past year), and children's experiences (Q35-37), could potentially be excluded from the analysis in order to avoid double-counting their answers. In these cases analyses were run both with everyone included and with the second person's responses excluded. The results were compared to see if including or excluding these cases significantly changed the results. A decision was made to include the second person's responses in the analyses because (1) the

purpose of the survey was to assess the experience of every adult currently on WV WORKS who has used between 25-60 months of TANF eligibility and (2) there were no significant differences in the results when these cases were included.

### **Respondent Demographic Profile**

The survey included a series of questions designed to provide a profile of the respondents. Overall, the majority of the respondents (like the population they represent) are females between 21-30 years old, living in single adult households, who have used 25-36 months of their TANF eligibility. In addition,

- 87.8 percent of the sample are white compared to 8.9 percent who are African Americans;
- Nearly 73 percent (72.9 percent) have a high school degree or its equivalency;
- 92 percent report that their household will receive less than \$10,000 in 2004;
- 41 percent of respondent households have two children, 30.7 percent have one child, and 18 percent have three children living with them;
- A majority (62.2 percent) of these households have a child younger than 5 years old in their home;
- Nearly half (49.7 percent) indicated they did not know how many months of TANF eligibility they had left;
- 46.3 percent of respondents live in a small town, 28.2 percent in a rural area, and 25 percent in a city or suburb;
- Over a third of respondents (35.9 percent) live in an economically distressed county;

As indicated in Table 2, there are significant differences on three variables (sex, household type, and those with a child under five in their household) when the three subgroups (those who have used 25-36 months of TANF eligibility, 37-48 months of TANF eligibility, and 49-60 months of TANF eligibility) are compared. For example, a significantly larger percentage of those who have used more (89.4 percent) and most (88.9 percent) of their TANF months are female compared to those who have used the fewest of their TANF months (83.3 percent).

In addition, a significantly larger percent of those using more and most of their TANF months (76.5 percent and 81.3 percent) are single adult households compared to those who have used the least amount of TANF months (64.9 percent). Thus, those in two parent households are significantly less likely than single parent households to use months of TANF eligibility. A significantly smaller percent of those who have used more and most of their TANF months (63.4 percent and 51.5 percent) have a child under five in their home than those who have used the least amount of their TANF eligibility (65.9 percent).

**Table 2  
Demographic Profile**

	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36 months</u>	<u>37-48 months</u>	<u>49-60 months</u>
<u>Sex*</u> (N=1,313)				
Female	86.2%	83.3%	89.4%	88.9%
Male	13.8%	16.7%	10.6%	11.1%
<u>Average Age</u> (N=1,314) (18-65 yrs)				
	31.07	30.46	31.01	32.91
<u>Marital status</u> (N=1,331)				
Single	31.8%	31.4%	31.6%	33.1%
Married	32.0%	34.1%	30.7%	28.5%
Divorced	22.8%	22.4%	21.0%	26.8%
<u>Household type*</u> (N=1,354)				
Single adult household	71.4%	64.9%	76.5%	81.3%
Two person, primary	18.1%	22.0%	14.6%	12.9%
Two person, other	10.5%	13.1%	8.9%	5.8%
<u>Race</u> (N=1,335)				
White	87.8%	89.5%	86.7%	84.7%
African American	8.9%	7.6%	8.9%	12.7%
<u>Have H.S./GED</u> (N=1,333)				
	72.9%	75.0%	68.8%	74.3%
<u>No. of children</u> (N=1,341)				
1	30.7%	32.2%	29.4%	28.9%
2	41.0%	41.9%	40.5%	39.3%
3	18.0%	15.7%	20.7%	19.7%
<u>Have children &lt; 5 in hhold*</u> (N=1,333)				
	62.6%	65.9%	63.4%	51.5%
<u>Money in household this yr.</u> (N=1,308)				
< 10,000	92.0%	91.6%	92.4%	92.3%
10,001 - 20,000	7.5%	7.6%	7.4%	7.3%
<u>No. of TANF Months left*</u> (N=1,343)				
Don't know	49.7%	62.8%	45.1%	19.8%

\*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.

Respondents were asked to indicate how many months of cash assistance (WV WORKS) eligibility they have left. Nearly half (49.7 percent) indicated that they did not know how many months of eligibility they had left. In fact, a significantly larger percent of those with the least months used indicated that they did not know (62.8 percent) how many months of eligibility they had left compared to those with more (45.1 percent) and most months (19.8 percent) of used TANF eligibility.

Table 3 reveals the variations in the location demographics. Sixty-two percent of the survey respondents live in a transitional county. There are 35.9 percent of respondents living in an economically distressed county and 2.1 percent in competitive counties. The largest percent of the sample (46.3 percent) live in a small town with 28.2 percent in a rural area, and 25 percent living in a city or suburb. The largest number of respondents are found in WVDHHR regions 4 (34.3 percent) and 2 (30.5 percent). The remainder are from region 1 (22.2 percent) and region 3 (12.9 percent).

	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36 months</u>	<u>37-48 months</u>	<u>49-60 months</u>
<u>Place</u> (N=1,319)				
Small town	46.3%	48.9%	44.2%	42.5%
Rural area	28.7%	27.1%	28.8%	33.0%
City/suburb	25.0%	24.0%	27.0%	24.5%
<u>ARC status*</u> (N=1,354)				
Transitional	62.0%	63.2%	62.4%	58.1%
Distressed	35.9%	33.8%	36.2%	41.5%
Competitive	2.1%	3.0%	1.4%	0.4%
<u>DHHR Region</u> (N=1,354)				
Region 4	34.3%	32.3%	36.5%	36.5%
Region 2	30.5%	31.5%	28.1%	32.0%
Region 1	22.2%	22.7%	23.5%	18.7%
Region 3	12.9%	13.5%	12.0%	12.9%
*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.				

There is one significant difference on the location variables (i.e., ARC status) when the three subgroups (those who have used 25-36 months of TANF eligibility, 37-48 months of TANF eligibility, and 49-60 months of TANF eligibility) are compared. A significantly larger percent of the respondents who have used more (36.2 percent) and most (41.5 percent) of their TANF eligibility live in an economically distressed county compared to those who have used the fewest months of TANF eligibility (33.8 percent). Thus, those living in competitive and transitional counties are less likely to have used more TANF eligibility than those in economically distressed counties. This finding provides support for the structural economic barriers many welfare recipients face when trying to find employment.

## **Current Economic and Social Well-Being**

Respondents were asked a series of questions designed to provide an assessment of their current economic and social well-being. Specifically, they were asked questions concerning their employment, household income, benefits received in addition to WV WORKS, life experiences, their personal assessment of their current economic and social well-being, and how they view their future and the future of their children.

### *Employment and Income*

Respondents were asked three different questions regarding their current employment in a non-subsidized, wage-paying job. In one question, approximately 13 percent of respondents indicated having a paying job; in another, the rate was approximately 15 percent; and in the third, approximately 17 percent reported having a paying job. By averaging the responses to the three questions, it is evident that approximately 15 percent of the survey respondents were employed in a non-subsidized, wage paying job at the time they filled out the survey. Over half of those employed (60.5 percent) indicated their job was permanent, a third indicated their job was temporary (35.6 percent), and the remainder indicated seasonal employment (3.9 percent). The average hourly wage reported by those in paying jobs was \$6.32, with the median being \$5.65. No significant differences were found among the three subgroups on these employment and income variables.

When asked what they expected their total household income to be for 2004, nearly all survey respondents (92 percent) answered less than \$10,000.

### *Other Benefits*

Table 4 summarizes the various benefits, in addition to WV WORKS, used by the respondent households during the previous year. The vast majority of respondents reported that their households were receiving Food Stamps (96.2 percent) and Medicaid (95.1 percent). Two statistically significant differences were found among the subgroups: the more months of eligibility a family has used, the more likely they are to have received school clothing vouchers; and those who have used between 49 and 60 months are more likely to have received DHHR emergency assistance.

**Table 4**

**During the past year, did anyone in your home receive benefits from any of the following programs:**

<b><u>Benefit</u></b>	<b><u>All Clients</u></b>	<b><u>25-36 months</u></b>	<b><u>37-48 months</u></b>	<b><u>49-60 months</u></b>
Food Stamps	96.2%	96.1%	95.7%	97.1%
Medicaid	95.1%	95.5%	94.7%	94.6%
Clothing Voucher*	70.6%	64.1%	73.1%	85.1%
LIEAP	48.7%	48.6%	47.0%	51.9%
Transportation Assistance	39.8%	39.1%	41.2%	39.4%
Emergency Aid*	30.2%	28.7%	29.3%	36.1%
Supportive Services	29.2%	29.9%	28.3%	28.6%
Child Support Enforcement	24.0%	25.4%	21.3%	24.5%
State Child Care Payment	9.5%	9.6%	11.0%	6.2%
CHIP	9.2%	8.0%	11.0%	9.5%
Relocation Assistance	1.5%	1.6%	1.4%	1.2%
None of the above	1.0%	0.7%	1.0%	1.7%

N=1,354

\*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.

### *Housing Status*

As indicated in Table 5, approximately three-quarters of the sample (74.4 percent) rent their home. A total of 10.5 percent indicated that they do not pay for housing, 7.9 percent own their home outright, and 7.2 percent own their home with a mortgage. Respondents were asked to indicate if their home has any problems such as leaks, broken window, etc. Nearly half (44.8 percent) indicated that there were no problems with their home. Over one quarter (26.7 percent) indicated that their home was too small or did not have enough bedrooms for their children. In addition, 18.2 percent indicated that they have broken windows, 17.4 percent have a leaking roof/ceiling, 16.8 percent have exposed wiring, 15.9 percent have rats/mice/roaches/insects, 11.7 percent have plumbing (such as toilet, hot water heater, etc.) that is not working, and 9.9 percent have no or too little heat in their homes. There were no significant differences between the subgroups on these variables.

**Table 5**

**Status of Home/Living Situation**

	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36 months</u>	<u>37-48 months</u>	<u>49-60 months</u>
<u>Status of home (N=1,311)</u>				
Rent	74.4%	73.0%	75.0%	77.1%
Don't pay for housing	10.5%	11.0%	11.6%	6.8%
Own outright	7.9%	9.1%	6.7%	6.8%
Own w/ mortgage	7.2%	6.9%	6.7%	9.3%
<u>Home has the following problems: (N=1,354)</u>				
Too small	26.7%	26.7%	25.9%	28.2%
Broken windows	18.2%	17.8%	19.9%	16.2%
Leaking roof/ceiling	17.4%	15.9%	19.2%	18.7%
Exposed wiring	16.8%	16.8%	16.5%	16.2%
Rats/mice/insects	15.9%	15.7%	15.1%	17.8%
Plumbing not working	11.7%	10.8%	12.5%	13.3%
No/too little heat	9.9%	8.9%	9.8%	12.9%
No problems with home	44.8%	45.4%	45.3%	41.9%

**Table 6**

**During the past year, were there times when you did not have enough money to do any of the following?**

<u>Life Circumstance</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Pay the electric, gas, or water bill	63.0%
Pay for telephone service	59.3%
Pay for transportation	54.9%
Go to the dentist	45.2%
Buy medicine	43.4%
Get glasses	41.8%
Buy food	40.7%
Pay for heat*	39.4%
Pay the rent or mortgage	35.8%
Go to the doctor	27.6%

N = 1,372

\*Statistically significant subgroup difference

*Life Experiences*

Respondents were provided a list of items and asked if there were times during the last year when they did not have enough money to pay for them. As indicated in Table 6, over half of respondents reported there were times when they did not have enough money to pay the gas, electric, or water bill, to pay for telephone service, or to pay for transportation. Over 40 percent reported not having enough money to go to the dentist, buy medicine, get glasses, or buy food; over a third reported not being able to pay for heat or the rent or mortgage, and 27.6 percent reported times when they did

not have enough money to go to the doctor.

**Table 7**

**Are there times when you cannot do any of the following for your children?**

<u>Life Circumstance</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Buy the clothes they need	69.8%
Buy them Christmas/holiday gifts	66.3%
Have enough money to let them participate in* after-school activities (sports, field trips, etc.)	64.4%
Buy them a birthday gift	57.0%
Buy their school supplies*	55.4%
Pay for their child care if needed	27.1%
Buy them personal care items	25.4%
Buy them enough food	23.5%
Afford to wash their clothes	19.5%
Take them to the doctor*	17.9%
Take them to the dentist*	16.7%
Buy their medicine	15.5%
Buy their glasses, if needed	14.4%
Get their eyes checked	12.5%
N = 1,372	
*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.	

A statistical analysis of the responses to this question indicated one significant difference between the three subgroups of respondents. The more months of eligibility a respondent has used, the more likely they were to report times when they were unable to pay for heat.

*Children's Experiences*

Respondents were presented a list of items and asked if there were times when they could not do any of the things listed for their children. As Table 7 indicates, over two-thirds of the respondents reported there were times when they could not buy the clothes their children need (69.8

percent), buy them Christmas or holiday gifts (66.3 percent), or have enough money to let them participate in after-school activities (64.4 percent). Over half the respondents reported times when they could not buy birthday gifts (57 percent) or school supplies for their children (55.4 percent), and approximately one-fourth reported times when they could not pay for their child care (27.1 percent) or buy them personal care items (25.4 percent) or enough food (23.5 percent).

A statistical analysis of the responses indicated that the more months of eligibility a respondent has used, the more likely they were to report times when they could not take their children to the doctor or the dentist, buy their school supplies, or have enough money to let them participate in after-school activities (See Appendix A).

A final series of questions was asked to determine if respondents turned to DHHR for help when their children were experiencing problems in school or with drugs or alcohol. Nearly 40 percent (38.9) of those answering the question indicated their children had experienced problems in school during the last year (513 of 1,318 who answered the question). However,

only 8 percent reported asking DHHR for help in dealing with these problems, with about half reporting that DHHR was helpful to them (48.1 percent).

When asked if their children had experienced problems during the last year with drugs or alcohol, about 20 percent (20.7) answered affirmatively (273 of 1,317 who answered the question). However, just over one percent (1.2) indicated they had turned to DHHR for help in dealing with these problems, with about a third reporting that DHHR was helpful.

One significant difference was found between the subgroups of respondents, with those having used the most months of eligibility being more likely to ask DHHR for help in dealing with their children’s problems in school or with drugs or alcohol.

**Views of Personal and Financial Future**

Respondents were asked to assess their personal and financial futures as well as the future for their children. As Table 8 shows, about a third of all the respondents viewed their personal futures as being either good (25.4 percent of those answering the question) or excellent (7.6 percent). Another third reported that their personal future looks fair (36.5 percent). The remaining third thought that their personal future was either poor (21.0 percent) or very poor (9.5 percent).

<b>Table 8</b>				
<b>Personally, do you think your future looks...*</b>				
<b>Assessment</b>	<b>All Clients</b>	<b>25-36 Months</b>	<b>37-48 Months</b>	<b>49-60Months</b>
Excellent	7.6%	8.3%	7.6%	5.6%
Good	25.4%	26.3%	27.6%	18.6%
Fair	36.5%	37.0%	33.5%	40.3%
Poor	21.0%	19.9%	21.5%	23.4%
Very Poor	9.5%	8.4%	9.8%	12.1%

\*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups. on these variables.  
N = 1327

Significant differences were found among the three subgroups of respondents, with those having used the most months of eligibility being more likely to have a negative view of their future.

Further statistical analyses indicated that those with a more negative view of their

future were more likely to be older, white respondents who live in an economically distressed county, and report mental health problems. Those who gave lower ratings to the performance of their caseworker, in another series of questions, also had more pessimistic personal views of their future.

As shown in Table 9, respondents were somewhat less optimistic about their financial future than they were about their personal future. Only about a quarter thought their financial future looked good (19.0 percent) or excellent (4.9 percent) compared to about a third who viewed their personal future as good or excellent. Of the remaining respondents, 31.5 percent said their financial future appeared fair, 30.2 percent said poor, and 14.4 percent said very poor.

There is a significant difference in respondents' assessment of their personal future by amount of eligibility used, with respondents who have used more of their eligibility being more likely to have a negative view of their financial future.

<u>Assessment</u>	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36 Months</u>	<u>37-48 Months</u>	<u>49-60 Months</u>
Excellent	4.9%	5.7%	4.7%	2.6%
Good	19.0%	20.2%	19.8%	13.9%
Fair	31.5%	32.4%	30.0%	31.7%
Poor	30.2%	29.0%	30.2%	33.5%
Very Poor	14.4%	12.6%	15.3%	18.3%
N = 1,316				
*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups.				

Further statistical analyses indicated that, as was true in terms of how respondents viewed their personal futures, those with a more negative view of their financial future were more likely to be older, white respondents who live in an economically distressed county and report mental health problems. Those who gave lower ratings to the performance of their caseworker also had more pessimistic views of their financial future. Not surprisingly, those reporting a negative view of their financial future were also more likely to be unemployed.

*Views of Their Children's Future*

As shown in Table 10, respondents were markedly more optimistic about the future of their children. The majority (56.8 percent) thought that the future looked excellent (17.0 percent) or good (39.8 percent) for their children, while the remainder assessed the future of their children to be fair (29.1 percent), poor (9.4 percent) or very poor (4.7 percent).

**Table 10**

**How do you think your children’s future looks?**

**Assessment All Clients 25-36 Months 37-48 Months 49-60Months**

Excellent	17.0%	18.2%	17.0%	13.3%
Good	39.8%	41.2%	38.9%	37.2%
Fair	29.1%	28.4%	27.7%	33.6%
Poor	9.4%	8.5%	10.7%	9.7%
Very Poor	4.7%	3.7%	5.6%	6.2%

N = 1,317

Statistical analyses indicated that, as was true in terms of how respondents viewed their own personal and financial futures, those with a more negative view of their children’s future were more likely to be older, white respondents who live in an economically distressed county and report mental

health problems. Those who gave lower ratings to the performance of their caseworker also had more pessimistic views of their children’s future. The number of children in the household was also a factor, with those having more children tending to view their children’s future more negatively than those with fewer children. However, there were no significant differences among the three subgroups of respondents in terms of how they view their children’s future.

*Comparative Views of the Future*

It is interesting to compare the survey responses with respect to the personal view individuals have of their future, their financial views of their future and their views of their children’s future. As shown in Table 11, respondents are more positive about their personal future than they are about their financial future, and are significantly more positive about what the future holds for their children.

**Table 11**

**Comparative Perspectives of Personal, Financial and Children’s Future**

<b><u>Assessment</u></b>	<b><u>Personal Future</u></b>	<b><u>Financial Future</u></b>	<b><u>Children’s Future</u></b>
Excellent	7.6%	4.9%	17.0%
Good	25.4%	19.0%	39.8%
Fair	36.5%	31.5%	29.1%
Poor	21.0%	30.2%	9.4%
Very Poor	9.5%	14.4%	4.7%

N= 1,327 and 1,316 and 1,317 respectively

## Points to Consider

- Survey respondents face many challenging life circumstances, with over half reporting times when they could not pay their utilities, for their telephone service, or for transportation.
- Over two-thirds of respondents reported times when they could not buy their children the clothes they needed, buy them Christmas or holiday gifts, or afford to let them participate in after-school activities.
- A very small percentage of respondents reported turning to DHHR for help in dealing with their children's problems in school (8 percent) or with drugs or alcohol (1.2 percent) This may reflect a perception that asking for such assistance might lead to a child protective services investigation. Case management practices might adopt a more proactive stance that requires family support specialists to discuss children's issues with the recipients and to offer to serve as a resource for assistance.
- Given the circumstances of those on WV WORKS, there is a substantial amount of optimism about their personal future, their financial future and their children's future. This may provide a positive basis upon which DHHR and other programs may build to help clients deal with their individual situations. The positive responses might indicate a willingness to respond to programmatic efforts rather than a fatalism that nothing can help their life circumstances. However, it is important to remember that the more months of eligibility that are used the more likely it is that optimism will diminish.
- The positive responses to questions about personal future, financial future and children's future may indicate attempts to cope with personal circumstances. These responses do not mean that the responses to other questions are not important or that clients do not face important challenges. The responses to other questions provide important feedback on issues with which the client and DHHR must be concerned.
- The statistical relationship between the client's view of the overall performance of their case manager and the client's personal view of their future and their view of their children's future is interesting. While a causal relationship is not determined, managers may want to consider the influence that case management has on client perspectives and the impact of client perspectives in dealing with case management.

## WV WORKS and DHHR Experiences

### Reason for Being on WV WORKS

Survey respondents were presented a list of circumstances and asked to indicate, yes or no, if this was why they were on WV WORKS. As Table 12 shows, the four most commonly cited reasons, each chosen by more than 20 percent of respondents, include some form of illness or disability in the household, not being able to find a job, attending school full-time, and lacking transportation to work. All except attending school full-time have consistently shown up as key barriers to employment in the previous welfare reform studies in West Virginia.

<b>Reason</b>	<b>All Clients</b>	<b>25-36 months</b>	<b>37-48 months</b>	<b>49-60 months</b>
Illness/disability*	37.3%	35.8%	35.3%	45.2%
Cannot find a job*	37.0%	34.6%	42.0%	35.3%
Attending school full-time*	22.5%	25.0%	22.3%	15.8%
Lack of transportation	21.8%	19.8%	23.3%	24.9%
Lack of child care	18.2%	18.8%	17.7%	17.0%
Child support problems	14.7%	15.7%	14.9%	11.6%
Birth of child	14.8%	15.8%	13.9%	13.7%
Divorce/separation	11.0%	10.3%	11.5%	12.0%
WV WORKS pays more than job	8.6%	8.2%	9.1%	9.1%
Moved into WV	7.9%	7.3%	8.9%	7.9%
Laid off from job	6.4%	5.7%	7.7%	6.2%
Quit job	4.7%	4.9%	4.3%	5.0%
Don't want to work	0.6%	0.7%	0.5%	0.4%
Death of spouse	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%	0.4%

N=1,372

\*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.

Note: percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were allowed to provide more than one reason for being on WV WORKS.

Among the subgroups, the following statistically significant differences were found: persons who had used 49-60 months of eligibility were more likely to report they needed WV WORKS because of an illness/disability, persons who had used 37-48 months of eligibility were more likely to report they needed help because they could not find a job, and persons who had used 25-36 months of eligibility were more likely to report needing help because they were attending school full-time.

*Utilization of Program*

Respondents were asked if they had ever left WV WORKS and then returned to the

program. As Table 13 indicates, almost 72 percent of all respondents have left and returned to WV WORKS. This reflects the cyclical nature of seeking and using assistance and is consistent with the patterns of usage found among TANF recipients in other states.

<b>Table 13</b>		
<b>Have you ever left WV WORKS and then returned to the program?*</b>		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
All Respondents	71.7%	28.3%
25 - 36 months	68.8%	31.2%
37 - 48 months	72.6%	27.4%
49 - 60 months	78.3%	21.7%
N = 1,361		
*Statistically significant differences across groups on these variables.		

Among the three subgroups, those who have used the most months of eligibility are significantly more likely to report leaving and then returning to the program.

*Perceptions of DHHR Office Operations*

Respondents were asked a series of questions to determine their level of satisfaction with using the local DHHR offices. As shown in Table 14, the overall level of satisfaction is positive, with most respondents expressing some level of satisfaction with DHHR office operations. Positive satisfaction ratings ranged from a low of 53.9 percent for waiting time spent to see their caseworker to a high of 89.3 percent for the office hours maintained in DHHR field offices. Among the three subgroups there was a significant difference on the question of satisfaction with office hours, with those who had used between 37-48 months of eligibility tending to express more dissatisfaction with the hours of operation. (See Appendices B-H)

**Table 14**  
**How satisfied are you with:**

<b><u>Item</u></b>	<b><u>Very Satisfied</u></b>	<b><u>Satisfied</u></b>	<b><u>Not Sure</u></b>	<b><u>Dissatisfied</u></b>	<b><u>Very Dissatisfied</u></b>
Local DHHR office hours*	18.6%	70.8%	5.5%	4.0%	1.1%
Local DHHR office location	21.7%	63.2%	5.0%	7.6%	2.4%
Treatment by local DHHR office receptionist	23.9%	56.4%	9.2%	6.9%	3.5%
Local DHHR office appearance	19.2%	65.4%	8.1%	5.9%	1.4%
Waiting time to see your caseworker	10.1%	43.8%	10.4%	24.9%	10.7%

N = 1,314 - 1,328

\*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.

*Interactions with Caseworker*

Respondents were asked a series of questions to determine their level of satisfaction with the casework process experienced as a WV WORKS recipient. As indicated in Table 15, it appears that recipients are generally positive about the nature of their interaction with their caseworkers. The highest level of satisfaction was with their personal treatment by the caseworker (73.9 percent positive) and the lowest level was with how quickly the caseworker returned phone calls (56.7 percent positive). No significant differences were found among the three subgroups on these items.

**Table 15**  
**How satisfied are you with your caseworker's:**

<b><u>Item</u></b>	<b><u>Very Satisfied</u></b>	<b><u>Satisfied</u></b>	<b><u>Not Sure</u></b>	<b><u>Dissatisfied</u></b>	<b><u>Very Dissatisfied</u></b>
Personal treatment of you	31.0%	42.9%	10.4%	10.5%	5.2%
Understanding of your situation	29.4%	36.8%	12.4%	13.3%	8.2%
Assistance with family problems	26.2%	37.1%	16.9%	14.1%	5.7%
Speed in returning calls	20.4%	36.5%	12.4%	20.8%	9.9%

N = 1,373

*Personal Responsibility Contract*

Table 16 presents responses to a number of questions regarding the Personal Responsibility Contract (PRC), the primary tool used to set expectations and focus the efforts of the recipient and case manager on the goals of WV WORKS as a work first program. While over 92 percent of respondents said the conditions and consequences of the contract were explained, close to a third indicated they did not have any say in the creation of the contract (29.3 percent), and did not see the contract as being useful (34.3 percent). Over half (54.4 percent) indicated that since signing their PRC, their caseworker had asked them to look for a full-time job, with those who had used the most months of eligibility being significantly more likely to report being asked to do so. Nearly 40 percent of the respondents indicated a change of caseworker during their experience with WV WORKS, with those utilizing 49-60 months of eligibility significantly more likely to report this experience.

**Table 16**  
**Personal Responsibility Contract Items**

<u>Item</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36</u>	<u>37-48</u>	<u>49-60</u>
Informed of PRC consequences	1,328	94.3%	95.6%	92.9%	92.8%
PRC conditions explained	1,329	92.6%	92.5%	92.0%	93.6%
Reviewed PRC in last 12 months	1,317	88.1%	87.2%	88.9%	89.3%
PRC requirements fair	1,293	85.9%	86.8%	85.4%	84.3%
Had a say in PRC contents	1,305	69.7%	67.6%	71.0%	73.4%
PRC has been useful	1,301	65.8%	65.4%	65.1%	68.2%
Caseworker has remained same*	1,318	61.2%	60.3%	62.2%	62.3%
Caseworker asked you to seek job*	1,302	54.5%	52.3%	55.7%	58.4%

Note: reporting the percentage of respondents who responded yes to the item.

\*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.

*Information About Resources*

Table 17 presents information regarding respondents' experiences in receiving information from their caseworkers on a variety of governmental and non-governmental resources. At least 50 percent of respondents indicated they had received information for each program listed in the question, with the largest percentage (89.6 percent) reporting they had received information about "other government programs." The smallest percentage reported receiving information about the Child Tax Credit (50.5 percent) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (52.5 percent).

Given the nature of WV WORKS as a work first program, it is interesting to note that fewer than two-thirds of respondents indicated receiving information about employment programs (65.9 percent) or job training programs (63.3 percent).

**Table 17**

**Did your caseworker provide information about:**

<b><u>Item</u></b>	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>All clients</u></b>	<b><u>25-36</u></b>	<b><u>37-48</u></b>	<b><u>49-60</u></b>
Other government programs	1,323	89.6%	89.9%	89.2%	89.2%
Your PRC	1,322	86.9%	86.3%	86.8%	88.9%
Child care assistance	1,316	72.9%	70.4%	75.2%	76.4%
Child support enforcement	1,297	71.0%	73.0%	68.7%	69.3%
Domestic violence programs	1,307	70.8%	70.7%	71.0%	71.0%
Education programs	1,318	67.8%	67.7%	69.2%	65.4%
Employment programs	1,329	65.9%	65.4%	67.4%	65.0%
Job training programs	1,328	63.3%	63.0%	64.7%	62.0%
Transportation assistance	1,312	60.4%	58.8%	64.3%	58.1%
Local community resources	1,314	58.8%	59.5%	56.4%	61.3%
Housing assistance	1,307	58.5%	55.7%	61.3%	61.3%
Earned Income Tax Credit	1,304	52.5%	50.7%	53.2%	56.6%
Child Tax Credit	1,295	50.5%	48.7%	52.5%	52.5%

Note: reporting the percentage of respondents who indicated yes to the item.

*Overall Rating of Caseworker Performance*

While the previous sections presented information about specific areas of the case management process, survey respondents were also asked to provide an overall rating of their caseworker's performance. As the data in Table 18 indicate, the overall assessment is generally positive, with almost two thirds of respondents (63.6 percent) rating their caseworker's performance as either excellent or good. Those who had used the fewest months of eligibility were significantly more likely to rate their caseworker's performance as "poor" when compared with the other subgroups.

**Table 18**

**What is your overall rating of your caseworker's job performance?\***

**All clients   25-36 months   37-48 months   49-60 months**

Excellent	27.2%	25.7%	30.1%	26.6%
Good	36.6%	37.3%	33.7%	39.7%
Fair	22.0%	21.3%	22.3%	23.2%
Poor	9.2%	12.0%	6.8%	5.1%
Very Poor	5.0%	3.7%	7.0%	5.5%

N = 1,333

\*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.

**Table 19**

**Do you feel that you can turn to DHHR for help or advice when you need it?**

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
All respondents	63.4%	36.6%
25 - 36 months	62.9%	37.1%
37 - 48 months	65.1%	34.9%
49 - 60 months	62.0%	38.0%

N = 1,299

*Perception of DHHR as a Resource*

A final question was asked concerning respondents' perceptions of DHHR as a resource when they need help or advice. A majority of respondents (63.3 percent) indicated they felt they could turn to DHHR for advice or help in times of need, with no significant differences reflected on this question among the subgroups of WV WORKS participants. This percentage is almost identical to the percentage who evaluated their caseworker's overall performance as either excellent or good (63.6 percent).

## Points for Consideration

The overall picture that emerges from the data presented in this section appears to be a rather positive one in terms of how WV WORKS recipients perceive DHHR operations and their caseworkers' performance. For the most part, the respondents appear to be satisfied with the case management process, especially how they are treated personally by their caseworker. With the possible exception of how quickly phone calls are returned and how long they have to wait to see their caseworker, their assessment in general is a positive one. However, several important points for consideration are revealed by the data.

- Almost 72 percent of respondents reported leaving and then returning to WV WORKS. The economic climate of West Virginia coupled with the issue of recipients facing multiple barriers to employment may indicate that this cyclical pattern of usage will continue to be the norm and that the 60 months time limit is not realistic for some recipients. Given this likelihood, the state should consider how it can operate within federal eligibility limitations and state budget constraints. Non-cash assistance services, aggressive outreach and enrollment for food stamps, Medicaid, and other programs have been hallmarks of past state efforts. More attention might be given to maximizing exemptions under the 20 percent rule allowed in the federal law.
- Given the focus on employment of WV WORKS, it is surprising that almost one-third of respondents report that information about employment programs was not provided by their caseworker.
- Given the central role of the personal responsibility contract as a case management tool, it is important to note that approximately 30 percent of survey respondents indicated they did not have a say in its development. A similar number did not see the PRC as meaningful. Without a voice the recipient may not be as motivated to follow the contract in a pro-active way.
- Almost 39 percent of respondents indicated a change in case manager since signing their PRC. Family Support Specialist turnover may have an impact on the case management process and implementation of the PRC. Careful attention should be directed to maintaining continuity in the case management process.
- Transportation has been cited as a barrier to employment in all previous research on WV WORKS. The Bureau of Children and Families has dedicated significant resources to developing transportation support services. With this said, it is surprising that nearly 40 percent of respondents (39.9 percent) reported not receiving information about transportation assistance from their caseworker.

## Work Activity Experiences

As indicated in Table 20, over two-thirds (68.6 percent) of survey respondents reported participation in some type of work activity. However, although WV WORKS emphasizes work activities, the undisputed “gold standard” of welfare to work programs is placing individuals into unsubsidized employment in the private and public sector. These are regular wage earning jobs that do not depend upon subsidies or supports from state and federal programs and dollars. Respondents were asked three different questions related to wage paying positions. In one of these, approximately 13 percent of the respondents reported having a “paying job.” In another question, about 15 percent reported having a “paying job.” And in a third question, approximately 17 percent reported having a “paying job.” In terms of actual numbers, the range of respondents reporting that they had a paying job goes from 185 to 210 individuals. Additionally, fewer than 9 percent of respondents reported living in a household where another member held a paying job.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Non ABE Educational Programs	18.6%
Job Search	18.1%
Community Service	14.3%
A Paying Job	13.4%
Community Work Experience Program	9.1%
Adult Basic Education	5.8%
Other Job Training Programs	2.2%
On the Job Training	.9%
Joint Opportunities for Independence	.2%
N=1,354	

Respondents employed in wage paying jobs reported a mean hourly wage of \$6.32 and a median hourly wage of \$5.65. There were no significant differences in wage rates across the three subgroups of TANF recipients. (See Appendix I)

	<u>No Activities</u>	<u>Some Activities</u>
25-36 months	32%	68%
37-48 months	30%	70%
49-60 months	31%	69%
Overall	31%	
		6
		9
		%

As Table 21 indicates, the overall rate of participation in work activities tends to be similar among the cohort groups. However, when the type of activity is examined, there is a statistically significant difference between the groups in one area (see Table 22). Those who have used between 37 and 48 months of eligibility are more frequently involved in job-search activities than those in the other groups (22 percent compared to 16 percent for those who have used between 25 and 36 months of eligibility and 17 percent for those who have used 49-60 months of eligibility).

Although nearly 69 percent of WV WORKS participants are engaged in some type of work activity, most participants do not meet the threshold of 30 hours required by the federal work participation standard. Sixty-five percent of all respondents reporting work activity are engaged in 29 hours or less of work activity per week. As Table 23 below illustrates, time spent in work activities was largely uniform across the groups.

**Table 22**  
**Reliance on “Job Search” as a Work Activity\***

<u>Eligibility Status</u>	<u>Job Search</u>
25 to 36 months	15.9%
37 to 48 months	22.1%
49 to 60 months	17.4%

Note: 245 of 1,354, or 18.1% of respondents reported job search as current work activity.

\*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on this variable.

**Table 23**  
**Average Number of Hours Worked**

	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36 Months</u>	<u>37-48 Months</u>	<u>49-60 Months</u>
No Hours	2.4%	2.7%	2.5%	1.3%
1 to 4 Hours	5.0%	3.9%	5.4%	7.5%
5 to 9 Hours	13.7%	13.9%	12.7%	15.1%
10 to 19 Hours	11.4%	12.3%	10.9%	10.1%
20 to 29 Hours	31.9%	31.6%	33.3%	30.2%
30 to 39 Hours	22.5%	22.7%	21.0%	24.5%
39 or More Hours	13.0%	13.0%	14.1%	11.3%

N=875

**Table 24**  
**If you do not have a paying job, how long has it been since you had a paying job?**

Less than 6 months	12.0%
6 to 11 months	16.1%
1 to 3 years	38.9%
3 to 5 years	9.8%
Never Worked	3.1%
Does Not Apply	14.5%
N=1,261	

As previous studies conducted by the research team have suggested, most WV WORKS recipients have some prior work experience. The same holds true for the current WV WORKS caseload. As Table 24 indicates, only about 3 percent reported not having ever worked. About 15 percent of respondents reported being currently employed. About 28 percent of the respondents reported being without a paying job for eleven months or less. About 39 percent reported being without a paying job for between one and three years and about 15 percent reported being without work between three and five years. No significant differences were found in these patterns among the three sub-groups of respondents. (See Appendix J)

Although the vast majority of respondents (96.9%) have previous work experience, the data suggest that almost half (48.7%) have been unemployed for more than one year. Lengthy spells of unemployment no doubt further complicate job training and placement prospects and create case management challenges.

*Perceived Employment Barriers*

Respondents were presented a list of circumstances and asked to indicate their biggest challenges in finding and keeping a full-time job. As reflected in Table 25, nearly half (48 percent) identified a lack of good paying jobs in their area and 43 percent identified a lack of full-time jobs. The next most frequently identified challenges were lack of transportation (34 percent) and illness/disability (31 percent).

As has been the case in the three previous studies, having an illness or disability or caring for a family member with an illness or disability continues to be a significant challenge to entering the workforce for many TANF recipients. Table 26 shows the breakdown by subgroup on the personal illness or disability variable. Although the difference among the groups is not statistically significant, the highest percentage of respondents reporting an illness or disability as a major challenge is found in the group that has used the most months of eligibility. This finding reinforces the appropriateness of the increased attention that DHHR has given to helping potentially eligible recipients apply for SSI benefits. (See Appendix K)

**Table 25**  
**What have you found to be the biggest challenges in finding and keeping a full-time job?**

<u>Challenge</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Too few good paying jobs in area	47.6%
Too few full-time jobs in area	42.7%
Lack of transportation	34.4%
Illness/Disability	30.4%
Lack of Child Care	23.3%
Family would lose benefits	22.7%
Want to stay home with children	17.1%
Family member Illness/Disability	13.9%
Do not want to work full-time	2.4%

N=1,354

Note: percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were allowed to mark all that apply.

**Table 26**  
**Illness or Disability as a Major Challenge to Finding and Keeping a Full-time Job**

<u>All Respondents</u>	<u>25-36 months</u>	<u>37-48 months</u>	<u>49-60 months</u>
30.5 %	28.7 %	30.0%	36.5%

N = 1,354

To gain further insight into the barriers to employment faced by TANF recipients, survey respondents were presented a list of circumstances and asked if they had found it difficult to get or keep a job. Some of the questions asked were similar to those questions reported in Table 25. However, the questions asked below reveal some of the nuances and go into more detail regarding perceived employment barriers. For example, the concern for a lack of employment opportunities is reinforced and becomes a more prominent concern when respondents are asked whether living “in an area where there are no good jobs available.” This is a more encompassing question than those reported in Table 25 regarding the availability of full time or good paying jobs. Thus, as indicated in Table 27, over half of the respondents (52.5 percent) identified a lack of access to good jobs as a barrier. The data reveal that other barriers are identified as well. For

**Table 27**  
**Have you found it difficult to get or keep a job because you:**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>25-36</b>	<b>37-48</b>	<b>49-60</b>
Live in an area where no good jobs available*	52.5%	49.3%	54.9%	58.1%
Don't have the right skills/experience	39.4%	38.6%	38.4%	43.6%
Don't have the right education	34.9%	35.2%	34.8%	33.2%
Don't have nice clothes	34.3%	33.2%	34.5%	36.1%
Cannot find transportation*	29.7%	25.9%	30.5%	33.2%
Have a mental health problem*	28.4%	25.7%	28.1%	36.9%
Don't have a driver's license*	24.6%	21.7%	26.6%	29.5%
Have a physical disability*	21.9%	20.1%	21.3%	27.8%
Cannot find or afford child care	20.6%	21.8%	20.4%	17.0%
Are on welfare*	20.2%	16.7%	24.0%	24.1%
Have bad teeth		17.8%	18.2%	16.8%
	18.9%			
Care for someone w/ physical/mental disability	13.3%	12.2%	13.2%	16.6%
Are overweight	12.7%	11.4%	11.8%	17.8%
Are female	10.1%	10.1%	9.8%	10.0%
Cannot see well	9.2%	7.9%	11.0%	9.5%
Are a person of color*		3.0%	2.6%	2.2%
		5.8%		
Look too old	2.7%	2.4%	3.6%	2.1%
Are in an abusive relationship	2.3%	2.0%	2.2%	3.3%
Have a drug or alcohol problem	1.5%	.9%	1.4%	2.9%
Do not want to work	.9%	.9%	.7%	1.2%
Number of respondents	1,354	696	417	241

Note: percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were allowed to mark all that apply.

example, over a third identify lack of skills and experience as a factor (39.4 percent). Similarly, over a third (34.9 percent) report not having the right education and not having nice clothes (34.3

percent) as reasons why it has been difficult to find or keep a job. In sum, while echoing findings presented in Table 25 a closer look at perceived employment barriers also reveals a stronger relationship between the amount of eligibility used and perceptions of employment barriers.

The information in Table 27 reveals some important and statistically significant distinctions among the groups while at the same time providing an overall portrait of what are seen to be key barriers to finding and keeping employment. Thus, while over half of all respondents cited a lack of employment opportunities in the areas in which they live as a factor that has made it difficult to find and keep a job, those who have used 49 or more months of eligibility are more likely than others to identify this as a barrier. Fully 58 percent in this group identified this factor. Closely linked to this is the lack of transportation options to get to and from work. Almost 30 percent of all respondents identified this as a factor in making it difficult to find or keep a job. Those who have used 49 months or more were more likely to identify this than those who had used less of their eligibility. A similar pattern holds when it comes to having a driver's license. Those who have used 49 months or more of eligibility are less likely to have a driver's license than others.

In addition, those who have used 49 or more months of eligibility are more likely to identify a mental health problem or physical disability as a barrier to finding and keeping employment. It is crucial to emphasize that these barriers are widely recognized across the groups. Over 28 percent of the respondents identified a mental health problem as a factor and almost 22 percent reported that a physical disability makes it difficult to find and retain a job. Those who have used 49 or more months of their eligibility are most likely to cite these concerns. For example, 36.9 percent of this group identified a mental health problem as a factor and 27.8 percent identified a physical disability as a reason why it has been difficult to get or keep a job.

Together these data suggest the importance of case management efforts to be sensitive to the changing perceptions and make-up of the WV WORKS caseload as defined by months of eligibility used. It is clear that those who have used more of their eligibility perceive greater barriers in the areas identified above. However, it is just as important to remember that these and other barriers, such as a lack of job skills and education, are identified across the groups.

## Points to Consider

- The federal TANF program has required states to meet work participation rates. West Virginia has been able to meet this rate largely through its case load reduction credit. It is likely that the reauthorized TANF law will reduce caseload credits, increase work participation rates, and increase the number of hours of work engagement necessary to count toward the rate.
- West Virginia has long relied on publicly-funded and arranged work placements, such as CWEP and community service. New federal work-requirements and participation rate mandates may place a strain on capacity and resources to provide these types of placements.
- Overall, there appears to be relatively little variation in the types of work activities engaged in across the three groups. This suggests that more careful attention might be given to work activities assignments that best suit the needs of those at different stages of the TANF eligibility time line.
- There are widely held perceptions that poor economic conditions, the lack of job availability, insufficient job skills, as well as personal mental health and physical disability problems are barriers that have made it difficult to find and keep jobs. These concerns appear to be more pronounced among those who have used 49 months or more of their eligibility. No doubt, there are underlying systemic economic conditions that make job placement difficult. At the same time, there appear to be individual circumstances that require focused case management responses.

## Job Training and Education Experiences

Most scholars and practitioners agree that job training and educational attainment are critical factors affecting an individual's ability to make the transition from welfare to economic self-sufficiency. The majority of the respondents also believe that participating in a job training program (52.4 percent) or an education program (64.4 percent) would help them find and keep a paying job. However, as indicated in Table 28, fewer than half (45.5 percent) of survey respondents indicated that they had participated in a job training program, with the majority participating while on WV WORKS (36.3 percent) compared to 6.8 percent participating but not while on WV WORKS. An additional 2.4 percent participated both on and off WV WORKS. Those who had used the most months of eligibility were significantly more likely to have participated in a job training program.

	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36 Months</u>	<u>37-48 Months</u>	<u>49-60 Months</u>
<u>Believe Job Training will help find/keep good job</u> (N=1,285)	52.4%	54.5%	51.5%	47.6%
<u>Participated in Job Training*</u>				
No	54.5%	61.0%	53.6%	37.2%
Yes, on WORKS	36.3%	29.7%	36.4%	55.6%
Yes, not on WORKS	6.8%	7.4%	7.4%	3.8%
Both on/off WORKS (N=1,328)	2.4%	1.9%	2.7%	3.4%
<u>Completed Job Training</u> (N=585)	77.3%	73.9%	78.3%	81.8%
<u>Job Training Help Find Job?</u>				
No, but would if jobs available	37.0%	35.5%	38.7%	37.4%
No, didn't help get job	36.1%	39.1%	30.1%	38.8%
Yes, help get job (N=573)	26.9%	25.4%	31.2%	23.7%
*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.				

For the 593 individuals who participated in a job training program, 77.3 percent indicated that they had completed it. In addition, 26.9 percent indicated that the training had helped them get a job, 36.1 percent stated that the job training would have helped if there were jobs available, and 37 percent indicated that the training did not help them get a job. There were no significant differences between the subgroups on these variables.

In terms of educational programs, as indicated in Table 29, about a third of all respondents (31.4 percent) indicated that they had participated in Adult Basic Education (ABE) while on WV WORKS, with about two-thirds (60.8 percent) reporting program completion. Those who had 49 months or more of TANF eligibility were significantly more likely than the other two subgroups to report having participated in ABE.

	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36 Months</u>	<u>37-48 Months</u>	<u>49-60 Months</u>
<u>Believe Education Program help get/keep job</u> (N=1,299)	64.4%	66.0%	65.4%	58.1%
<u>Participated in ABE on WV WORKS*</u> (N=1,314)	31.4%	28.6%	33.4%	36.4%
<u>Completed ABE?</u> (N=431)	60.8%	62.4%	56.0%	64.8%
<u>For those who dropped out of ABE, Why? (N=193)</u>				
No transportation	32.1%	36.1%	32.8%	22.5%
Own health	30.0%	24.1%	34.3%	35.0%
Found job	21.1%	28.9%	14.9%	15.0%
Didn't learn/like	14.7%	14.5%	9.0%	25.0%
Couldn't find child care	14.2%	18.1%	10.4%	12.5%
Family health	9.5%	7.2%	9.0%	15.0%
Did not want to continue	5.3%	4.8%	6.0%	5.0%
*There are statistically significant differences across the three groups on these variables.				

Individuals who dropped out of the ABE program (N=193) were asked to identify the major reasons for leaving the program. The top three reasons were lack of transportation (32.1 percent), a health problem (30 percent), and finding a job (21.1 percent). In addition, 14.7 percent indicated that they did not learn anything/did not like the program, 14.2 percent that they could not find childcare, 9.5 percent that a health problem of a family member had interfered in their participation, and 5.3 percent that they did not want to continue the program. There were no significant differences between the subgroups on these variables.

## Points To Consider

- Job training is widely recognized as key to successful employment prospects and in preventing reliance on cash assistance programs. Given that almost a quarter of those participating in job training fail to complete these programs, the Bureau should consider establishing performance benchmarks for successful rates of completion.
- As part of its initial works assessment process, the BCF has emphasized that WV WORKS recipients without high school degrees or general equivalency be given the opportunity to pursue adult basic education. However, the study reveals that of those who have participated in ABE, only about 61 percent have successfully completed the program. As a stepping stone to self-sufficiency, few can argue against the merits of education. The Bureau should consider establishing performance benchmarks for ABE completion among those referred to these services. In order to ensure program quality, these benchmarks should be based on best practices found in successful ABE programs in the state and elsewhere. A commitment should also be made to promote completion of the ABE even if the client leaves WV WORKS. An entry level job can be a great opportunity, but it should not become a barrier to future success because an individual has chosen pay over education.
- As in any other work and training activity, the respondents identified barriers to participating in ABE programs. The Bureau should assess and respond to identified barriers to participation. These include child care and transportation issues. The state also faces the challenge of helping the nearly 40 percent of respondents who dropped out of ABE programs because of their own health problems or the health problems of a family member.

## Child Care Needs

Survey respondents were asked if they had children in the household who needed childcare. For those who responded that they did need childcare, a series of questions were asked to understand better who takes care of the child, for how many hours, the difficulty of finding childcare, the impact on the respondent in terms of working and training, day care utilization and satisfaction with the day care arrangements.

Three-quarters (76.6 percent) of the survey respondents indicated that they had childcare needs. The remaining quarter (23.4 percent) did not respond to questions in this section because they did not have childcare needs. No statistically significant differences were found among the three subgroups of recipients on any of the childcare issues presented in this section.

### *Childcare Arrangements*

Respondents with childcare needs were asked who takes care of the child or children when they were working, in school or in another work activity. As indicated in Table 30, most children were taken care of by family members (40.4 percent), with an additional group where children were in child or day care centers (18.2 percent). School related programs (such as Head Start) and other programs did not seem to be utilized to a notable degree.

**Table 30**

**Who usually takes care of your child when you are working, in school,  
or in another work activity?**

<b><u>Arrangement</u></b>	<b><u>All Clients</u></b>	<b><u>25-36 Months</u></b>	<b><u>37-38 Months</u></b>	<b><u>49-60 Months</u></b>
Family Member	40.8%	42.3%	37.1%	42.8%
Child/Day Care Center	18.2%	18.4%	18.5%	17.3%
Combined Arrangements	17.2%	14.6%	19.9%	20.2%
Friend or Neighbor	6.3%	5.7%	7.3%	6.4%
School Related Program	2.2%	3.6%	0.7%	1.2%
Other Program	0.9%	0.8%	1.7%	0.0%
No One	14.4%	14.6%	14.9%	12.1%

N = 981

### *Time in Childcare*

Next, respondents were asked how many hours, on average, the child or children were in childcare when the respondent was working, in school or in another work activity. About a third (34.4 percent) answered that their children were in child care for between one and ten hours a week. The remaining answers fell into three relatively equal groups as reported in Table 31. Thus, children are in childcare arrangements for a wide range of hours and need. (See Appendix L)

<u>Hours in Childcare</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1-10 Hours	34.4%
11-20 Hours	19.8%
21-30 Hours	25.2%
More Than 30 Hours	20.7%

### *Difficulty in Finding Childcare*

The next question asked about the difficulty in finding childcare. As indicated in Table 32, respondents generally divided into two equal groups. About half (49.6 percent) said that finding childcare was very hard or hard. But, an equal number (50.4 percent) said that it was not too hard, easy or very easy.

Statistical comparisons with other variables suggested some important connections. Those who found it harder to find childcare arrangements tended to have more children in the household, reported mental health problems, and were younger (probably because younger persons had more children in the age group where childcare was needed). (See Appendix M)

<u>Assessment</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Very Hard	27.6%
Hard	22.0%
Not Too Hard	28.9%
Easy	11.5%
Very Easy	10.0%

### *Impact of Childcare Needs*

Respondents were also asked whether their childcare needs had made it more difficult to do various things. As shown in Table 33, the largest percentage reported such needs made it difficult to get a paying job (36.5 percent) or go to school (28.8 percent), with a smaller percentage reporting child care needs making it difficult to get job training (15.8 percent) or keep peace in the family (18.8 percent).

**Table 33**

**Have your childcare needs made it more difficult for you to do the following?**

<u>Category</u>	<u>All Clients</u>	<u>25-36 Months</u>	<u>37-48 Months</u>	<u>49-60 Months</u>
Get A Paying Job	36.5%	36.4%	36.2%	37.4%
Go To School	28.8%	30.0%	26.1%	26.7%
Get Job Training	15.8%	16.6%	14.5%	16.0%
Keep Peace in Family	18.8%	17.9%	19.8%	19.8%

N = 1,035

The responses to the question whether childcare needs had made it more difficult to get a job, go to school, get job training or keep family peace were divided into two categories (any item of difficulty vs. no reported difficulty). This allowed statistical analysis to determine the connection to respondent characteristics. Those whose childcare needs made it more difficult were more likely to be younger, white, live outside an economically distressed county, have more children and report mental health concerns.

*Day Care Centers and Programs*

A series of questions were then asked about day care centers or programs because these organized and sponsored arrangements are connected to public policy and program responsibilities. The first question asked about the number of hours a child (or children) participated in the day care center or program. More than two-thirds (70.1 percent of 927 responses) said that the question did not apply to them because they did not have children in day care centers or programs. However, as shown in Table 34, for those who did utilize such programs (29.9 percent), many used them for substantial hours. (See Appendix N)

**Table 34**

**How many hours per week is your child at the day care center or program?**

<u>Hours</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1-10 Hours	18.7%
11-20 Hours	23.4%
21-30 Hours	33.3%
More Than 30 Hours	24.4%

N = 282 (those using day care centers)

Respondents utilizing day care centers or programs were asked questions about the proximity of the center or program to their home, problems in getting to the center or program, and the overall quality of care of the center or program. Relatively small percentages of respondents reported problems with proximity (23.8 percent), access (21.9 percent), or quality of care (13.1 percent). (See Appendices O-Q)

The last question in this section asked for an overall assessment of the day care center or program (for those where the child went to such a program). Separating out those who said the question did not apply to them, almost half (48.9 percent) responded that they were very satisfied with the day care center or program; another 39.2 percent said they were satisfied. A small group (6.2 percent) said they were not sure and only a few were dissatisfied (3.4 percent) or very dissatisfied (2.0 percent). (See Appendix R)

**Table 35**

**Day Care Centers and Programs**

<u>Assessment</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Is it close to your home or work?	76.2%	23.8%
Is it a problem to get there?	21.9%	78.1%
Is the quality of care acceptable?	86.9%	13.1%
N = 315, 306 and 305 respectively		

**Table 36**

**If your child goes to a day care center or program, overall, how satisfied are you with it?**

<u>Assessment</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Very Satisfied	48.9%
Satisfied	39.2%
Not Sure	6.2%
Dissatisfied	3.4%
Very Dissatisfied	2.0%
N = 280 (those using a center or program)	

## Points to Consider

- About three-fourths of survey respondents (76.6 percent) reported having childcare needs. About half seem to make arrangements without much difficulty, but the other half found childcare an issue to resolve.
- Approximately two-thirds of the respondents indicated they do not utilize day care centers or programs. Such programs, however, may still be critical for about one-third of the clientele. Most people using such arrangements are very positive about their proximity to day care centers, about transportation to day care centers, and quality of day care centers.
- Most survey respondents did not report that childcare provided a serious barrier to getting a job, going to school, getting training or keeping peace in the family. This does not mean that childcare is not an issue; it appears to be a substantial concern for about one-third of the respondents with respect to these impacts. In addition, as hours of work engagement increase, either as a result of securing unsubsidized employment or due to increased work requirements imposed by federal law, pressures for child care services will likely increase.
- No significant differences were found related to child care issues and needs among the three subgroups of respondents. However, there may be differences among other subgroups within the WV WORKS population. Case managers and policy analysts might more usefully direct attention to location, particularly economically distressed counties, age and mental health concerns.

## Summary of Significant Differences Among Subgroups

One of the purposes of the current study was to determine if there were significant differences among three subgroups of WV WORKS recipients: (1) those who have used 25-36 months of TANF eligibility; (2) those who have used 37-48 months of TANF eligibility; and (3) those who have used 49-60 months of TANF eligibility. Statistical analyses indicated that females, those in single adult households, those with a mental health problem, and those living in economically distressed counties are more likely than males, those in two adult households, those without mental health problems, and those in transitional or competitive counties to have used 49 months or more of their TANF eligibility. In addition, individuals who have used more months of eligibility are more likely to:

- know how many months of eligibility they have left
- lack access to a working phone in their home
- report leaving and returning to the program
- participate in a job training program
- participate in the ABE program
- receive clothing vouchers and DHHR emergency assistance
- report times when they did not have enough money to pay for heat
- report times when they could not take their children to the doctor or dentist, buy school supplies, or have enough money to allow them to participate in after-school activities
- report being asked by their caseworker to look for a full-time job
- experience a change in their caseworker
- ask DHHR for help when their children experience problems in school or with drugs or alcohol
- have a negative view of both their personal and their financial futures
- report the following as barriers to finding a job: living in an area where no good jobs are available, having a mental health problem, not having a driver's license, being on welfare, having a physical disability, being overweight, and being a person of color.

One significant difference was found between those who had used the fewest months of eligibility (25-36 months) and the other subgroups. Respondents in this subgroup were more likely to rate the overall performance of their caseworker as “poor.”

Two significant differences were found between those who had used 37- 48 months of eligibility and the other subgroups. Respondents in this group were: (1) more likely to be involved in job search activities; (2) less likely to be satisfied with DHHR's hours of operation.

A final area where significant differences were found among the three groups was the reasons they gave for being on WV WORKS. Those who have used 49 or more months of eligibility were more likely to need assistance due to an illness or disability; those who have used 36-48 months of eligibility were more likely to need assistance because they could not find a job; those who have used 25-36 months of eligibility were more likely to need assistance because they were attending school full-time.

## **Conclusion**

As this study bears out, the difficulties and challenges facing those on WV WORKS are substantial. In most cases, the circumstances of the WV WORKS recipient cannot be reduced to or attributed to a single cause. Instead, there are numerous factors contributing to the overall status of those needing cash assistance under West Virginia's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. The purpose of this study was to gain insight on the experiences, needs, concerns, and the perceptions of those currently on WV WORKS. With this information base, the Bureau for Children and Families may be better positioned to assess and enhance case management practices. Realizing that circumstances and perspectives might vary according to the number of months of eligibility they have used, the study identified three cohorts in the study: those who are currently on WV WORKS and have used between 25 and 36 months of their eligibility, those currently on WV WORKS who have used between 37 and 48 months of eligibility, and those on WV WORKS who have used between 49 months and 60 months of their eligibility.

Logic would dictate that needs and circumstances will vary according to the number of months of eligibility used. In many ways, our study supports this assumption. For example, those who have used fewer months of eligibility are more likely than those in other groups to cite the need for assistance while pursuing schooling on a full time basis as a reason for being on WV WORKS. Those who have used between 37 and 48 months of eligibility are more likely to identify a lack of employment opportunities as a reason why they are on WV WORKS. Those who have used over 48 months of their eligibility are likely to identify disability as a reason why they have been on the program and are likely to hold less optimistic views about their futures.

But in other respects the experiences of those on WV WORKS appear to be undifferentiated. When it comes to work activities, for example, there are no significant differences in the type of work activities engaged in across the groups. The only exception to this is that those who have used between 37 and 48 months are more likely to be engaged in job search activities. One explanation for this uniformity across groups is that because long-term dependency is not an issue in West Virginia, similar types of placements are relied on. In other words, number of months of eligibility used does not appear to be a determining factor in the type of work or training activity engaged in. One of the more telling statistics from the study is that over 70 percent of all respondents reported being off and then returning to WV WORKS and

that this percentage increases with months of eligibility used. With families moving on and off the program, there may not be as great a priority or incentive on the part of case workers to tailor work activities to specific cases and circumstances.

This raises the larger question of the efficacy of case management of work and training activities. Time matters, in that early and sustained attention and commitment to case management is likely the best path toward client and program success. A failure early in the case management process may have major consequences at a later date. For example, a client who fails to complete an Adult Basic Education program is likely to have greater future difficulties in securing and retaining employment. Short term gains made in the present, such as failing to follow up on ABE because of the attraction of an immediate job, are likely to be secured at the expense of longer term benefits.

There is another important lesson to consider as well. Regardless of the amount of eligibility that has been used by current TANF recipients, those across the cohorts face similar challenges. This report provides a sobering picture of just how difficult it is to make it when incomes are low, job prospects are minimal, and circumstances are dire. Respondents across the groups spoke largely with the same voice as they identified the challenges of making ends meet, affording the basic necessities of life, living in affordable and decent housing, and having the resources to provide for their children.

This report provides a comprehensive picture of the current status of those who are currently enrolled in WV WORKS. By looking at different cohorts or groups of adult recipients, as defined by months of eligibility used, a broad portrait can be constructed of the needs, program experiences, and perceptions of those on WV WORKS. Ideally, this information base can help to further the Bureau for Children and Families' commitment to improving and enhancing case management practices and program design under WV WORKS. With this in mind, the Bureau and the Department of Health and Human Resources may want to consider some immediate, near, and long-term program responses. In addition, the Bureau should continue in its efforts to assess the status and well-being of those on WV WORKS.

Immediate steps should focus on enhancing case management effectiveness. In recent months, the Bureau for Children and Families has dedicated itself to this goal. It is heartening to see that almost three quarters of respondents were satisfied with the treatment they have received from their caseworkers. But the study points out areas where additional emphasis and effort can be directed. It would benefit the process if Personal Responsibility Contract development and review become a more meaningful and interactive experience for the WV WORKS client. As pointed out earlier in this presentation, survey respondents often report that they have little input in the development of the PRC. This is unfortunate, for this is where effective case management must begin. The PRC has been singled-out from among the many short term points to consider found within this report, because it is the keystone of case management. It is the place where both literally and figuratively, the case manager and the client can be on the same page.

In the near term, the Bureau for Children and Families should anticipate and plan for the new changes in work requirements, engagement responsibilities, and other TANF program components as a result of reauthorization. Like counterparts in other states, the Bureau has long

relied on its caseload reduction credit as a means of meeting the federal work participation rate. It is very likely that federal reauthorization will disallow much of this credit. The state is particularly vulnerable in this regard. The reason for this is twofold. First, the caseload reduction has allowed individuals to engage in activities, such as job search, that do not necessarily meet federal engagement criteria. Second, among those who are engaged in work activities, for most the hours worked fall short of the threshold currently required under federal law. Upward revisions of this requirement in a reauthorized TANF program will place even greater demands on the state.

In the long-term, the Bureau for Children and Families and the Department of Health and Human Resources will need to play a facilitative role in helping others at the local, state, and national level understand that cash-assistance programs alone cannot address the systemic economic and community development challenges that the state faces. This study, and the previous studies that were conducted for the Bureau for Children and Families, consistently reveal that “place matters” and that economically distressed counties and rural settings create many barriers to achieving economic self-sufficiency among the poor. Circumstance rather than character appears to be the driving force that results in families returning to the cash assistance program as they encounter hardships and difficulties associated with a poor local economy. In addition, opportunities to become self-sufficient are often compromised by the challenges that families and individuals encounter as a result of disability and illness. As the Bureau for Children and Families knows all too well, successful welfare program management requires much more than putting people to work, it involves a much wider provision of services to help those in need.

Understanding the variety of challenges and needs of those on WV WORKS requires initial and follow-up assessments of individual cases and of the aggregate case load. Regular review and evaluation can be key in helping families meet the challenges they are encountering, finding the best ways to direct them to resources and opportunities, and allowing for follow-up efforts to assist families once off WV WORKS. Periodic assessments of caseload trends and case management practices offer the promise of continuous improvement and development in program services in this complex, demanding, and vital area of public policy and government responsibility.