

**The Project on Devolution
and Urban Change**

**Welfare Reform in Cleveland
Implementation, Effects,
and Experiences of
Poor Families
and Neighborhoods**

Summary Report

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Manpower Demonstration
Research Corporation

September 2002

Funders of the Project on Devolution and Urban Change

Ford Foundation
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
The Pew Charitable Trusts
W. K. Kellogg Foundation
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services (including interagency funds
from the U.S. Department of
Agriculture)

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
The Joyce Foundation
The Cleveland Foundation
The George Gund Foundation
William Penn Foundation
The James Irvine Foundation
The California Wellness Foundation
The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

Dissemination of MDRC publications is also supported by the following foundations that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Atlantic Philanthropies; the Alcoa, Ambrose Monell, Fannie Mae, Ford, George Gund, Grable, New York Times Company, Starr, and Surdna Foundations; and the Open Society Institute.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

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Overview

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) ushered in profound changes in welfare policy, including a five-year time limit on federally funded cash assistance (known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF), stricter work requirements, and greater flexibility for states in designing and managing programs. The law's supporters hoped that it would spark innovation and reduce welfare use; critics feared that it would lead to cuts in benefits and widespread suffering. Whether PRWORA's reforms succeed or fail depends largely on what happens in big cities, where poverty and welfare receipt are most concentrated.

This report — one of a series from MDRC's Project on Devolution and Urban Change — examines how welfare reform unfolded in Ohio's largest city and county: Cleveland, in Cuyahoga County. Ohio's TANF program features one of the country's shortest time limits (36 months) and has a strong emphasis on moving welfare recipients into employment. This study uses field research, surveys and interviews of current and former welfare recipients, state and county welfare and employment records, and indicators of social and economic trends to assess TANF's implementation and effects. Because of the strong economy and ample funding for services in the late 1990s, it captures welfare reform in the best of times, while also focusing on the poorest families and neighborhoods.

Key Findings

- Cuyahoga County remade its welfare system in response to TANF. It shifted to a neighborhood-based delivery system and dramatically increased the percentage of recipients who participated in work activities. It also launched a major initiative to divert families from going on welfare. The county firmly enforced time limits starting in October 2000, but it ensured that families were aware of their cutoff date, and it offered short-term extensions and transitional jobs to recipients who had employment barriers or no other income.
- Between 1992 and 2000, welfare receipt declined in the county, and employment among welfare recipients increased. The economy and other factors appear to have driven these trends, as they did not change substantially after the 1996 law went into effect. However, TANF seems to have encouraged long-term welfare recipients to leave the rolls faster and to have discouraged food stamp recipients from coming onto cash assistance.
- A longitudinal survey of former and ongoing welfare mothers in Cleveland's poorest neighborhoods showed substantial increases in the percentage who were working and had "good" jobs between 1998 and 2001. These changes are not necessarily due to welfare reform; they may reflect the economy and the maturation of women and their children. Despite the improvements, half the women surveyed in 2001 had incomes below poverty level. Those who had exhausted 36 months of cash assistance or had less than one year of benefits remaining tended to face the most employment barriers and to have the worst jobs. Nevertheless, most who were cut off TANF because of time limits were working, and nearly all were receiving food stamps and Medicaid.
- Between 1992 and 2000, the number of neighborhoods with high concentrations of welfare recipients (20 percent or more) fell sharply — a result of caseload decline. Though social conditions in these neighborhoods were much worse than in other parts of the county, they generally improved or remained stable over time. For instance, birth rates among teens and violent crime decreased, while prenatal care and median housing values increased. Unmarried births, property crimes, and child abuse and neglect did not change.

The study's findings counter the notion that welfare reform would lead to service retrenchment and a worsening of conditions for families and neighborhoods. To the contrary, there were many improvements in Cleveland — though the favorable economy played a major role, and time limits had just been implemented when the study ended. Further study is needed to determine the long-term effects of time limits and how welfare reform will fare under less auspicious conditions.

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Preface

In passing the 1996 federal welfare reform law, legislators set the country on an uncharted path. At the time, no one knew whether the law's major features — especially its imposition of time limits on cash assistance and its tougher work requirements — would spur welfare recipients to become more self-reliant or would make them worse off. Nor did anyone know whether the block grant that each state was entitled to receive under the law (the level of which was based on the state's pre-1996 welfare spending) would be sufficient to meet the needs of poor families. And no one could have foreseen how the economic boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s would raise employment levels and expand state coffers, creating a highly favorable environment for the new welfare policies.

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) launched the Project on Devolution and Urban Change in 1997 to chart the course of welfare reform in four big cities: Cleveland, Los Angeles, Miami, and Philadelphia. Our goal was to find out whether the new law would lead to meaningful changes in urban welfare bureaucracies — institutions that have tended to resist reforms in the past — and to learn how time limits and other policies would affect the poorest families and neighborhoods. Unlike many MDRC evaluations, this study did not use a random assignment design. Given the broad sweep of the welfare overhaul, assigning some people to the reforms and others to the old system seemed impractical and, equally important, would not have allowed us to capture the effects of welfare reform on *places*. Consequently, we used a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to examine how governments, neighborhoods, and families experienced welfare reform over a period of several years, believing that the integration of these different data sources and perspectives would provide the most accurate and most complete assessment of the 1996 law's effects in big cities.

The Urban Change project's findings in Cleveland are generally positive. Cuyahoga County's welfare agency capitalized on the flexibility of the new law and revamped its service delivery system. Welfare rolls went down, employment among welfare recipients went up, and the circumstances of the poorest families and neighborhoods improved on most fronts. Our analyses of trends before and after the new law took effect, however, suggest that the flourishing economy — more than welfare reform — was the principal force behind the improving conditions. Moreover, welfare reform in Cleveland did not have the ruinous effects on low-income families that some people feared, in part because of protections the welfare agency implemented to protect the most vulnerable.

Although unusually comprehensive, this report is only the first chapter of Cleveland's welfare reform story. Time limits had just begun to be implemented when data collection ended, and further follow-up is needed to find out how welfare reform will unfold in the current, less favorable economic climate. Forthcoming reports on each of the other cities in the Urban Change study will shed light on the extent to which Cleveland's experiences are unique or part of a larger pattern in the nation's big cities.

Gordon Berlin
Senior Vice President

Acknowledgments

This report represents the culmination of several years of research and could not have happened without the support of many people. We especially thank the families — predominantly low-income women with children — whose lives are represented in the statistics and stories throughout this volume. We hope that the report reflects their experiences and contributes to policy decisions that will improve their lives and opportunities.

We are indebted to the officials of Cuyahoga County for allowing us to conduct the Cleveland study and providing full access to welfare offices and information. The support of Bette Meyer, Ralph Johnson, Rick Werner, Sandra Bizzell, and Robert Bonner was instrumental to the research. We also thank the following managers and team coordinators of the East Cleveland, Glenville, and Westshore offices for being gracious hosts and sharing many insights: Jill Heard, Fred Kramer, Michelle Latimore, Theresa Moore, Dina Capretta-Kozak, and Sandra Zaborniak.

As noted at the beginning of the report, a consortium of foundations and federal agencies provided financial support for the Project on Devolution and Urban Change. We particularly thank Goldie Alvis at the Cleveland Foundation, Marcia Egbert at the George Gund Foundation, and Jennifer Phillips and Unmi Song at the Joyce Foundation for their interest and involvement in the Cleveland study.

Helpful reviewers of a draft of the report were Elizabeth Lower-Basch at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Jim Rohn and Karene Booker at Cuyahoga Work and Training. In addition, an advisory group comprising Rebecca Blank, Gary Burtless, Robinson Hollister, Robert LaLonde, and Phil Robbins reviewed and commented on early drafts of Chapters 3 and 6. Within MDRC, Gordon Berlin, Judith Gueron, Barbara Goldman, Howard Bloom, and Louis Richman gave substantive advice throughout the drafting process.

The following individuals in partner institutions helped with data collection and analysis. Neil Bania and Lisa Nelson at the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change at Case Western Reserve University played an instrumental role in compiling and processing the vast administrative records used in the impact and neighborhood indicators analyses. Louise Hanson and Carolyn Rahe at the Institute for Survey Research at Temple University oversaw the fielding of the client survey and the preparation of related data files. Lorna Dilley, Ralonda Ellis-Hill, Karen Fierer, Kristy Harris, Vicki Hunter, Kagendo Mutua, Leondra Mitchell, Samieka Mitchell, Nancy Myers, Laura Nichols, Liz Piatt, and Sarah Spain at Kent State University participated in gathering and preparing the ethnographic data for analysis.

At MDRC, Charles Michalopoulos played an important role in conceptualizing the impact study and overseeing the analysis of administrative records. Other MDRC staff who assisted with data collection and analysis included Jo Anna Hunter, Ying Li, Rebecca Widom, Nikita Hunter, Lindsay Moore, Kate Gaultieri, Tara Cullen, and Eric Rhodes. Lauren Cates served as report coordinator. Robert Weber edited the report, and Stephanie Cowell prepared it for publication.

The Authors

Summary Report

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) introduced profound changes in America's welfare system. It eliminated Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) — the major cash assistance program for low-income families — and replaced it with a time-limited program called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). It also imposed tougher work requirements on welfare recipients and gave states much more flexibility in the design and operation of their welfare programs. In turn, many states have “devolved” much of the responsibility for their welfare programs to local governments and other entities.

The anticipation that welfare reform might pose particular challenges to urban areas — where poverty and welfare receipt are most concentrated — prompted the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) to launch the Project on Devolution and Urban Change (Urban Change, for short). The project is examining the implementation and effects of TANF in four urban counties: Cuyahoga (Cleveland), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia. This report focuses on Cuyahoga County and addresses four major sets of questions:

- How did Cuyahoga County respond to the new law? What “messages” and services did the county put in place? How were time limits implemented?
- What were the effects of welfare reform on the county's welfare caseloads? Did reform alter patterns of welfare and employment?
- How did low-income families in the county adapt to time limits and other dimensions of welfare reform? What were their experiences in the labor market? Were they better or worse off economically?
- What were the conditions of neighborhoods in Cuyahoga County before and after welfare reform? In particular, were poor neighborhoods better or worse off after reform?

In many ways, the Urban Change project captures the best of times and the most challenging of places for welfare reform. The study's focal period of the late 1990s through the early 2000s was one of prolonged economic expansion and unprecedented decline in unemployment. In addition, states and localities had unprecedented amounts of money to spend on welfare programs, owing to a combination of stable TANF funding (a five-year block grant based on pre-TANF spending levels) and a rapid decline in welfare caseloads. The study thus captures the most promising context for welfare reform: one of high labor market demand and ample resources to support families in the process of moving from welfare to work. At the same

time, it focuses on big-city welfare agencies — institutions that have tended to resist change in the past — and on the experiences of the poorest people and places within each city.

In order to assess TANF's implementation and effects in Cuyahoga County, the study uses multiple research methods and data sources (Table 1). Researchers visited welfare offices to observe program operations and interview staff; analyzed welfare and employment records for everyone who received cash assistance and food stamps between 1992 and 2000; administered a longitudinal survey to 689 women who had a history of welfare receipt and lived in high-poverty neighborhoods; conducted ethnographic interviews with 38 current or former welfare families in poor neighborhoods; and analyzed a variety of social and economic indicators at the county and neighborhood levels. All these data were gathered at different points to capture change over time. In some instances, data were obtained as far back as 1992, to establish a trend line that could help determine whether TANF contributed to significant changes in patterns of welfare receipt or employment and changes in neighborhood conditions. Data collection ended at about the time that Cuyahoga County began terminating families from welfare because of time limits; hence, this report focuses chiefly on the *pre*-time-limit phase of welfare reform.

This summary — like the full report on which it is based — begins with a brief overview of the social and economic environment of Cuyahoga County during the study period. It then analyzes how TANF was implemented, the effects on welfare receipt and employment, the experiences of low-income families, and county and neighborhood conditions before and after welfare reform. The report concludes with a discussion of policy implications.

Among the study's key findings are the following:

- Cuyahoga County's welfare agency revamped its organizational structure in response to welfare reform, and it instituted new policies and services to divert families from welfare, promote employment, and enforce time limits. At the same time, it maintained a safety net for families who exhausted their cash benefits.
- Between 1992 and 2000, welfare receipt in the county declined, and employment increased among welfare recipients. These trends began before TANF and were not significantly altered after welfare reform got under way, suggesting that the changes largely reflected the strong economy and other factors. There is evidence, however, that welfare reform sped up the rate at which long-term recipients left welfare and that it reduced the number of food stamp recipients who later received cash assistance.
- A longitudinal survey of welfare mothers living in the county's poorest neighborhoods suggests that their employment and economic circumstances

The Project on Devolution and Urban Change

Table 1
Data Used for the Cuyahoga Study

Data Type	Data Source	Sample	Time Period and Coverage	Chapter Relying on Data
Program implementation	Field/observational research	Interviews and observations conducted in 3 neighborhood offices and the central office downtown	Six rounds between 1997 and 2001	2
	Survey of case management staff	The universe of case managers; 88% of staff completed a survey (n = 256).	Administered in April 2000	
County and state administrative records: cash assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance records	Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, Case Western Reserve University; Ohio Department of Job and Family Services	The universe of recipients who received food stamps, AFDC/TANF, or Medicaid between July 1992 and December 2000 (n = 536,256)	Eligibility records for the period July 1992 to December 2000; unemployment insurance records for the period January 1992 to December 2000	3, 6
Longitudinal surveys	Two waves of in-person interviews with current and former welfare recipients, conducted by the Institute for Survey Research, Temple University	Randomly selected recipients of cash assistance in Cuyahoga County in May 1995 who were single mothers, between the ages of 18 and 45, and resided in neighborhoods where either the poverty rate exceeded 30% or the rate of welfare receipt exceeded 20%. In Wave 1, 80% of the sample completed a survey; in Wave 2, 86% of Wave 1 respondents completed a survey; 689 respondents completed both surveys.	Wave 1 completed between March and December 1998; Wave 2 completed between March and September 2001	2, 4, 5

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Data Type	Data Source	Sample	Time Period and Coverage	Chapter Relying on Data
Ethnography	Four rounds of in-depth, in-person interviews with current and former welfare recipients, conducted by on-site researchers at Kent State University	Thirty-eight families residing in 3 neighborhoods varying in ethnic composition and poverty: Detroit-Shoreway, East Cleveland, and Glenville	Interviews conducted from 1998 to 2001	2, 4, 5
Aggregate neighborhood indicators	Social and economic indicators from administrative agency records, prepared by the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, Case Western Reserve University	All residential census tracts in Cuyahoga County	Census-tract annual indicators from vital records, tax assessor's property files, child welfare, crime, and welfare and wage records for 1992 through 2000	6

generally improved between 1998 and 2001. These changes were not necessarily a result of welfare reform but may reflect a variety of factors, including the economy and the maturation of women and their children. Despite improvements, half the women surveyed in 2001 were living below poverty. The mothers least likely to be working or to have “good” jobs were women who had used up all their months on cash assistance or were within 12 months of reaching the time limit. Nevertheless, most women who had been cut off welfare because of time limits were working, and nearly all were receiving food stamps and Medicaid.

- Between 1992 and 2000, the number of neighborhoods characterized by a high concentration of welfare recipients declined — a direct result of falling caseloads. During this same period, social conditions in the county’s poorest neighborhoods generally held stable or improved. In absolute terms, however, the conditions in poor neighborhoods were worse than in other areas of the county. Today, Cuyahoga’s remaining welfare caseload is concentrated in neighborhoods that are experiencing some of the worst social and economic conditions in the county.

In sum, the study finds overall improvement in many trends in Cleveland — though the extraordinary economy seems to be a driving factor as strong as or stronger than welfare reform. Moreover, despite improvements, many families remain poor, and a few neighborhoods — primarily in the central city — remain highly distressed. Follow-up is needed to determine how welfare reform fares under less auspicious economic circumstances and what effects time limits will have in the long term.

Cuyahoga County’s Social and Economic Environment

Before drawing inferences from a study that focuses on one metropolitan area, some appreciation of the urban context is required. Cuyahoga County is the largest of Ohio’s 88 counties, and Cleveland is its primary city. In Ohio, welfare is administered at the county level.

- **A disproportionate share of Ohio’s welfare population lives in Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland.**

Even though Cuyahoga County accounts for just 12 percent of Ohio’s population, its share of the state’s welfare caseload rose from 19 percent in 1992 to almost 25 percent in 2000. Similarly, within Cuyahoga County, most welfare recipients live in the City of Cleveland. Outlying suburbs tend to be more affluent.

- **The economy in the Cleveland area improved during the 1990s, and unemployment declined. Welfare caseloads also dropped sharply during this period.**

Starting in 1992, the unemployment rates for Cleveland and Cuyahoga County began to fall and remained fairly constant through the late 1990s and early 2000s (Figure 1). Unemployment in the City of Cleveland, however, has been consistently higher than in the county or state. Along with the improving economy, poverty has declined, as have the county's cash assistance caseloads (Figure 2). The caseload reductions began before TANF was implemented.

- **The economy of the Cleveland area has experienced many structural changes over the past 30 years, including a decline in manufacturing and the relocation of many businesses from the city to the suburbs. Accessing suburban jobs, however, is difficult for many welfare recipients.**

While manufacturing represented almost one-third of the region's employment in 1970, it accounted for less than 20 percent by 2000. Growth in the service sector more than made up for the loss in manufacturing, though service jobs tend to offer lower earnings and fewer benefits for workers without advanced education. Virtually all the region's job growth occurred in the outlying suburbs rather than in Cleveland, making access to jobs difficult for the approximately 50 percent of the county's welfare recipients who rely on public transit.

The Implementation of Welfare Reform

During the late 1980s through the mid-1990s, Ohio lawmakers passed a number of initiatives to try to reduce welfare dependency, including a bill in 1995 that would have placed a time limit on AFDC.¹ Hence, TANF did not represent a new direction for the state so much as a culmination of past reforms. In response to TANF, Ohio lawmakers created two new programs: Ohio Works First (OWF), which replaced the state's AFDC and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program; and the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) program, which replaced Emergency Assistance. The goals of OWF and PRC are to "transform public assistance from a system based on entitlement to one focused on employment, personal responsibility and self-sufficiency."²

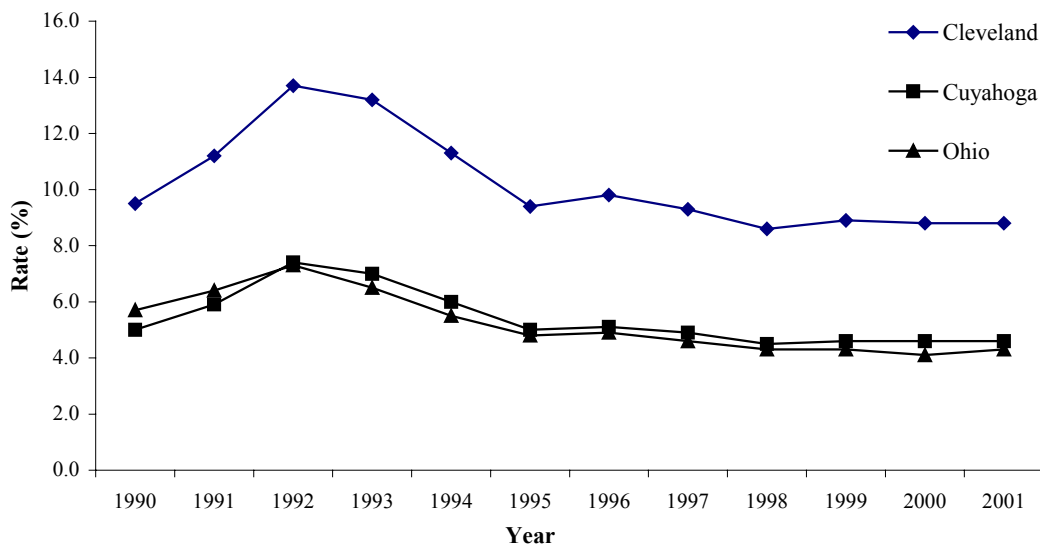
¹The time-limit provision on AFDC required a federal waiver and was not implemented. Once TANF was created, no waiver was required.

²State of Ohio, Ohio Department of Human Services, "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program State Title IV-A Plan," September 30, 1997, p. 1.

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Figure 1

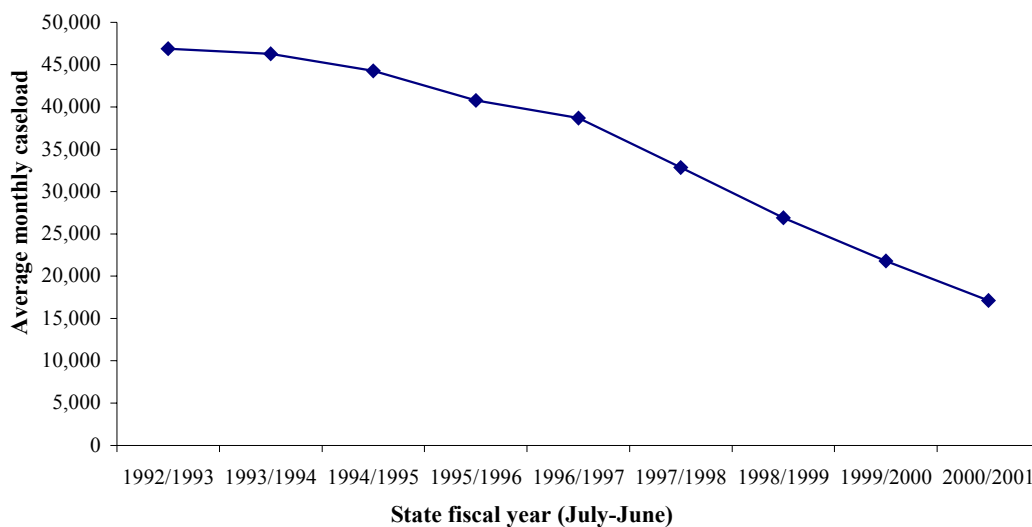
Unemployment Rates in Greater Cleveland and Ohio



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002.

Figure 2

Monthly Cash Assistance Caseloads in Cuyahoga County, 1992/1993 - 2000/2001



SOURCE: Cuyahoga County Income Maintenance Files.

The Major Features of Ohio Works First

- **Ohio adopted one of the nation's shortest time limits on cash assistance: 36 months.**

Starting in October 1997, families receiving cash benefits in Ohio have been limited to 36 months of aid, after which point they are ineligible for at least 24 months. The state has placed a lifetime cap of 60 months on cash benefits.

- **OWF expanded and simplified Ohio's earned income disregard policy, making it easier for welfare recipients to combine work and welfare and thus increase their monthly income.**

Before OWF, a welfare recipient who had two children and went to work could retain some cash benefits until the family's monthly income reached \$632 (during months 1 through 4), \$461 (during months 5 through 12), or \$431 (after 12 months). OWF established a uniform earned income disregard policy that enabled a parent with two children to earn up to \$974 before losing eligibility for cash assistance.

- **Work requirements were made tougher under OWF.**

OWF required adult welfare recipients to spend 30 hours per week either working or engaging in welfare-to-work activities. (Before welfare reform, the requirement was 20 hours.) In addition, OWF introduced full-family sanctions, meaning that a family's entire cash grant — not just the adult's portion — could be terminated for noncompliance. Adults could also lose their portion of the family's food stamp benefit.

- **The PRC program was used to divert families from welfare.**

Ohio encouraged county welfare agencies to develop programs to divert welfare applicants from going on cash assistance, and the state created a flexible funding pool — called the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) program — expressly for this purpose.

- **OWF placed increased emphasis on child support enforcement.**

Ohio had long required single parents on welfare to provide information about the whereabouts of the absent parent (usually the father). Under OWF, noncompliance with child support enforcement results in the same penalties as noncompliance with welfare-to-work activities. The state also eliminated the \$50 "pass-through" that families on welfare once received if child support payments were collected. Child support payments were turned over to the family only after the state received full reimbursement for the money spent on cash assistance and the family was no longer receiving welfare.

Services in Cuyahoga County

- **Welfare reform in Cuyahoga County was more of a process than an “event.” Planning and organizational changes unfolded over a few years.**

Cuyahoga County officials began planning for welfare reform in 1996 and 1997, and they embarked on a major reorganization of the welfare agency in 1998. These changes resulted in the division of the welfare agency into two parts — one focused on OWF recipients, the other on food stamp- and Medicaid-only cases not subject to time limits — and the development of 11 full-service neighborhood centers.

- **To reinforce the emphasis on work, the county implemented a new case management model that combined income maintenance and employment functions.**

The new case managers, called Self-Sufficiency Coaches, handled a wide range of responsibilities, including determination of eligibility for cash assistance, assignment of clients to welfare-to-work activities, approval of support services like child care, and enforcement of time limits. Relative to other urban welfare departments, Cuyahoga’s staff had low caseloads (about 80 cases each) and exercised considerable discretion in determining how best to help clients.

- **The county placed a strong emphasis on trying to divert welfare applicants from going on cash assistance.**

Self-Sufficiency Coaches met with welfare applicants to try to understand why they needed cash assistance and to offer alternatives, including food stamps, Medicaid, and child care assistance. Starting in late 1999, the county began offering PRC grants — up to \$3,000 in a 12-month period (though usually much less) — to keep families from going on cash assistance, to help them find work, and to meet emergency needs. Importantly, PRC grants did not count toward the time limit. As first implemented, PRC eligibility criteria were extremely loose, and program costs mushroomed. By spring 2001, the county tightened PRC guidelines to contain costs and ensure that funds were used to help clients gain self-sufficiency.

- **The county greatly expanded its welfare-to-work program after welfare reform. Initially focused on job search and unpaid work experience, the program gradually included more specialized services.**

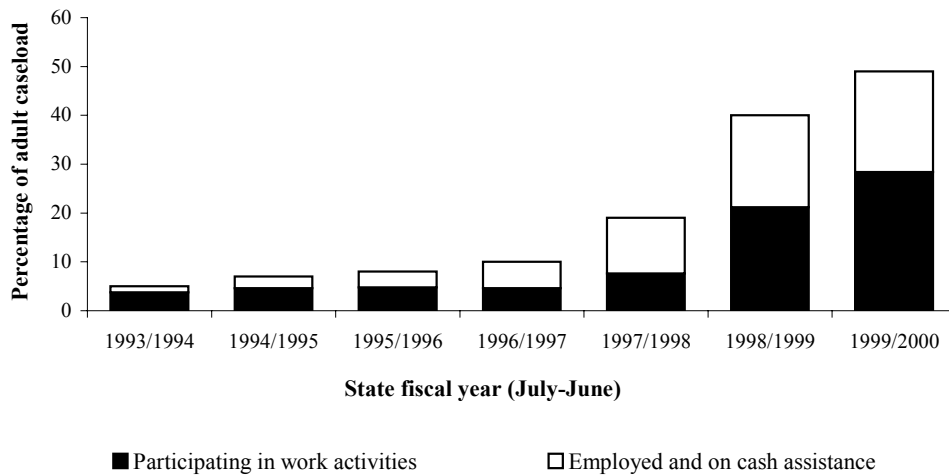
As shown in Figure 3, the percentage of adult cash assistance recipients who were employed or participating in welfare-to-work activities jumped from 19 percent in 1998 to 49 percent in 2000. (Note that these participation rates represent average monthly data and are defined

more broadly than the participation rates in PRWORA.)³ A large part of this increase was related to the growing number of welfare recipients who combined work and welfare — a change attributable in part to the expanded earned income disregard. The county’s expenditures on welfare-to-work activities (excluding child care) also grew, by 34 percent, during this period, owing to an increase in program capacity and the development of more intensive programs for people who had difficulty holding jobs or who faced severe barriers to employment. Job search was heavily emphasized, but it was sometimes combined with General Educational Development (GED) instruction or short-term training to improve clients’ employment prospects.

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Figure 3

Percentage of Adult Cash Assistance Recipients Employed or Participating in Work Activities in Cuyahoga County, 1993/1994 - 1999/2000



SOURCE: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

NOTES: Data were supplied by the state and were not independently verified. MDRC made adjustments to minimize duplicated counts of recipients.

Participation rates capture a broader array of activities than federal guidelines allow and are not limited to participants meeting the 30-hour weekly requirement.

³Specifically, PRWORA requires participation of 30 hours per week in a prescribed set of work activities. The figures for Cuyahoga County capture any amount of participation and include assignments that are not counted under federal guidelines, including some education programs and substance abuse treatment.

- **The 36-month time limit began to be enforced in Cuyahoga County in October 2000. Within the next 12 months, approximately 4,000 families who had used up their months were cut off cash assistance.**

Some welfare staff and clients did not believe that the county would go through with time limits, but the policy went into effect as scheduled. Before cash assistance was terminated, families were called in for a pre-time-limit interview to make sure that they understood that their cash benefits were about to end, to determine whether they had a realistic plan to replace OWF income, and to ensure that they continued to receive noncash benefits for which they were eligible — namely, food stamps, Medicaid, and child care. Clients who needed employment were referred to job developers and other employment resources.

- **The county implemented a child safety review process to ensure that families who exhausted their cash assistance did not suffer harm.**

Self-Sufficiency Coaches initiated the child safety review whenever clients failed to attend their pre-time-limit interviews or did not appear to have sufficient income to replace OWF. Social service workers from community-based agencies conducted home visits to discuss family income sources, check up on children, and make service referrals. In the year after time limits went into effect, approximately 1,900 families were referred to the child safety review. According to county staff, the vast majority of families who were contacted did not appear to be at risk of severe problems like homelessness or child abuse or neglect, though they often needed economic supports and other services.

- **The county implemented two post-time-limit programs to help families in need: the Transitional Jobs Program and Short-Term Transitional Assistance. A modest number of families used these programs.**

Recognizing that some families who hit time limits might not have other income sources, the county instituted two “last resort” programs. The Transitional Jobs Program offered up to six weeks of paid job search assistance, followed by three months of subsidized employment for clients who were employable but could not find work. Short-Term Transitional Assistance provided an extension of cash assistance for up to six months for women with infants, for teenage parents about to finish school, and for adults who were either seriously ill or disabled or caring for someone who was ill or disabled. In the first year that time limits were in effect, a total of 433 families participated in the Transitional Jobs Program, and a monthly average of 155 families received Short-Term Transitional Assistance.

The Perceptions and Experiences of Welfare Recipients

- **A survey and ethnographic interviews with current and former welfare recipients revealed high awareness of the major rules of welfare reform. However, some respondents mistakenly believed that — like cash assistance — food stamps and Medicaid were also time-limited.**

The survey and ethnographic interviews with women who were likely targets of welfare reform reveal that there was nearly universal awareness of the time limit on cash assistance. A large majority were also aware that they could get help with medical care, food stamps, and child care if they left welfare for work. Perhaps because the county emphasized the time-limit policy so forcefully, the ethnographic interviews reveal that some women believed the policy extended to *all* benefits, not just cash. This erroneous belief may have led some families to skip eligibility appointments and thus lose benefits for which they were eligible.

- **Though Cuyahoga County had a low rate of sanctioning overall, families who remained on the welfare rolls for a long time were more likely to be penalized by welfare staff.**

On a monthly basis, less than 2 percent of the adults on cash assistance in Cuyahoga County were sanctioned for noncompliance with work requirements or other rules. The survey, however, suggests that sanctioning rates were much higher for women who stayed on welfare for extended periods. Such women also tended to view Self-Sufficiency Coaches as enforcers of rules rather than as people who got to know them or helped them find jobs. The ethnographic interviews suggest that women who combined work and welfare held more positive views of welfare staff than women who did not.

The Effects of OWF on Welfare Receipt and Employment

One of the goals of TANF is to move people from welfare to work. As a first step in exploring the likely effects of OWF on welfare receipt and employment, administrative records were assembled for the 536,256 individuals in Cuyahoga County who received cash assistance, food stamps, or Medicaid in at least one month from July 1992 through December 2000. The Ohio Income Maintenance System reported monthly estimated payments and eligibility status for each person. State unemployment insurance (UI) records provided information on earnings reported to the UI system for the same people over the same period. Because information is available only through the end of 2000, this analysis focuses on the period before any families reached the OWF time limit. Because work requirements, time limits, and other OWF policies apply only to cases headed by adults and because of the growth in importance of child-only cases during the 1990s, the analysis is limited to adults.

The analysis summarized below compares groups of adults who received welfare before October 1997 with later groups of welfare recipients. If the behavior of the later groups differed markedly from what was expected based on the behavior of the earlier groups, this suggests that OWF had an effect. For example, if OWF contributed to the decrease in caseloads after October 1997, then either people should have left welfare faster than expected after that point or fewer people than expected should have begun receiving welfare. The main findings of the analysis are summarized in Table 2. Although welfare recipients left welfare and went to work faster in 2000 than they did in 1992, OWF is likely to be responsible for only a small part of those changes. Many of the changes began before OWF, and the pattern of change after 1997 was often similar to the pattern of change before 1997.

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Table 2

Estimated Trends and Effects of OWF for Welfare Exits, Welfare Entry, and Employment

Outcome	Trend from 1992 to 2000	Estimated Effect of OWF
<u>Welfare exits</u>		
New welfare recipients	Rate of exit increased steadily throughout the period	Small effect; increase in rate of exit slightly higher after OWF
Long-term welfare recipients	Rate of exit increased faster after 1997 than before 1997	OWF increased rate of exit
<u>Welfare entry</u>		
New welfare recipients	Entry declined throughout the period	OWF did not significantly affect the number of new welfare recipients
Returning welfare recipients	Recidivism increased throughout the period	OWF did not significantly affect recidivism
New food stamp recipients entering welfare	Entry increased before OWF but declined after OWF	OWF reduced number of people moving from food stamps to cash assistance
<u>Employment among new welfare recipients</u>		
All employment	Employment increased steadily throughout the period	No significant effect; increase in employment similar before and after OWF

- **The behavior of welfare recipients in Cuyahoga County has changed considerably since 1993.**

About 53 percent of new adult welfare recipients in 1993 left the rolls within a year, compared with more than 80 percent of new adult welfare recipients at the end of 1999. Likewise, 50 percent of the former group were working a year later, compared with 63 percent of the latter group. Many fewer people began receiving welfare at the end of the decade than at the beginning of the decade. For example, there were only about 2,000 new and returning welfare recipients in December 2000, compared with more than 3,000 before implementation of OWF. All these changes began to occur before OWF, however, suggesting that changes were not caused by welfare reform alone. Other factors — such as a growing economy, an expanded federal Earned Income Credit (EIC), a reduction in out-of-wedlock births among teenagers, and the aging of the population — may have played a role.

- **OWF appears to have increased the rate at which long-term welfare recipients leave the rolls, but not the exit rate for new welfare recipients.**

As mentioned above, the rate at which new adult welfare recipients left the rolls in Cuyahoga County gradually increased throughout the 1990s. Because this increase occurred at a similar rate before and after 1997, OWF is unlikely to be its primary cause. However, among long-term welfare recipients (those who had remained on the rolls for 18 of the 24 months after first receiving welfare), the change in welfare exits accelerated after 1997, suggesting that OWF had an effect for that group. Welfare reform's different effects for the two groups may reflect differences in the groups' exposure to welfare reform and what individuals would have done on their own, without its influence. Most new welfare recipients left the rolls quickly even before 1997, so welfare reform had little ability to affect their behavior. In contrast, long-term welfare recipients, who were much less likely to leave welfare on their own, would have been exposed to the new policies longer. Indeed, the implementation study revealed that county staff placed an increasing emphasis on getting clients into work activities and off welfare as they got closer to exhausting their 36 months on cash assistance.

- **OWF has not affected recidivism or the number of people first receiving cash assistance.**

The likelihood that former welfare recipients returned quickly to the rolls increased before 1997 and continued to increase after that. Likewise, the number of adults receiving cash assistance for the first time declined throughout the decade but did so as quickly before 1997 as afterward. The implication is that OWF did not substantially affect the number of people coming onto welfare for the first time or the number returning to welfare.

- **OWF appears to have reduced the number of food stamp recipients who began receiving cash assistance.**

Because they already have low income, people who are receiving food stamps might be especially at risk of receiving cash assistance. Between 1993 and 1997, the proportion of new adult food stamp recipients who subsequently began receiving cash assistance gradually increased. After that period, however, the proportion moving onto cash assistance dropped substantially, from 33 percent around the time that OWF began to 13 percent by the end of the decade. This may imply that the program's diversion strategy succeeded in helping people avoid receiving cash assistance.

- **OWF does not appear to be responsible for increased employment among current and recent welfare recipients.**

As mentioned above, new welfare recipients were more likely to go to work quickly at the end of the decade than in 1993. However, this change occurred at about the same rate before and after 1997, suggesting that OWF was unlikely to be responsible for greater employment among new welfare recipients. Other factors, such as the growing economy or the expanded EIC, may instead be responsible for the steady increase in employment among welfare recipients.

The Experiences of Former and Ongoing Welfare Recipients

One of the Urban Change project's principal objectives is to understand how the well-being of low-income families has evolved since welfare reform. The experiences of nearly 700 single mothers who were on welfare in May 1995 — before OWF's implementation — and who were living in Cleveland's poorest neighborhoods were studied through survey interviews conducted after welfare reform got under way, first in 1998 and again in 2001. The survey was supplemented by four rounds of ethnographic interviews with 38 welfare mothers in the same poor neighborhoods from 1998 through 2001. The analysis gave special attention to examining the circumstances of women who were especially vulnerable to adverse effects of welfare reform — those who had exhausted their 36 months or were close to it. Readers should keep in mind that observed changes over time are not necessarily attributable to welfare reform but are likely to reflect a combination of factors, including the strong economy, the effect of other policies like the EIC, and the aging of these women and their children.

Welfare and Employment Experiences

- **Almost all women had worked for pay after welfare reform, and most were working without receiving welfare in 2001.**

Among women in the survey, welfare receipt declined from 100 percent in May 1995 (baseline) to 50 percent in 1998 and to 12 percent at the time of the 2001 interview. Nearly 70 percent were employed and not receiving cash assistance in 2001. However, the percentage of women who had neither work nor welfare as a source of income nearly doubled, from 11 percent in 1998 to 20 percent in 2001. Similar patterns were observed in the ethnographic sample.

- **On the whole, these women had fairly high employment stability.**

Employment stability overall was higher among these women than has typically been found among welfare recipients in other studies, with two out of five having worked in 36 or more months out of a 48-month period. Nearly one-third of the women who were working in 2001 had had the same job for two or more years. Some women, however, experienced considerable employment instability, having taken a series of short-term low-wage jobs that resulted in great fluctuations in earnings (and therefore benefit eligibility) from month to month. Health problems of the women or their children emerged as a leading reason for job loss, either because the women had had to quit or had been let go because of absences.

- **Over time, the employment situations of most women improved.**

In both 1998 and 2001, most women who worked had full-time jobs. Average hourly wages for the women's current or most recent job increased from \$7.20 in 1998 to \$8.60 in 2001, resulting in an increase in average weekly earnings from \$258 to \$325. Women were also more likely to be in jobs with fringe benefits (such as sick pay, vacation, and health insurance) in 2001 than in 1998.

- **Regardless of improvements in employment, the majority of women did not have what might be considered "good" jobs.**

The percentage of women who worked full time in jobs that paid \$7.50 per hour or more *and* that offered employer-provided health insurance increased from 1998 to 2001 (Figure 4), but only about one out of three working women had such a job in 2001. Despite the strong economy, most women worked in jobs that offered them few or no benefits and that provided earnings that would keep their families at or near the poverty level. These women typically worked in service sector jobs, and only about half had regular day jobs.

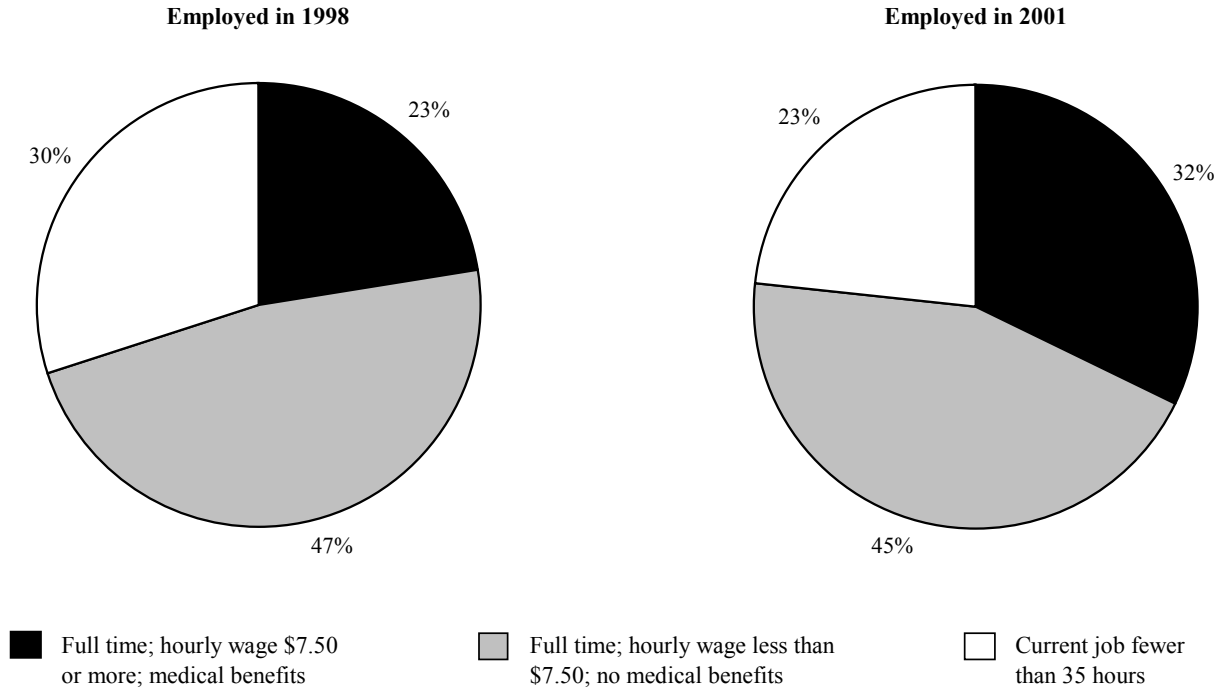
- **The majority of these women faced multiple barriers to employment, but barriers did decline somewhat over time; in particular, there was significant improvement in educational attainment.**

Most women had barriers that could constrain their ability to get a job (for example, health problems) or that could limit the kinds of job for which they qualified (for example, their education credentials). Although most women had several barriers in both 1998 and 2001, the

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Figure 4

Job Characteristics for Those Currently Employed in 1998 and in 2001



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Urban Change Respondent Survey.

NOTES: Calculations for 1998 are based on 337 of the 371 respondents who were working for whom wage and benefit information was available. Calculations for 2001 are based on 461 of the 489 respondents who were working for whom wage and benefit information was available.

average number with barriers did decline, and the percentage with no barriers increased. Of particular note was significant growth in the percentage of women who had a GED or high school diploma, which rose from 55 percent in 1995 to 67 percent in 2001.

Economic Circumstances and Material Hardship

- **Over time, the composition of total household income changed substantially.**

From 1998 to 2001, there was a large reduction in the percentage of families who had income from TANF, and there were significant increases in the percentage of households with income from earnings, child support, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Although only 17 percent were in households with TANF income in 2001, about half were still getting food stamps and Medicaid. While use of food stamps and the Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) program declined over time, there was no change in use of Medicaid, subsidized housing, and energy assistance.

- **On average, families were better off economically in 2001 than they had been in 1998, but most families continued to be poor or near poor.**

Overall, average total monthly household income increased from \$1,358 in 1998 to \$1,771 in 2001, corresponding to an average annualized income of \$21,258 in 2001 (not including the EIC).⁴ The percentage of households with incomes below the poverty threshold declined significantly, from 63 percent in 1998 to 50 percent in 2001. Despite this decline, the majority of families were poor or near poor, and thus many shifted from being welfare poor to working poor.

- **Over time, the assets of these families increased, but there was also an increase in the percentage with large consumer debt.**

Car ownership increased from 39 percent to 54 percent between 1998 and 2001, and home ownership increased from 8 percent to 14 percent over this period. The percentage of families with savings in excess of \$500 more than doubled (from 4 percent to 9 percent). There was a corresponding increase in consumer debt, however, with the percentage owing more than \$2,000 (not including car loans and mortgages) rising from 32 percent in 1998 to 43 percent in 2001.

- **Despite overall economic improvements, there was no change with regard to food hardships.**

⁴A single parent who had two children and earned wages totaling \$21,258 would have received an EIC payment of \$2,284 in 2001.

Rates of food insecurity and hunger were high and stable over time. Forty percent of the women reported food insecurity in 2001, down only slightly from 44 percent in 1998. Rates of hunger were just over 10 percent at both interviews. Use of food banks was also unchanged over time.

- **In contrast to food hardships, housing hardships declined significantly from 1998 to 2001.**

Families were less likely to have “worst-case housing needs” (spending more than 50 percent of household income on rent and utilities, without subsidy) in 2001 than in 1998 — declining from 32 percent to 25 percent. They were also less likely to be homeless, to have experienced a gas or electricity shutoff in the prior year, to be doubling up with another family, and to be living in a dangerous neighborhood. Still, some housing conditions did not improve (for example, the percentage of families living in crowded housing), and housing and neighborhood hardships overall were considerable.

- **With regard to health care hardships, most indicators were unchanged or improved, but unmet need for dental care increased from 1998 to 2001.**

Health care coverage for the women was unchanged, with about one out of five lacking health insurance in the month before both interviews. Lack of health insurance for children, however, declined — from 13 percent in 1998 to 7 percent in 2001. There was no change with regard to reports of unmet medical care need, but more women in 2001 (27 percent) than in 1998 (22 percent) said that they or their children could not afford needed dental care. In the ethnographic sample, some women specifically mentioned that they had difficulty affording prescription drugs.

- **Overall, despite some improvements over time, material hardships remained high among these families.**

At the time of the 2001 interview, families were experiencing two hardships, on average, out of eight specific hardships considered. About four out of five women reported at least one hardship, and over one-third reported three hardships or more. The ethnographic data suggest that the prevalence of hardships would be even higher were it not for the women’s appreciable efforts to prevent and reduce the hardships of their families by economizing and seeking help from family, friends, and charity.

In summary, data from this study indicate that, overall, there were substantial improvements over time with regard to employment and economic well-being of women who had been welfare recipients in 1995. However, most women were in jobs that continued to leave them poor or near poor, and material hardships were widespread.

The Experiences of Vulnerable Groups of Women

- **Women were considered to be vulnerable to the adverse effects of welfare reform if their cash assistance had been terminated because of the time limit or they were at risk of that happening in 2001.**

In the survey sample, 15 percent of the women had had their cash assistance terminated because they had used up their 36 months of OWF benefits. Another 19 percent were at risk of termination — that is, they had fewer than 12 months left on their time clocks at the 2001 interview. Women with 12 months or more left on their clocks (few of whom were still on welfare) were considered to be a less vulnerable subgroup.

- **Terminated and at-risk women were considerably more disadvantaged before welfare reform than women who were not at risk of termination, and they continued to face greater barriers to employment throughout 2001.**

Compared with women not at risk of time-limited termination, women in the two vulnerable subgroups were, in May 1995, less likely to have a high school diploma or GED certificate; less likely to have had formal employment in the prior year; had more children; had younger children; were more likely to be African-American; and were more likely to be long-term welfare recipients. In both 1998 and 2001, terminated women typically faced numerous barriers to employment. They continued to be far less likely than others to have a high school diploma or GED — although they, too, had made great strides since baseline: 63 percent lacked such a credential in 1995, compared with only 47 percent in 2001.

- **Terminated and at-risk women were less likely to be working in 2001 than those not at risk — but most did have some employment after welfare reform.**

About 60 percent of both groups of vulnerable women were working at the time of the 2001 interview, compared with nearly 80 percent of those not at risk. This means that two out of five terminated women had neither cash welfare nor employment income at the final interview. Nevertheless, nearly all women had recent work experience: For example, some 96 percent of terminated women had worked for pay within the 48 months before the 2001 interview, and, on average, they had worked in 18 of those 48 months.

- **Terminated and at-risk women had had less favorable jobs than other women.**

Although most women in all three subgroups worked full time in their current or most recent job, those who had exhausted the 36-month time limit or were close to being cut off cash

assistance had significantly less favorable jobs than other women. For example, the hourly wage was \$7.31 for terminated women, compared with \$9.14 for those with ample time left on their clocks; this translates to nearly \$100 difference in weekly earnings (\$257 for terminated women and \$356 for those not at risk). Having such low-wage jobs likely qualified terminated women for partial welfare checks that contributed to their having exhausted 36 months of benefits.

- **Women who had been terminated because of the time limit were much poorer than others, but rates of poverty declined over time for all groups.**

Nearly 80 percent of women with time-limited terminations had household incomes in 2001 that put them below poverty, compared with about 40 percent of women not at risk of reaching the time limit. It is worth noting, however, that terminated women were more likely to be below poverty in 1998 *before* they were terminated than they were in 2001 — down from 86 percent to 78 percent. Still, ethnographic data reveal that some women who had been cut off welfare because they had reached the time limit were living in rather dire circumstances.

- **Housing and food hardships were especially severe among terminated women, but these women were less likely than others to report health care hardships.**

Over half the terminated women (compared with 38 percent of those not at risk of termination) were food insecure in 2001. Terminated women were also more likely than others to have housing hardships (for example, to be living in housing with heating, electrical, or plumbing problems). They were far less likely, however, to be at risk medically. For example, only 1 percent of terminated women had an uninsured child, compared with 10 percent of women not at risk of time-limited termination. Only 3 percent of terminated women lacked insurance for themselves, compared with 26 percent of women with 12 months or more left on their time clocks. About 90 percent of the terminated women were relying on the safety net supports of food stamps and Medicaid (and about 25 percent had income from SSI).

In summary, the women least likely to be faring well at the time of the final interview were those who had been cut off welfare (or were at risk of being cut off) at 36 months. These women had typically had numerous barriers to employment that preceded welfare reform. Their ability to support themselves and their children remains uncertain, but the majority do appear to be getting support from the safety net.

Welfare Reform and Neighborhoods

As legislation to reform welfare took shape in Cuyahoga County, questions were raised about the effects of reform on low-income communities. Critics conjectured that welfare reform

would undercut the progress that was being made on such urban problems as housing deterioration, crime, and drug trafficking. Further, some anticipated that those remaining on welfare might become increasingly isolated in urban areas of greatest disadvantage. Proponents of welfare reform, on the other hand, expected positive spillover effects for communities. One point of view suggested that rising levels of employment among welfare recipients could prove beneficial for neighborhood economies, processes, and institutions. This section summarizes findings from the Urban Change project's neighborhood indicators component, which asked: What were the conditions of Cuyahoga County's neighborhoods before and after welfare reform? In particular, did poor neighborhoods get better or worse after reform?

The Residential Patterns of Welfare Recipients

- **In the early 1990s, families receiving cash assistance were not evenly dispersed throughout Cuyahoga County but were concentrated in a set of neighborhoods that are largely contiguous.**

Before welfare reform, many neighborhoods (defined as census tracts) in Cleveland had high concentrations of families receiving welfare cash assistance (Figure 5a). Concentration of welfare was more pronounced on the east side of the City of Cleveland than the west side and was more severe for African-American than white welfare recipients. Because of residential patterns, most welfare families were geographically isolated from working-poor and middle-class families who were not on welfare.

- **By 2000, the notion of a neighborhood's being "welfare dependent" virtually ceased to exist in Cleveland, with the exception of a very few neighborhoods that often contained many units of public housing.**

The steady decline in the welfare caseload that started in 1992 resulted in a very different picture of welfare concentration after welfare reform (Figure 5b). Following the implementation of OWF, a handful of neighborhoods remained in which more than 20 percent of the residents were receiving cash assistance. As Cuyahoga County's caseload declined by over 60 percent, recipients in even the poorest neighborhoods left welfare, resulting in fewer high-welfare neighborhoods primarily in the City of Cleveland. Neighborhoods that accounted for many welfare recipients by the end of the study period were ones that had an extreme proportion of the welfare population in 1992 and had experienced rates of caseload decline that were below the county's average.

- **Although the number of welfare recipients in Cuyahoga County fell by more than half during the study period, people who remain on the rolls are residentially segregated and socially isolated from nonrecipients.**

Pockets of welfare concentration have led to serious concerns about the isolation of the welfare poor and the resulting limitations on opportunity. Commonly used indices of segregation, isolation, and concentration show that while falling welfare caseloads have lowered the number and percentage of welfare recipients living in high-welfare tracts, welfare recipients still remain relatively segregated and isolated in the metropolitan area.

Neighborhood Conditions

The Urban Change project monitored aggregate social and economic indicators for high-welfare neighborhoods and the balance of Cuyahoga County to assess whether neighborhood conditions — especially *undesirable* conditions — had become more prevalent in particular neighborhoods since the implementation of OWF. Indicators were selected that were relevant to concerns about the potential effects of OWF on children, families, and neighborhoods. Unlike the earlier discussion of the effects of OWF on welfare receipt and employment, this analysis is purely descriptive of trends from 1992 through 2000.

- **Over a nine-year tracking period, most indicators of neighborhood conditions showed either little change or change in a positive direction. Since OWF was implemented, none of the indicators has shown a rate or pattern that is consistent with a negative change.**

Overall, the average change in conditions before and after reform — regardless of neighborhood classification — has been positive for a number of social and economic conditions (Table 3). Over time, births among teenagers and violent crime decreased, and adequacy of prenatal care, drug arrests, and median housing values increased. Domestic violence and tax delinquency registered an increase, but the changes did not coincide with welfare reform. Births out of wedlock, property crime, and child abuse and neglect did not change significantly countywide. Increases in domestic violence and drug arrests predate OWF's implementation and may relate to changes in local law enforcement practices.

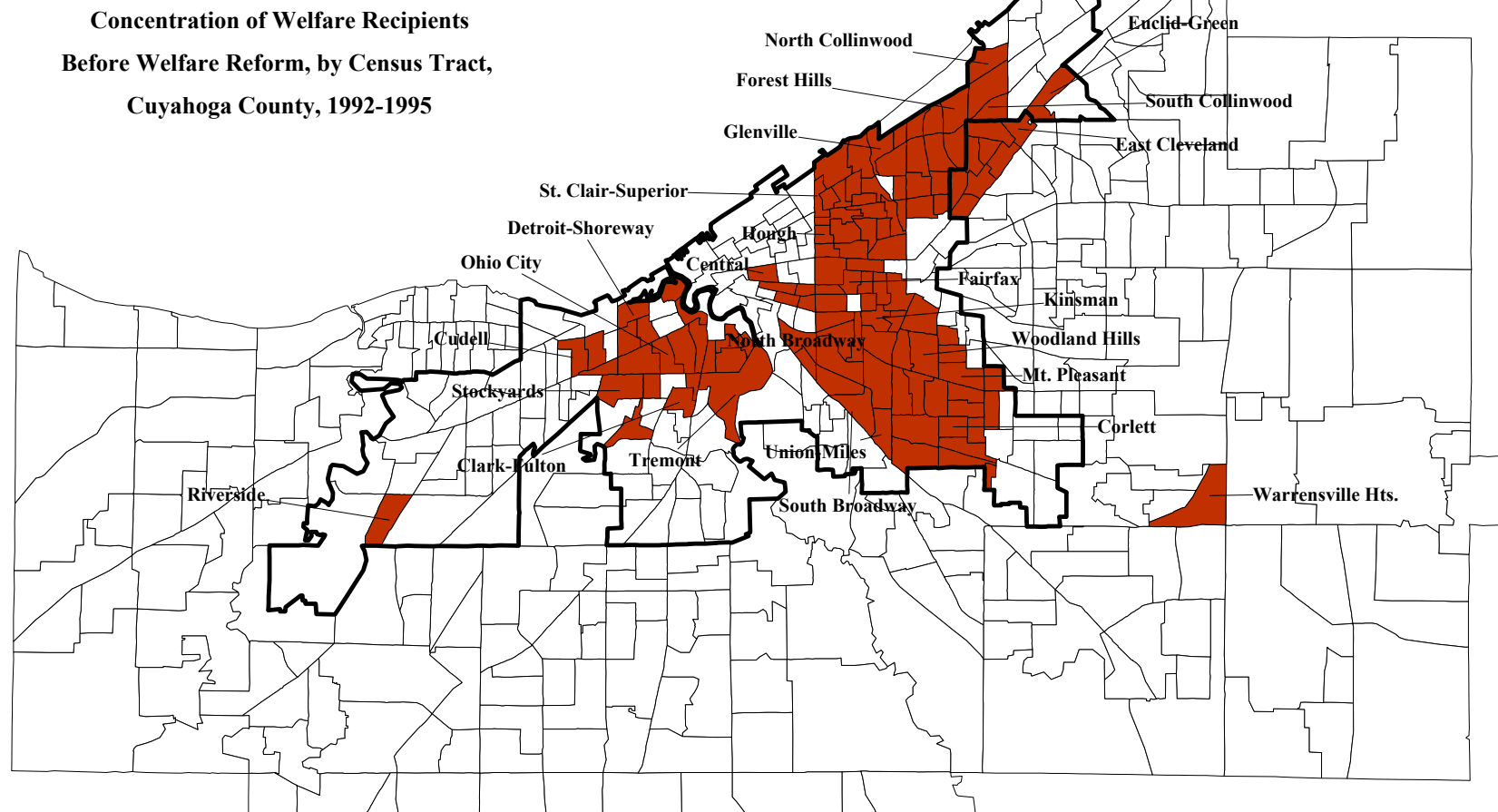
- **Throughout the study period, although the trends in high-welfare neighborhoods were generally stable or improving — similar to trends in other parts of the county — the absolute levels of distress in such neighborhoods were consistently higher.**

On every indicator examined, conditions in the county's poorest neighborhoods were less favorable than in other areas. For example, throughout the study period, child maltreatment

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Figure 5a

Concentration of Welfare Recipients
Before Welfare Reform, by Census Tract,
Cuyahoga County, 1992-1995



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the Urban Change Neighborhood Indicators Database.

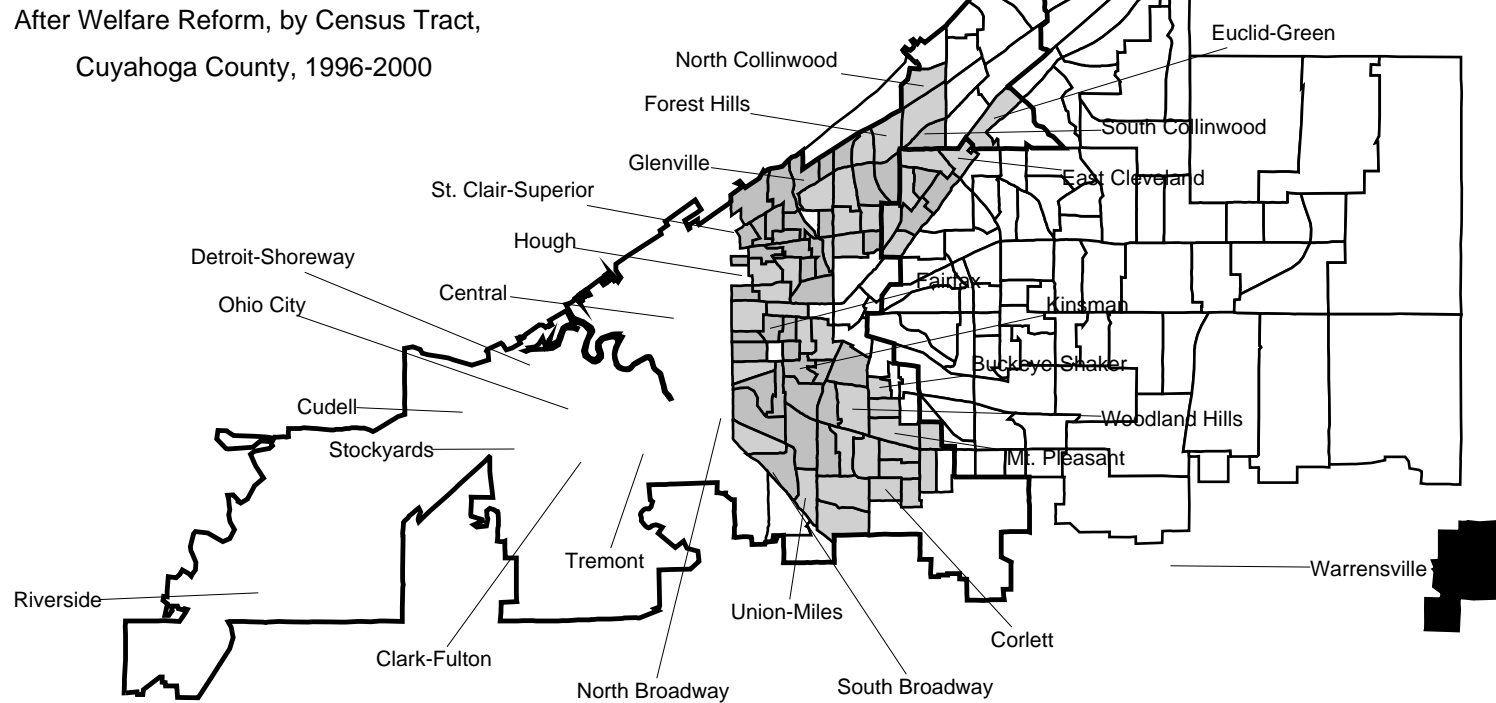
NOTES: High-welfare-concentration tracts are those where at least 20 percent of the residents receive welfare. Selected neighborhoods are identified, but all residential tracts in the county were included in the neighborhood analysis.

- High (117 tracts)
- Low (352 tracts)
- Census tract boundaries
- City of Cleveland municipal boundary

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Figure 5b

Concentration of Welfare Recipients
 After Welfare Reform, by Census Tract,
 Cuyahoga County, 1996-2000



- High (52 tracts)
- Formerly high, now low (65 tracts)
- Low (352 tracts)
- Census tract boundaries
- City of Cleveland municipal boundary

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the Urban Change Neighborhood Indicators Database.

NOTES: High-welfare-concentration tracts are those where at least 20 percent of the residents receive welfare. Selected neighborhoods are identified, but all residential tracts in the county were included in the analysis.

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Table 3

Summary of Trends in Conditions in High-Welfare Neighborhoods, 1992-2000

Indicator	Trend
<u>Births</u>	
Births to teenagers	Decline
Births to unmarried mothers	No change
Adequacy of prenatal care	Slight increase
<u>Child well-being</u>	
Child abuse and neglect	No change
<u>Crime</u>	
Violent crime	Decline
Property crime	No change
Domestic violence	Increase
Drug arrests	Increase
<u>Economic factors</u>	
Median housing	Increase
Tax delinquency	Slight increase

rates in high-welfare neighborhoods were about twice as high as in the balance of the county, and the incidence of violent crime was more than 15 times greater.

- **The outcomes captured by the social and economic indicators tend to cluster in a few high-risk places. Families remaining on welfare live in neighborhoods where most of the indicators are extremely negative.**

As a way to identify places with extremely negative conditions, the study created a summary index of neighborhood disadvantage. Before welfare reform, 68 percent of welfare recipients lived in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods, compared with 63 percent after OWF. Thus, although most neighborhood conditions improved over time, the changes were modest, and the remaining cash assistance recipients were living in neighborhoods that were probably experiencing some of the worst social and health outcomes in the county.

Welfare-to-Work Transitions and Neighborhood

The patterns of economic opportunities and social relationships within neighborhoods, cities, and regions might promote or impede the employment and self-sufficiency goals of wel-

fare reform. These possibilities raise the question whether employment outcomes for current or former cash assistance recipients differ by neighborhood.

- **Despite the clustering of welfare recipients in disadvantaged neighborhoods, place of residence did not seem to affect the employment probabilities of current or former recipients.**

Welfare recipients in high-welfare neighborhoods were only slightly less likely than their suburban counterparts to combine work and welfare or to leave welfare for work. Work participation, exit, and welfare-to-work rates improved comparably in both high- and low-welfare neighborhoods.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

When federal lawmakers created TANF, they ventured into unknown territory. Many of the provisions of PRWORA — time limits, in particular — had never been implemented on a large scale or evaluated. Supporters and critics envisioned starkly different outcomes. On one side were those who believed that the law would spur innovation at the state and local levels; that tougher work requirements and time limits would induce more welfare recipients to find jobs; and that ending the welfare “culture” of low-income communities would lead to their revitalization. On the other side were those who feared that devolution would spur a “race to the bottom” as states slashed benefits and tried to make their programs less attractive than those of neighboring states. Critics feared that sanctions and time limits would deprive needy families of essential income and would cause suffering, leading to increases in crime, homelessness, and other social problems.

The realities of welfare reform in Cuyahoga County fell between these two extremes, but the disaster that some critics feared clearly did not materialize. To the contrary, the county *did* innovate and improve services in many areas. Its caseloads declined sharply, and many welfare recipients went to work. The employment and economic situations of low-income women who had a history of welfare receipt and who lived in the poorest neighborhoods generally improved over time: They had fairly high employment stability; their average weekly earnings increased; and they acquired more assets (along with more debts). Likewise, the social conditions of the county as a whole and of low-income neighborhoods in particular either improved or held constant on most measures. The various procedures and services that the county put in place to help families prepare for the time-limit cutoff seemed to avoid immediate harm.

Despite the good news, there are three main reasons to refrain from declaring victory for welfare reform in Cleveland. First, welfare rolls in Cuyahoga County were going down, and employment was rising, *before* OWF was implemented; there is little evidence that welfare reform sped up the exit rate for most welfare recipients (long-term recipients being an important

exception) or that it increased the rate at which they went to work. Second, it is unclear how welfare reform will play out in a weaker economy. Even with the extraordinarily good conditions captured in this study, most former welfare recipients ended up in low-paying jobs without basic benefits, and some central-city neighborhoods remain highly distressed. Third, the policy that has most worried critics of welfare reform — time limits — had just been implemented when data collection for this study ended. It is still too early to know whether ending cash assistance leads to positive or negative effects on low-income families and neighborhoods.

What lessons are policymakers to draw from this? The answers depend largely on what goals they want welfare reform to achieve. Within the parameters set by OWF, several key observations and recommendations can be made:

- **The robust economy played a central role in reducing caseloads and increasing employment in Cuyahoga County. The importance of economic factors should not be overlooked.**

The growth in employment during the study period made it relatively easy for welfare recipients to find work. It also reinforced the logic of such program strategies as job search and short-term training designed to move welfare recipients into the labor market quickly. In a softer economy, more intensive activities — such as subsidized work or education and training — may be required to help welfare recipients (and agencies) meet federal and state participation requirements and to improve the ability of welfare recipients to compete for jobs. A softer labor market would also likely increase the demand for cash benefits and other services, from families who have reached the time limit. This underscores the need for flexible extension policies and cash reserves in the event of an economic downturn.

- **The ample, flexible funding available under welfare reform — a result of the fixed TANF block grant and reduced caseloads — helped foster innovation and expand services in Cuyahoga County. This record makes a case for maintaining the current size and structure of the block grant.**

Far from “racing to the bottom,” Cuyahoga County’s elected officials and welfare administrators took advantage of the flexibility of welfare reform and tried to improve service delivery and reduce poverty. Among their many achievements were the creation of a neighborhood-based service delivery system, a sizable increase in the percentage of welfare recipients enrolled in welfare-to-work activities, an expansion of child care benefits for low-income working families, and the development of an array of pre- and post-time-limit services to ensure that families who lost cash assistance after 36 months were not harmed. Not all their ideas worked; the PRC program, for example, was initially too open-ended and had to be curtailed. On balance, however, the level of services offered to welfare recipients and low-income working families in the county went up, not down. It seems unlikely that this would have occurred without the added flexibility and resources that OWF initially offered county officials.

- **The expanded earned income disregard provided economic support to families who combined work and welfare, and it helped boost the county’s participation rates in welfare-to-work activities. These short-term benefits — while important — may put some families at risk in the future.**

OWF’s earned income disregard policy provides a financial incentive for welfare recipients to go to work, but it may also keep them on the rolls longer. In the short run, this is a win-win situation: Welfare recipients who are employed gain valuable experience and increase their monthly income, and the welfare agency gets to count such employment toward its welfare-to-work participation rate. Under OWF, however, individuals who combine work and welfare are using up months of assistance that they may need later if they lose a job or other source of income. State policymakers might reconsider whether welfare recipients who “play by the rules” (that is, work) should be subject to the same time-limit policies as those who do not work. One option would be to “stop the clock” for families who combine welfare and work. To pay for these benefits — which would be smaller than regular welfare payments — states could take advantage of TANF’s nonassistance provision, which does not count toward federal time limits on benefits. Research in several states suggests that providing financial incentives to welfare recipients who go to work can increase employment, reduce poverty, and improve family and child outcomes.⁵

- **The generally low quality of jobs obtained by welfare recipients underscores the importance of noncash benefits to low-income working families, including the Earned Income Credit (EIC), food stamps, and Medicaid. Continuous education and outreach are needed to ensure that families are aware of these programs and can access benefits for which they are qualified.**

In the strong economy in which the study took place, most welfare recipients were able to find full-time employment. Nevertheless, the survey found that many women worked in jobs that paid low wages and lacked health insurance. Moreover, many of the women reported food insecurity, even though they were working. Although Cuyahoga County made a major effort to ensure that families who left welfare continued to receive food stamps and Medicaid, some of the women in the ethnographic sample indicated that they had missed eligibility appointments and had thus lost benefits for which they were eligible because of their mistaken beliefs that they did not qualify or that benefits were time-limited. Welfare staff and social service providers may need to make more concerted efforts to explain the economic supports and benefits that are

⁵See, for example, Pamela Morris, Virginia Knox, and Lisa Gennetian, *Welfare Policies Matter for Children and Youth: Lessons for TANF Reauthorization* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2002).

available to low-income working families apart from cash assistance — and to emphasize that these benefits are not time-limited. They might also place greater emphasis on explaining the EIC, including how to ask employers to get a portion of the EIC advanced in one's paycheck.

- **Adults who leave welfare for work often lose health insurance after transitional Medicaid expires. If they become sick or injured, their jobs — and their families' economic security — are placed at risk.**

Since welfare reform, the federal government and Ohio have made major strides in expanding health care coverage to low-income children. The findings from this study suggest that many former welfare recipients do not find jobs that provide health insurance after their 12 months of transitional Medicaid end. As long as the women stay healthy, this is not a problem; but should they become sick or injured, their ability to work and support their families may be seriously compromised. Policymakers might consider extending transitional Medicaid beyond 12 months or allowing former welfare recipients to purchase Medicaid coverage or state-sponsored health insurance based on their ability to pay. Policymakers might also consider providing greater incentives for employers to extend health insurance to more workers, including part-time employees.

- **Helping former welfare recipients stabilize their employment and access better jobs may require specialized skill-building programs designed for working parents.**

As important as transitional benefits are to welfare recipients who go to work, the long-term solution to lifting families out of poverty and encouraging self-sufficiency is to help them acquire better jobs. While some advancement may come with greater work experience, many former welfare recipients may need to upgrade their skills to land jobs with higher pay and benefits. Education and training providers might consider developing part-time or short-term programs specifically for low-income working adults, preferably in the evenings or on weekends. Welfare agencies can set aside funds to help former welfare recipients who enroll in training programs to access child care, transportation assistance, and financial help with books and supplies. Employers can support workers' career advancement through in-house training, tuition reimbursement programs, and flexible work schedules.

- **Cuyahoga County made a strong effort to ensure that families who reached the time limit were prepared and did not suffer harm. The survey and ethnographic data indicate that such preventive actions are warranted and that families who hit time limits remain vulnerable.**

Cuyahoga County implemented a comprehensive program of pre- and post-time-limit services to ensure that families understood the cutoff policy and were not harmed when benefits ended. Nonetheless, there is ample reason to worry about these families. Judging from the sur-

vey, most are living below poverty level, have multiple employment barriers, and — if they are working — are in jobs with low pay and no health insurance. The findings underscore the importance of maintaining the kinds of protections and “last resort” programs that Cuyahoga County put in place. They also suggest the desirability of having child safety review workers or others conduct periodic check-ins with time-limited families in the future to ensure that their economic situations do not deteriorate and that they are referred to appropriate services to address basic needs and improve their lives.

- **The survey found an increase in the number of families receiving child support, which may suggest that the county’s child support enforcement policies are working. On a cautionary note, the amount collected tends to be small, and many families still do not receive child support.**

One of the tantalizing findings from the survey was a significant increase in the percentage of mothers who reported receiving child support income: from 9 percent in 1998 to 19 percent in 2001. While this is not necessarily attributable to welfare reform, it suggests that there may be a payoff to the child support enforcement procedures now in place. At the same time, the fact that four out of five families reported *no* child support income suggests that it is only part of the solution to increasing self-sufficiency and reducing poverty. Other research on noncustodial parents (usually fathers) has found that they are often as poor as or poorer than the mothers and have limited ability to provide support. For this reason, programs that emphasize skills training, job placement, and career advancement for current and former welfare recipients might target noncustodial parents as well.

- **While there is no evidence that welfare reform negatively affected Cuyahoga’s neighborhoods, several Cleveland neighborhoods remain highly distressed. Revitalizing these communities will likely require investments well beyond what the welfare system can provide — as well as the involvement of other public and private sector partners.**

During the time period covered by the neighborhood indicators study, there is no evidence that moving large numbers of women from welfare to work negatively affected other social indicators in their communities. Thus, there is no immediate need for policy to address negative spillover from welfare reform in these neighborhoods. However, the relatively smaller population who remain on welfare continue to be geographically isolated and live in distressed neighborhoods. Addressing such inequalities may require a two-pronged approach, on the one hand promoting the revitalization of poor neighborhoods and, on the other hand, adopting transportation and subsidized housing policies that will make it easier for low-income families to move freely throughout the metropolitan area, where they can have equal access to opportunities.

Recent Publications on MDRC Projects

Note: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. With a few exceptions, this list includes reports published by MDRC since 1999. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site (www.mdrc.org), from which copies of MDRC's publications can also be downloaded.

Reforming Welfare and Making Work Pay

Next Generation Project

A collaboration among researchers at MDRC and several other leading research institutions focused on studying the effects of welfare, antipoverty, and employment policies on children and families.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Children: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Pamela Morris, Aletha Huston, Greg Duncan, Danielle Crosby, Johannes Bos.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Employment and Income: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos.

How Welfare and Work Policies for Parents Affect Adolescents: A Synthesis of Research. 2002. Lisa A. Gennetian, Greg J. Duncan, Virginia W. Knox, Wanda G. Vargas, Elizabeth Clark-Kauffman, Andrew S. London.

ReWORKING Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A multifaceted effort to assist states and localities in designing and implementing their welfare reform programs. The project includes a series of "how-to" guides, conferences, briefings, and customized, in-depth technical assistance.

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. 1997. Dan Bloom.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Business Partnerships: How to Involve Employers in Welfare Reform. 1998. Amy Brown, Maria Buck, Erik Skinner.

Promoting Participation: How to Increase Involvement in Welfare-to-Work Activities. 1999. Gayle Hamilton, Susan Scrivener.

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Steady Work and Better Jobs: How to Help Low-Income Parents Sustain Employment and Advance in the Workforce. 2000. Julie Strawn, Karin Martinson.

Beyond Work First: How to Help Hard-to-Employ Individuals Get Jobs and Succeed in the Workforce. 2001. Amy Brown.

Project on Devolution and Urban Change

A multiyear study in four major urban counties — Cuyahoga County, Ohio (which includes the city of Cleveland), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia — that examines how welfare reforms are being implemented and affect poor people, their neighborhoods, and the institutions that serve them.

Big Cities and Welfare Reform: Early Implementation and Ethnographic Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change.

1999. Janet Quint, Kathryn Edin, Maria Buck, Barbara Fink, Yolanda Padilla, Olis Simmons-Hewitt, Mary Valmont.

Food Security and Hunger in Poor, Mother-Headed Families in Four U.S. Cities. 2000. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

Assessing the Impact of Welfare Reform on Urban Communities: The Urban Change Project and Methodological Considerations. 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Johannes Bos, Robert Lalonde, Nandita Verma.

Post-TANF Food Stamp and Medicaid Benefits: Factors That Aid or Impede Their Receipt. 2001. Janet Quint, Rebecca Widom.

Social Service Organizations and Welfare Reform. 2001. Barbara Fink, Rebecca Widom.

Monitoring Outcomes for Cuyahoga County's Welfare Leavers: How Are They Faring? 2001. Nandita Verma, Claudia Coulton.

The Health of Poor Urban Women: Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change. 2001. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

Is Work Enough? The Experiences of Current and Former Welfare Mothers Who Work. 2001. Denise Polit, Rebecca Widom, Kathryn Edin, Stan Bowie, Andrew London, Ellen Scott, Abel Valenzuela.

Readying Welfare Recipients for Work: Lessons from Four Big Cities as They Implement Welfare Reform. 2002. Thomas Brock, Laura Nelson, Megan Reiter.

Wisconsin Works

This study examines how Wisconsin's welfare-to-work program, one of the first to end welfare as an entitlement, is administered in Milwaukee.

Complaint Resolution in the Context of Welfare Reform: How W-2 Settles Disputes. 2001. Suzanne Lynn.

Exceptions to the Rule: The Implementation of 24-Month Time-Limit Extensions in W-2. 2001. Susan Gooden, Fred Doolittle.

Matching Applicants with Services: Initial Assessments in the Milwaukee County W-2 Program. 2001. Susan Gooden, Fred Doolittle, Ben Glispie.

Time Limits

Florida's Family Transition Program

An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Three-Year Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1999. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, James Kemple, Nandita Verma.

The Family Transition Program: Final Report on Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 2000. Dan Bloom, James Kemple, Pamela Morris, Susan Scrivener, Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

Welfare Time Limits: An Interim Report Card. 1999. Dan Bloom.

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

An evaluation of Connecticut's statewide time-limited welfare program, which includes financial work incentives and requirements to participate in employment-related services aimed at rapid job placement. This study provides some of the earliest information on the effects of time limits in major urban areas.

Connecticut Post-Time Limit Tracking Study: Six-Month Survey Results. 1999. Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Dan Bloom.

Jobs First: Implementation and Early Impacts of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 2000. Dan Bloom, Laura Melton, Charles Michalopoulos, Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

Connecticut's Jobs First Program: An Analysis of Welfare Leavers. 2000. Laura Melton, Dan Bloom.

Final Report on Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 2002. Dan Bloom, Susan Scrivener, Charles Michalopoulos, Pamela Morris, Richard Hendra, Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Johanna Walter.

Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

An evaluation of Vermont's statewide welfare reform program, which includes a work requirement after a certain period of welfare receipt, and financial work incentives.

Forty-Two Month Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project. 1999. Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

WRP: Key Findings from the Forty-Two-Month Client Survey. 2000. Dan Bloom, Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

Financial Incentives

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's pilot welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000:

Volume 1: Effects on Adults. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Lisa Gennetian, Martey Dodoo, Jo Anna Hunter, Cindy Redcross.

Volume 2: Effects on Children. Lisa Gennetian, Cynthia Miller.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: A Summary of the Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Lisa Gennetian.

Final Report on the Implementation and Impacts of the Minnesota Family Investment Program in Ramsey County. 2000. Patricia Auspos, Cynthia Miller, Jo Anna Hunter.

New Hope Project

A test of a community-based, work-focused antipoverty program and welfare alternative operating in Milwaukee.

New Hope for People with Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1999. Johannes Bos, Aletha Huston, Robert Granger, Greg Duncan, Thomas Brock, Vonnie McLoyd.

Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients. Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

Does SSP Plus Increase Employment? The Effect of Adding Services to the Self-Sufficiency Project's Financial Incentives (SRDC). 1999. Gail Quets, Philip Robins, Elsie Pan, Charles Michalopoulos, David Card.

When Financial Work Incentives Pay for Themselves: Early Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study (SRDC). 1999. Charles Michalopoulos, Philip Robins, David Card.

The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects of a Financial Work Incentive on Employment and Income (SRDC). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, David Card, Lisa Gennetian, Kristen Harknett, Philip K. Robins.

The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects on Children of a Program That Increased Parental Employment and Income (SRDC). 2000. Pamela Morris, Charles Michalopoulos.

When Financial Incentives Pay for Themselves: Interim Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study (SRDC). 2001. Charles Michalopoulos, Tracey Hoy.

SSP Plus at 36 Months: Effects of Adding Employment Services to Financial Work Incentives (SRDC). 2001. Ying Lei, Charles Michalopoulos.

Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Conceived and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with support from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), this is the largest-scale evaluation ever conducted of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Do Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs Affect the Well-Being of Children? A Synthesis of Child Research Conducted as Part of the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (HHS/ED). 2000. Gayle Hamilton.

Evaluating Alternative Welfare-to-Work Approaches: Two-Year Impacts for Eleven Programs

(HHS/ED). 2000. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton, JoAnn Rock, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Amanda Schweder, Laura Storto.

Impacts on Young Children and Their Families Two Years After Enrollment: Findings from the Child Outcomes Study (HHS/ED). 2000. Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Kristin Moore, Suzanne LeMenestrel.

What Works Best for Whom: Impacts of 20 Welfare-to-Work Programs by Subgroup (HHS/ED). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Christine Schwartz.

Evaluating Two Approaches to Case Management: Implementation, Participation Patterns, Costs, and Three-Year Impacts of the Columbus Welfare-to-Work Program (HHS/ED). 2001. Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

How Effective Are Different Welfare-to-Work Approaches? Five-Year Adult and Child Impacts for Eleven Programs—Executive Summary (HHS/ED). 2001. Gayle Hamilton, Stephen Freedman, Lisa Gennetian, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter, Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Anna Gassman-Pines, Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Surjeet Ahluwalia, Jennifer Brooks.

Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program

An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: First-Year Findings on Participation Patterns and Impacts. 1999. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Final Report on a Work First Program in a Major Urban Center. 2000. Stephen Freedman, Jean Knab, Lisa Gennetian, David Navarro.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD). 1998. Robert Granger, Rachel Cytron.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

Focusing on Fathers

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood (Russell Sage Foundation). 1999. Earl Johnson, Ann Levine, Fred Doolittle.

Parenting and Providing: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Paternal Involvement. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cindy Redcross.

Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment. 2000. John M. Martinez, Cynthia Miller.

The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum. 2000. Eileen Hayes, with Kay Sherwood.

The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share. 2001. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox

Career Advancement and Wage Progression

Opening Doors to Earning Credentials

An exploration of strategies for increasing low-wage workers' access to and completion of community college programs.

Opening Doors: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Low-Income Workers. 2001. Susan Golonka, Lisa Matus-Grossman.

Welfare Reform and Community Colleges: A Policy and Research Context. 2002. Thomas Brock, Lisa Matus-Grossman, Gayle Hamilton.

Opening Doors: Students' Perspectives on Juggling Work, Family, and College. 2002. Lisa Matus-Grossman, Susan Gooden.

Education Reform

Accelerated Schools

This study examines the implementation and impacts on achievement of the Accelerated Schools model, a whole-school reform targeted at at-risk students.

Evaluating the Accelerated Schools Approach: A Look at Early Implementation and Impacts on Student Achievement in Eight Elementary Schools. 2001. Howard Bloom, Sandra Ham, Laura Melton, Julienne O'Brien.

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Building Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Through Employer Partnerships. 1999. James Kemple, Susan Poglinco, Jason Snipes.

Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School. 2000. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Initial Transitions to Post-Secondary Education and Employment. 2001. James Kemple.

First Things First

This demonstration and research project looks at First Things First, a whole-school reform that combines a variety of best practices aimed at raising achievement and graduation rates in both urban and rural settings.

Scaling Up First Things First: Site Selection and the Planning Year. 2002. Janet Quint.

Project GRAD

This evaluation examines Project GRAD, an education initiative targeted at urban schools and combining a number of proven or promising reforms.

Building the Foundation for Improved Student Performance: The Pre-Curricular Phase of Project GRAD Newark. 2000. Sandra Ham, Fred Doolittle, Glee Ivory Holton.

LILAA Initiative

This study of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative explores the efforts of

five adult literacy programs in public libraries to improve learner persistence.

So I Made Up My Mind: Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs.

2000. John T. Comings, Sondra Cuban.

"I Did It for Myself": Studying Efforts to Increase Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs. 2001. John Comings, Sondra Cuban, Johannes Bos, Catherine Taylor.

Toyota Families in Schools

A discussion of the factors that determine whether an impact analysis of a social program is feasible and warranted, using an evaluation of a new family literacy initiative as a case study.

An Evaluability Assessment of the Toyota Families in Schools Program. 2001. Janet Quint.

Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

Equity 2000

Equity 2000 is a nationwide initiative sponsored by the College Board to improve low-income students' access to college. The MDRC paper examines the implementation of Equity 2000 in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Getting to the Right Algebra: The Equity 2000 Initiative in Milwaukee Public Schools. 1999. Sandra Ham, Erica Walker.

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995.

Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

Employment and Community Initiatives

Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multisite effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

Mobilizing Public Housing Communities for Work: Origins and Early Accomplishments of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. James Riccio.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site: An Early Look at Program Implementation. 2000. Edited by Susan Philipson Bloom with Susan Blank.

Building New Partnerships for Employment: Collaboration Among Agencies and Public Housing Residents in the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 2001. Linda Kato, James Riccio.

Neighborhood Jobs Initiative

An initiative to increase employment in a number of low-income communities.

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: An Early Report on the Vision and Challenges of Bringing an Employment Focus to a Community-Building Initiative. 2001. Frieda Molina, Laura Nelson.

Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

Designing and Administering a Wage-Paying Community Service Employment Program Under TANF: Some Considerations and Choices. 1999. Kay Sherwood.

San Francisco Works: Toward an Employer-Led Approach to Welfare Reform and Workforce Development. 2000. Steven Bliss.

Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of Unemployment Insurance.

Testing a Re-employment Incentive for Displaced Workers: The Earnings Supplement Project. 1999. Howard Bloom, Saul Schwartz, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Suk-Won Lee.

MDRC Working Papers on Research Methodology

A new series of papers that explore alternative methods of examining the implementation and impacts of programs and policies.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Estimating Program Impacts on Student Achievement Using "Short" Interrupted Time Series. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Using Cluster Random Assignment to Measure Program Impacts: Statistical Implications for the Evaluation of Education Programs. 1999. Howard Bloom, Johannes Bos, Suk-Won Lee.

Measuring the Impacts of Whole School Reforms: Methodological Lessons from an Evaluation of Accelerated Schools. 2001. Howard Bloom.

The Politics of Random Assignment: Implementing Studies and Impacting Policy. 2000. Judith Gueron.

Modeling the Performance of Welfare-to-Work Programs: The Effects of Program Management and Services, Economic Environment, and Client Characteristics. 2001. Howard Bloom, Carolyn Hill, James Riccio.

A Regression-Based Strategy for Defining Subgroups in a Social Experiment. 2001. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

Extending the Reach of Randomized Social Experiments: New Directions in Evaluations of American Welfare-to-Work and Employment Initiatives. 2001. James Riccio, Howard Bloom.

About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and Oakland, California.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods to determine a program's effects, including large-scale studies, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.