



The West Virginia

# Public Affairs Reporter

Volume 17, No. 1

Institute for Public Affairs

West Virginia University

Morgantown, WV

Winter 2000

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## WV WORKS Case Closure Study

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President Clinton promised during his 1992 presidential campaign to end welfare as we know it, and he did precisely that when he signed into law the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*. The new law indicated in its introduction that its primary goals were to reduce out-of-wedlock births, single-parent child-rearing, and welfare dependency. To accomplish the first two goals it provided states “bonus” money if they were able to devise programs that reduced out-of-wedlock births, and it required recipients to cooperate with state child support enforcement agencies to reduce single-parent child-rearing. To accomplish the third goal, the Aid to Families With Dependent Children program was replaced by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant (TANF).

This new, state-centered block grant program was designed to end welfare dependency by instituting lifetime benefit limits and mandatory work requirements for recipients, and mandatory work participation rates for states. States that fail to meet these participation rates are subject to the forfeiture of five percent of their federal TANF funds during the first year of non-compliance, and an additional two percent of funding for each consecutive year they continue in non-compliance, up to a maximum of 21 percent of their federal TANF funding (National Conference of State Legislatures 1997).

TANF’s work requirements and other sanctions had an immediate and dramatic impact on caseloads across the nation. Between January 1997 and June 1999, over 4.5 million people (39.7 percent) left the program, reducing total enrollment from 11.4 million to 6.9 million people. The reductions were even more dramatic in West Virginia. Over that same time period, more than two out of every three TANF/WV WORKS recipients (67,658 out of 98,690) left the rolls (68.5 percent) (DHHS 1999a).

The dramatic drop in TANF enrollment across the nation, and in West Virginia, was viewed initially by most state policymakers as an indication that welfare reform was working. The reductions, it seemed, clearly indicated that the new law was meeting its stated goal of stemming the rising tide of welfare dependency. At first, most commentators assumed that TANF enrollments were declining because the law’s provisions were encouraging welfare recipients to find work at a time when the national economy was booming and jobs, especially entry-level jobs, were relatively plentiful. However, a closer examination of the statistics provided by state welfare agencies revealed that, nationwide, less than half of the recipients who left the welfare rolls were finding jobs. In West Virginia, less than one-third of those who left TANF/WV WORKS following the new law’s enactment entered the work force (Fischer 1998; WV WORKS 1998). Policymakers across the nation, and in West Virginia, began to ask the same question: what was happening to these people?

In an effort to answer this, and other questions, West Virginia’s Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) provided funding to an interdisciplinary faculty research team, assembled by West Virginia University’s Institute for Public Affairs, to design, administer, and interpret a

comprehensive statewide survey of WV WORKS recipients whose cases were closed during 1998. The Department’s records indicated that 18,254 cases were closed during 1998 (cases can be either individuals or families). Their records also indicated that about one-third (35 percent) of the cases closed because the recipient found employment, 19.9 percent because of the counting of Supplemental Security Income toward the program’s income eligibility criteria (this policy has subsequently been rescinded), 17.8 percent by customer request, and 27.3 percent for other reasons. The survey was to provide (1) additional information concerning why the cases were closed, (2) a profile of the respondents’ current economic and social well-being, (3) an indication of how welfare reform has impacted their behavior and prospects for economic self-sufficiency, and (4) an assessment of their experiences with the Department’s programs.

### Survey Design

The survey was designed in consultation with officials in West Virginia’s Department of Health and Human Resources and with several knowledgeable policy experts, both from within and outside West Virginia. Because the response rate for mailed surveys is typically low, especially for survey populations with limited formal education and/or income, respondents were offered \$15 to complete the survey.

The use of telephone surveys and face-to-face interviews to either replace or supplement the information provided by the mailed survey was considered. A telephone survey was precluded by state confidentiality rules. A face-to-face survey was precluded by cost and time limitations.

In an effort to supplement the primarily quantitative answers to the survey questions, many of the questions provided respondents an opportunity to explain their answers. In addition, the following three, open-ended, qualitative questions were included in the survey:

- If there was one thing that you could do to improve your own well-being, what would it be?
- If there was one thing that you could do to improve your family’s well-being, what would it be?
- If there was one thing that you could change about WV WORKS, what would it be?

Most of the respondents (803/962) answered the open-ended question, “If there was one thing that you could do to improve your own well-being, what would it be?” A summary of the responses to this question can be found on Table 23. Most of the respondents (753) also answered “If there was one thing that you could do to improve your family’s well-being, what would it be?” A summary of the responses to this question can be found on Table 24. Finally, more than half of the respondents (581) answered “If there was one thing that you could change about WV WORKS, what would it be?” A summary of the responses to this question can be found on Table 25.

## Survey Sample Size

West Virginia's Department of Health and Human Resources randomly generated mailing labels for 2,500 WV WORKS recipients whose cases were closed during 1998. The target sample size was 2,000 "good" addresses. It was anticipated that about 20 percent of the mailing addresses would be undeliverable because of the transient nature of the population sample. A total of 580 surveys (23.2 percent of the initial mailing) were returned as undeliverable by the post office. This created a population sample size of 1,920.

The initial mailing of the surveys took place in mid-July, 1999. A second, follow-up mailing took place in mid-August, 1999. Respondents were given until September 10, 1999 to complete and return the surveys.

A total of 962 surveys were completed and returned, for a response rate of 50 percent. This is considered an exceptional response rate for mailed surveys to low-income populations (Nachmias and Nachmias 1987). Samples of this size (962 responses from a total population of 18,259 case closures) have a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent for each question. Also, because the sample was drawn scientifically the sample should provide (within a 95 percent confidence interval) an accurate representation of the experiences of all 18,259 cases that were closed in 1998 (Manheim and Rich 1986).

## Survey Representativeness

The sample's demographic characteristics were compared with the demographic characteristics of all WV WORKS' adult recipients in 1998 to make certain that it was truly representative of the survey population. Although some differences were expected between the target population (adults who left WV WORKS in 1998) and all WV WORKS adults in 1998, the two groups should be sufficiently similar to provide an additional test of the sample's validity. The sample is similar to the population of all WV WORKS adults in 1998 in nearly all respects:

- The county-by-county distribution of survey responses is similar to the actual county-by-county distribution of WV WORKS cases in 1998. All 55 counties are represented in the sample, with the largest number of respondents residing in Kanawha (116) and Cabell (63) counties;
- The gender of the respondents is similar to the gender of adult WV WORKS recipients in 1998 (82.2 percent of the respondents were women and 17.8 percent were men compared to 79.8 percent of adult WV WORKS recipients in 1998 were women and 20.2 percent were men);
- The age distribution of the respondents is similar to the age distribution of WV WORKS adult recipients in 1998 (79.6 percent of the respondents were in their 20s or 30s, ranging from 18 to 91, with an average age of 31, compared to 79.4 percent of all WV WORKS adult recipients in 1998 were in their 20s or 30s) (DHHS 1999b);
- The ethnicity of the respondents is similar to the ethnicity of WV WORKS adult recipients in 1998 (91.7 percent of the respondents were Caucasian, 5.8 percent were African-American, 1.1 percent were Native

American, 0.4 percent were Hispanic, 0.1 percent were Asian, and 1 percent reported other compared to 93.2 percent of all WV WORKS adult recipients in 1998 were Caucasian, 6.1 percent were African-American, 0.1 percent were Native American, 0.1 percent were Hispanic, 0.1 percent were Asian, and 0.4 reported other) (DHHS 1999b).

There was a difference between the respondents' marital status and the marital status of all WV WORKS adult recipients in 1998, but that was expected. The respondents were less likely to be single than the typical WV WORKS adult recipient in 1998. Of the respondents, 38.7 percent were married, 26 percent were single, 25.7 percent were divorced, 8.8 percent were separated, and 0.7 percent were widowed. Of the WV WORKS adult recipients in 1998, 31.7 percent were married, 37.5 percent were single, 17 percent were divorced, 13 percent were separated, and 0.4 percent were widowed (DHHS 1999b). The difference in marital status between the respondents and WV WORKS adult recipients in 1998 was expected because one of the reasons for leaving WV WORKS is a change in marital status.

As is always the case when conducting scientific random samples, there are some variations in the sample's characteristics and what is known about the survey population's characteristics. Overall, these variations are very minor. As a result, we are confident that the survey sample is truly representative of the survey population.

## Respondent Profile

The survey included a series of questions designed to provide a profile of the respondents. As mentioned previously, most of the respondents were white women in their twenties or thirties. Also:

- Most of the respondents (72.4 percent) had either one (35.3 percent) or two children (37.1 percent) in the household;
- About one-third of the respondents had not completed high school or received a GED (30.4 percent);
- More than half of the respondents (54.5 percent) received wages or a salary;
- The median (mid-point) wage of those respondents who were employed was \$5.90 an hour (the average wage was \$6.26 per hour);
- The median monthly gross income of those respondents who worked was \$727.50 per month (the average was \$817.08);
- Most of the respondents (82.9 percent) had a total annual household income of \$10,000 or less in 1998 and most (69.9 percent) anticipated having a total annual household income of \$10,000 or less in 1999;
- More than half of the respondents (51.8 percent) were receiving food stamps when they completed the survey;
- More than half the respondents (59.5 percent) had some form of health care insurance, either from Medicaid (48.4 percent), private health insurance (5.7 percent), Medicare (2.9 percent) or public employee insurance (2.4 percent) when they completed the survey;

- Most of the respondents (79.1 percent) did not receive earned income tax credits;
- Most of the respondents (62.4 percent) have applied for and received WV WORKS/TANF/AFDC benefits only once (36.6 percent) or twice (25.8 percent) in their lives;
- More than half of the respondents (59.7 percent) had received WV WORKS/TANF/ AFDC benefits for fewer than three years;
- Most of the respondents (86.6 percent) were off of WV WORKS when they completed the survey (those without a high school degree or GED were more likely than others to return to the WV WORKS program);
- Most of the respondents (78.8 percent) did not know how many months of WV WORKS/TANF eligibility they had remaining;
- More than half of the respondents (58.8 percent) reported that they had participated in at least one job training program or an education program.

### Reasons for Case Closure

As mentioned previously, West Virginia's Department of Health and Human Resources' records indicated that 35.1 percent (6,397/18,254) of the cases closed in 1998 were closed because the recipient found employment, 19.8 percent (3,625) were closed because of the counting of Supplemental Security Income toward the program's income eligibility criteria (this policy has subsequently been rescinded), 17.8 percent (3,251) were closed by customer request, and 27.3 percent (4,981) were closed for other reasons.

The respondents were asked a series of questions that were designed to provide a more comprehensive assessment of why they left WV WORKS in 1998. First, they were asked if they had requested that their case be closed or if DHHR closed their case. Most (60.8 percent) of the respondents who answered this question indicated they left the program voluntarily (473/778 respondents) and 39.2 percent indicated that DHHR closed their case (305/778 respondents). The respondents were also asked to indicate why they thought they were no longer on WV WORKS. They were provided a list of reasons and allowed to mark all that applied. They were also provided space to write in an answer. As Table 1 indicates, the most frequently cited reason for leaving the program was finding employment (43.4 percent of the respondents answering this question - 362/834). The second most frequently cited reason for leaving the program was exceeding the program's income eligibility criteria due to the receipt of money from non-employment related sources, such as pensions, social security, workers' compensation or child support (19.7 percent). The third most cited reason was that they received job training or education that led to employment (9.6 percent).

### Current economic and social well-being

The respondents were asked a series of questions that were designed to provide an assessment of their current economic and social well-being. Specifically, respondents were asked questions concerning their income, life experiences, their personal assessment of their current economic and social well-being, and how they view their future prospects.

**Table 1**

Reason for Leaving WV WORKS/TANF	
Reason	Percentage
Found employment	43.4%
Exceeded income limits from non-employment related sources (pensions, social security, etc.)	19.7%
Got job training/education that led to employment	9.6%
Got transportation and that was all that was needed for employment	7.4%
Got married	6.5%
Sanctioned by DHHR	6.1%
Saving eligibility for the future	6.1%
Child or children turned 18	5.2%
Assets exceeded the limit	4.7%
Found child care and that was all that was needed for employment	4.6%
Did not want DHHR involved in child support	4.1%
Not willing to follow the Personal Responsibility Contract	3.5%
Moved	3.1%
Work requirements interfered with college	2.7%
Did not want to identify the father of my child or children	1.4%
Did not want to give information to the DHHR caseworker	1.0%
Received a diversion payment	0.7%
Reconciled with my husband	0.7%
N = 834	
note: the percentages total to more than 100 percent because the respondents were allowed to provide more than one reason for leaving the program.	

### Income

More than half of the respondents (54.5 percent) were employed and received wages or a salary. The median wage of those employed was \$5.90 an hour (the average wage was \$6.26 an hour). Of those who were employed, 61.8 percent were employed full-time (defined as more than 30 hours per week) and 38.2 percent were employed on a part-time basis (note: 2.8 percent of those employed for at least 30 hours a week were employed at more than one job). Of those employed, more than half (58 percent) did not have paid vacation or personal days and most did not have paid sick leave (80.8 percent), did not have paid holidays (66.9 percent), did not have health benefits paid either in full or in part by their employer (79.1 percent), and did not have a retirement plan (78.5 percent).

Nearly all (98 percent) of the respondents who were employed on a part-time basis reported that they wanted to work on a full-time basis. The most frequently reported reasons for not working full-time was my job does not require a full-time person (15.2 percent) and I cannot find a full-time job (11.8 percent).

As Table 2 indicates, most (82.9 percent) of the respondents had a total household income of \$10,000 or less in 1998. Nearly half of the respondents (47.7 percent) had a total annual household income of less than \$5,000 and 35.2 percent had a total annual household income of \$5,000 to \$10,000. When asked to estimate what their total annual

**Table 2**

Respondent's Annual Household Income (1998)	
Amount	Percentage
Less than \$5,000	47.7%
\$5,000 - \$10,000	35.2%
\$10,001 - \$15,000	10.2%
\$15,001 - \$20,000	3.4%
\$20,001 - \$25,000	1.7%
More than \$25,000	1.8%
N = 898	

household income would be in 1999, most of the respondents (69.9 percent) indicated either less than \$5,000 (30.3 percent) or \$5,000 to \$10,000 (39.6 percent). Another 15.9 percent of the respondents estimated that their total annual household income would be \$10,001 to \$15,000, 6.5 percent estimated \$15,001 to \$20,000, 3.5 percent estimated \$20,001 to \$25,000 and 4.3 percent estimated more than \$25,000.

### Other Benefits

Respondents were provided a long list of benefits and asked to mark all that they or a family member in their household received (both while on WV WORKS/TANF and after leaving the program). Table 3 lists the percent of respondents who reported receiving the benefits while they were on WV WORKS/TANF and after they left the program. The most frequently cited benefits were Medicaid/medical card (76.8 percent while on WV WORKS/TANF and 58.4 percent after they left the program), food stamps (72.6 percent while on WV WORKS/TANF and 51.8 percent after they left the program), and free or reduced price school meals (42.6 percent while on WV WORKS/TANF and 35.9 percent after they left the program). The frequency of most governmental based benefits decreased after the respondents left WV WORKS/TANF while the frequency of most private sector provided benefits increased.

**Table 3**

**Have you or a family member in your home received any benefits from the following programs? (while on WV WORKS/TANF and since leaving the program)**

Program	% while on WV WORKS/TANF	% since leaving WV WORKS/TANF
Medicaid/medical card	76.8%	58.4%
Food stamps	72.6%	51.8%
Free or reduced price school meals	42.6%	35.9%
School clothing voucher	36.2%	14.8%
Low income energy assistance program (LEAP)	31.2%	18.4%
Women, infant, and children nutrition program	29.0%	20.1%
Housing assistance	16.4%	13.7%
DHHR emergency assistance	15.0%	10.2%
Supplemental security income	12.3%	14.3%
Food pantry	10.5%	13.9%
Head start	10.2%	9.5%
State child care payment	8.2%	8.3%
Mental health services	6.8%	5.5%
Free health clinics	6.4%	6.3%
Children's health insurance program (CHIP)	6.0%	6.4%
Child care assistance (other than from the state)	5.2%	6.5%
Assistance from church	4.3%	7.7%
Family planning	4.1%	4.4%
Free dental clinics	4.0%	3.8%
State transportation assistance	3.8%	3.7%
Summer food service (energy express)	2.3%	3.5%
Drug/alcohol rehabilitation services	1.7%	2.1%
Unemployment benefits	1.6%	5.0%
Domestic violence counseling	1.5%	2.1%
Homeless shelter	1.4%	2.2%
Workers' compensation	1.2%	4.0%
Meals on wheels	0.8%	2.0%

N = 962


### Life Experiences

The respondents were asked if leaving WV WORKS/TANF caused a change in their lives. They were provided a list of changes and asked to mark all that applied. As Table 4 (on page 6) indicates, the most frequently reported change in their lives caused by their leaving WV WORKS/TANF was having the family run out of money (23.2 percent). The second most cited change caused by their leaving the program was a family member getting a job (16.2 percent). Another 11.3 percent of the respondents indicated that leaving the program caused them to move in with a friend or relative or for a friend or relative to move in with them and 11.2 percent indicated that leaving the program caused them to move.

Respondents were also provided a list of life circumstances. They were then asked to indicate if there was ever a time any of those circumstances happened to them while they were on WV WORKS/TANF or since they left the program. As Table 5 (on page 6) indicates, the incidence of all of the life circumstances listed increased after the respondents left WV WORKS/TANF. For example, the percentage of respondents not having enough money to buy food increased from 27.7 percent to 42.9 percent; the percentage of respondents not having enough money to buy medicine increased from 22.3 percent to 40.2 percent; the percentage of respondents not having enough money to go to the dentist increased from 32.2 percent to 48.9 percent; and the percentage of people not having enough money to buy glasses increased from 27.2 percent to 40.7 percent.

### Personal Assessments

Respondents were asked to assess their financial and personal well-being since leaving WV WORKS/TANF. Financially, 20.7 percent of the respondents to this question (163/786) said they were much better off, 21.9 percent said they were better off, 31.4 percent said they were about the same,



**The West Virginia  
Public Affairs Reporter**

*A Quarterly Publication of the Institute for Public Affairs*  
Eberly College of Arts and Sciences • West Virginia University  
PO Box 6317 • Morgantown WV 26506-6317

**Volume 17, No. 1, Winter 2000**

**Robert J. Dilger, Director/Editor**

*The West Virginia Public Affairs Reporter* is a quarterly refereed journal of the Institute for Public Affairs. Each issue addresses topics of concern to West Virginia's state and local government officials. The *Reporter's* content is written by public officials, faculty, research associates, and others familiar with West Virginia affairs. In all cases, the views of the authors are not necessarily those of the Institute for Public Affairs nor of West Virginia University.

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<http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/ipa/>

**Table 4**

**Has leaving WV WORKS/TANF caused any of the following to occur?**

Change	Percentage
The family to run out of money	23.2%
A family member to get a job	16.2%
To move in with a friend or relative or a friend or relative to move in with me	11.3%
To move	11.2%
To think seriously about breaking up the family	3.8%
To be without a place to live	3.6%
An increase in violence between my spouse/partner and me	3.3%
To remain in or return to a violent/abusive relationship	2.9%
My children to stay with someone else or placed in temporary foster care	2.8%
To get married	2.7%
To get separated/divorced	1.5%
An increase in alcohol/drug use	1.2%
Less violence between my spouse/partner and me	1.1%
Child abuse to occur	0.2%

N = 823

**Table 5**

**Was there a time when the following happened to you? (while on WV WORKS/TANF and since leaving the program)**

Life Circumstance	% while on WV WORKS/TANF	% since leaving WV WORKS/TANF
Not have enough money to go to the dentist	32.2%	48.9%
Not enough money to buy food	27.7%	42.9%
Not enough money to get glasses	27.2%	59.3%
Not have enough money to buy medicine	22.3%	40.2%
Not have enough money to go to the doctor	15.3%	39.6%
Took odd jobs	10.5%	19.8%
Had to move because you could not pay for housing	9.9%	13.8%
Drove more than an hour to find work	9.6%	14.7%
Moved in with someone to share expenses	6.8%	10.4%
Went without lights or electricity	5.9%	9.6%
Went without heat	5.8%	8.8%
Moved to find work	4.9%	8.8%

N = 962

16.4 percent said they were worse off, and 9.5 percent said they were much worse off since leaving WV WORKS/TANF.

A statistical analysis of the data revealed that respondents over the age of 30, those with less than a high school degree or GED, and those with an income of \$10,000 or less were more likely to report that they were worse off financially than when they were on WV WORKS.

Respondents were also asked to assess their personal well-being. As Table 6 indicates, although the respondents reported on a previous question that the incidence of adverse life circumstances had increased since they left WV WORKS/TANF, only about one in every five respondents to this question (20.4 percent - 161/790) reported that they were personally either worse off (12.4 percent) or much worse off (8 percent) since leaving WV WORKS/TANF. Again, respondents over the age of 30, those with less than a high school degree or GED, and those with an annual income of \$10,000 or less were more likely than others to report being personally worse or much worse off since leaving WV WORKS/TANF.

**Table 6**

**Personally, are you... (since leaving WV WORKS/TANF)**

Assessment	Percentage
Much better off now	28.2%
Better off now	18.1%
About the same	33.3%
Worse off now	12.4%
Much worse off now	8.0%

N = 790

Respondents were also asked how they viewed their future and how they viewed their children's future. Once again, most of the respondents had either a relatively positive or a neutral view of their future, although there was a sizeable minority who indicated that their future looked either poor or very poor. Specifically, 12 percent of the respondents answering this question (108/902) viewed their future as excellent (things are looking much better), 29.4 percent viewed their future as good (things are improving), 23.5 percent viewed their future as fair (things are okay), 15 percent viewed their future as poor (I'm worried about the future) and 13.5 percent viewed their future as very poor (I'm barely getting by day-by-day). Another 6.6 percent indicated that they were not sure about their future.

Respondents also reported a relatively positive view of their children's future. As shown on Table 7, 21.8 percent of the respondents answering this question (198/910) reported they viewed their children's future as excellent, 35.8 percent viewed their children's future as good, 23.5 percent viewed their children's future as fair, 4.7 percent viewed their children's future as poor and 3 percent viewed their children's future as very poor. Another 11.2 percent were not sure.

The respondents' relatively positive attitudes were also evident in their responses to the statement: "I have total confidence in my ability to provide for my family in the future." Most of the respondents to this question (65 percent - 599/922) either strongly agreed (29.1 percent) or agreed (35.9 percent) with this statement, 27.2 percent were not sure, 3.8 percent disagreed and 4 percent strongly disagreed.

Respondents under age 30, those living in non-rural areas, and those with at least a high school degree or GED were more likely than others to have a positive view of their future, of their children's future, and of their ability to provide for their families in the future. Also, married respondents were more likely than respondents who were not married to have a less positive view of their own future (marital status was not a significant factor in the respondents' views of their children's future or of their ability to provide for their family in the future).

**Table 7**

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

Assessment	Percentage
Excellent	21.8%
Good	35.8%
Fair	23.5%
Poor	4.7%
Very Poor	3.0%
Not sure	11.2%

N = 910

## Employment Barriers and Program Assessment

Although most of the respondents were employed, a sizeable minority (45.5 percent) were unemployed. The unemployed respondents were asked a series of questions designed to determine why they were unemployed.

As Table 8 indicates, most (60.9 percent of the unemployed respondents who answered this question - 267/438) reported that they had been unemployed for three years or less since their last job (19.4 percent were unemployed for less than six months, 20.5 percent were unemployed six months to a year, and 21 percent were unemployed between one and three years). Another 11.2 percent of the unemployed respondents were unemployed from three to five years, 16.7 percent were unemployed for more than five years, and 11.2 percent of the unemployed respondents had never been employed.

<b>How long has it been since you last worked?</b>	
<b>Time</b>	<b>Percentage of Unemployed</b>
Six months or less	19.4%
Six months to a year	20.5%
Between one and three years	21.0%
Three to five years	11.2%
More than five years	16.7%
Never been employed	11.2%
N = 438	

Men were more likely than women to be unemployed for long periods of time (for at least one year). Women were more likely than men to have never been employed (12.0 percent compared to 6.9 percent). Unemployed respondents over the age of 30, those lacking a high school degree or GED, and those living in rural areas were more likely to be unemployed for longer periods of time than unemployed respondents who were under the age of 30, those who had finished high school or attained a GED, and those living in a town or city.

Unemployed respondents were provided a list of reasons why they currently do not have a job. They were asked to mark all that applied. As Table 9 indicates, the most frequently cited reason for not working (33.5 percent of the unemployed respondents who answered this question - 149/445) was because they had a physical or mental illness or disability. The next most cited reasons were could not find a job (26.3 percent), no transportation (25.6 percent), and do not have skills/experience/education (25.2 percent). Only two respondents (0.4 percent) said that they did not want to work.

Respondents over age 30, those lacking a high school degree or GED, and men were more likely than others to report that a physical or mental illness or disability prevented their employment. Respondents aged 30 and younger and those residing in economically distressed counties (defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission) were more likely than older respondents and those not residing in economically distressed counties to report that they could not find a job. Women, single respondents, those without a high school degree or GED, and those who do not own their own means of transportation were more likely than others to report transportation as an employment barrier. Respondents lacking a high school degree or GED were more likely than others to

**Table 9**

<b>What reasons best explain why you don't have a job?</b>	
<b>Specific Reason</b>	<b>Percentage of Unemployed Respondents</b>
I have a physical or mental illness or disability	33.5%
I can't find a job	26.3%
I have no transportation	25.6%
I don't have the skills, experience, education	25.2%
I can't find a good paying job	19.8%
I can't afford child care	19.8%
I want to stay home with my children	19.3%
There is no child care available	17.3%
Other reasons	13.3%
I care for someone with a physical or mental illness or disability	9.2%
I would lose my benefits if I worked	7.2%
I am or recently was pregnant	6.3%
I am receiving child support payments	5.6%
I am in full or part time education	5.6%
I am too old to work	1.1%
I am in an abusive relationship	1.1%
I am in job training	0.7%
I don't want to work	0.4%
I have a drug/alcohol problem	0.4%
<b>Reason by Major Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Unemployed Respondents*</b>
Physical or mental illness or disability (own illness or disability or caring for someone with one)	39.1%
Labor market conditions (can't find a job or can't find a good paying job)	37.7%
Child care (can't afford or not available)	26.1%
Transportation	25.6%
Lack of skills, experience, education	25.2%
*percentages adjusted to account for those individuals who cite both of the specific reasons within the major category (to prevent double counting).	
N = 445	
<b>note:</b> the percentages total to more than 100 percent because the respondents were allowed to provide more than one reason for leaving the program.	

cite the lack of skills, experience, or education as an employment barrier.

Unemployed respondents were provided a list of job skills and asked to indicate if they had that skill. As Table 10 (on page 8) indicates, most of the respondents reported that they get along well with others (73.5 percent - 327/445), can do basic math (66.7 percent), have a positive attitude (59.3 percent), can read well (55.3 percent), and can communicate clearly (51.9 percent). Less than half of the unemployed respondents indicated that they could write well (48.1 percent), can understand business machines (44.9 percent), can solve problems well (37.9 percent) and are familiar with basic computer operations (24 percent). Those with at least a high school degree or GED, women, younger respondents, and those living in a town or city were more likely than others to get along well with others, do basic math, have a positive attitude, read well, write well, understand business machines, and be familiar with basic computer operations.

Respondents were presented with a list of potential employment barriers concerning their personal appearance and asked to mark all that applied. As Table 11 (on page 8) shows, the lack of nice clothes was the most frequently cited employment barrier on the list (24.9 percent -240/962), followed by a physical disability (15.2 percent), being overweight (10.1 percent), having bad teeth (9.8 percent), and being female (7.4 percent).

**Table 10**

**What skills do you have that may help you to get a job?**

Skills	Percentage
Get along well with others	73.5%
Can do basic math	66.7%
Have a positive attitude	59.3%
Can read well	55.3%
Can communicate clearly	51.9%
Can write well	48.1%
Can understand business machines	44.9%
Can solve problems well	37.9%
Familiar with basic computer operations	24.0%

N = 445

**Table 11**

**Have you found it difficult to find a job because:**

Reason	Percentage
You don't have nice clothes	24.9%
You have a physical disability	15.2%
You are overweight	10.1%
You have bad teeth	9.8%
You are female	7.4%
You cannot see well	5.7%
You look too old	2.6%
You are a person of color	1.9%
You look too young	1.9%
You cannot speak English well	0.5%

N = 962

**Job Training/Education**

More than half (64.6 percent) of the respondents reported that they had participated in at least one job training program or an education program while they were on WV WORKS/TANF or since leaving the program (621/962).

As Table 12 indicates, respondents were most likely to participate in the JOBS program (17.6 percent of all respondents), the JTPA program (17.1 percent), a GED class (14.9 percent) and the Community Work Experience Program (9.1 percent) when they were on WV WORKS/TANF.

Table 13 indicates that respondents were most likely to participate in a JTPA program (7.6 percent of all respondents), participate in a GED class (5.3 percent), participate in vocational training (4.9 percent) and attend a four-year college (4.5 percent) after they left WV WORKS/TANF.

As expected, participation in both job training and education programs declined after the respondents left WV WORKS/TANF (note: more than half of the respondents were employed when they completed the survey).

As Table 14 indicates, the two most frequently used job training programs by respondents who participated in a job training or educational program while on WV WORKS/TANF were the JOBS (29.8 percent) and JTPA (29.1 percent) programs. The two most frequently used educational programs were GED class (25.2 percent) and vocational training (15.3 percent). Table 14 also shows the completion rates for each of these programs, ranging from a high of 79 percent for the summer youth employment program to a low of 31.5 percent for a four-year college.

Table 15 (on page 9) indicates that the most frequently used job training program by respondents who participated in a job training or educational program after leaving WV WORKS/TANF was the JTPA (13 percent) program. The two most frequently used educational programs were GED class (9 percent) and vocational training (8.3 percent). Table 15

**Table 12**

**Which programs have you been involved in while on WV WORKS/TANF?**

Program	% of All Respondents
JOBS	17.6%
JTPA	17.1%
GED class	14.9%
Community Work Experience Program	9.1%
Vocational Training	9.0%
Community College	7.9%
Adult Basic Education	6.6%
Four Year College	5.6%
Other Programs	4.5%
Summer Youth Employment	4.1%
Joint Independence Program	1.6%
State Government Rehabilitation	0.9%

N = 962

**Table 13**

**Which programs have you been involved in since leaving WV WORKS/TANF?**

Program	% of All Respondents
JTPA	7.6%
GED class	5.3%
Vocational Training	4.9%
Four Year College	4.5%
Community College	4.3%
Adult Basic Education	2.3%
Other programs	2.3%
Summer Youth Employment	1.8%
State Government Rehabilitation	1.1%

N = 962

**Table 14**

**Which job training or educational programs have you been involved in and which programs did you complete while on WV WORKS/TANF?**

Program	Percent Participated	Percent Completed
JOBS	29.8%	56.8%
JTPA	29.1%	64.2%
GED class	25.2%	60.1%
Community Work Experience Program	15.4%	56.8%
Vocational Training	15.3%	64.3%
Community College	13.4%	51.3%
Adult Basic Education	11.3%	46.8%
Four Year College	9.5%	31.5%
Other programs	7.8%	75.0%
Summer Youth Employment	6.8%	79.4%
Joint Independence Program	2.6%	60.0%
State Government Rehabilitation	1.5%	78.0%

N = 566

also shows the completion rates for each of these programs, ranging from a high of 72.7 percent for the state government rehabilitation program to a low of 31.8 percent for a four-year college.

While on WV WORKS/TANF, women, especially those with a spouse or a partner, were less likely than men to complete a job training program and the middle aged were more likely than younger and older respondents to complete a job training program. Those with at least a high school degree or GED were more likely than those lacking a high school education to complete a job training program after leaving the program.

Respondents who participated in a job training program were asked how they heard about the program. As Table 16

**Table 15****Which job training or educational programs have you been involved in and which programs did you complete since leaving WV WORKS/TANF?**

Program	Percent Participated	Percent Completed
JTPA	13.0%	56.8%
GED class	9.0%	52.9%
Vocational Training	8.3%	70.2%
Four Year College	7.8%	31.8%
Community College	7.4%	33.3%
Adult Basic Education	4.0%	47.8%
Other programs	3.9%	63.6%
Summer Youth Employment	3.2%	72.2%
State Government Rehabilitation	1.9%	72.7%

N = 566

**Table 16****How did you hear about the job training program?**

Source	Percentage
DHHR/welfare office	49.2%
State Employment Service	17.1%
Friend or acquaintance	13.4%
Newspaper, radio or TV	9.9%
Family member or other relative	9.2%
Other	6.0%
Family resource network	2.6%

N = 566

shows, the most frequently cited source was the DHHR welfare office (49.2 percent of those responding to this question - 279/566). Other sources were: state employment service (17.1 percent), friend or acquaintance (13.4 percent), newspaper, radio or television (9.9 percent), family member or other relative (9.2 percent), family resource network (2.6 percent) and other (6 percent).

Women were more likely than men to find out about job training programs from a family member or other relative. Those lacking a high school degree or GED were more likely than those with at least a high school degree or GED to find out about job training from the DHHR/welfare office.

Respondents who had participated in a job training or education program were presented with a list of job-related skills. They were then asked to mark all of the skills that they had learned from their job training or education program while on WV WORKS and since leaving the program. As Table 17 indicates, the most frequently cited job-related skill learned from their job training or education program while they were on WV WORKS/TANF was job readiness skills (interviewing, resume writing, grooming, etc.). It was cited by 26.3 percent of those who had participated in a job training or education program (149/566). The next most cited learned skills were office skills (15.7 percent), none (14.8 percent), and custodial skills (6.9 percent).

Respondents who participated in a job training or education program after leaving WV WORKS/TANF had a similar reaction to their job training and education programs. The most frequently cited job-related skill learned was job readiness (10.9 percent), followed by office skills (9.3 percent), none (9.3 percent), and child or adult care skills (5.6 percent).

Men were more likely than women to learn custodial skills and a skilled trade, both while they were on WV WORKS/TANF and after they left the program. Women were more likely than men to learn child care or adult care skills, com-

puter skills, office skills, and health care skills, both while they were on WV WORKS/TANF and after they left the program.

Respondents who started, but did not complete a job training or education program were provided a list of reasons for not completing the program and asked to identify the main reason they did not complete the program. The most frequently cited main reasons for not completing the program were: they found a job (27.9 percent of those who answered this question - 48/172), a health problem (23.3 percent), they quit to look for a job (12.2 percent), and they could not get transportation to the program (10.5 percent). Additional reasons were: other (7.0 percent), college does not count for the work requirement (6.4 percent), a family member's health problem (4.7 percent), did not learn anything/did not like the program (4.7 percent), and could not find or afford child care (3.5 percent).

Older respondents (over age 30) were more likely than others to cite a health problem as a reason for not completing the program.

**Table 17****What skills did you learn in the job training or education program(s) while on WV WORKS/TANF?**

Skill	Percentage
Job readiness	26.3%
Office skills	15.7%
None	14.8%
Custodial Skills	6.9%
Computer training	6.9%
Health care skills	5.8%
Child care or adult care skills	5.5%
Food service	5.5%
Other	4.4%
Skilled trade	4.1%
Advanced medical training	3.9%
Personal service skills	3.0%

N = 566

The respondents' overall assessment of the job training and education programs' helpfulness in getting them a job was mixed. Specifically, as Table 18 shows, 27.3 percent of respondents who answered this question (108/395) reported that the programs were very helpful, 24.2 percent reported that the programs were somewhat helpful, 19.7 percent reported that the programs would have been helpful, but there were no jobs available, and 28.9 percent reported that the programs were not helpful at all.

Women, those with a high school degree or GED, and those residing in non-distressed counties, were more likely than others to report that the programs were either very helpful or somewhat helpful. Also, respondents residing in DHHR's Regions 1 (northwest West Virginia) and 4 (southeast West Virginia) were more likely than Regions 2 (southwest West

**Table 18****How helpful were the job training or educational programs in getting you a job?**

Response	Percentage
Very helpful	27.3%
Somewhat helpful	24.2%
Would have been helpful, but no jobs were available	19.7%
Not helpful at all	28.9%

N = 395

Virginia) and 3 (northeast West Virginia) to report that the programs would have been helpful, but there were no jobs available.

### Child Care

Nearly all of the respondents reported that they had at least one child in their household (96.1 percent of those responding to this question - 899/935). More than half of the respondents with a child in the household (54.7 percent) indicated that they had a child needing child care (492/899). These respondents were asked a series of questions concerning their child care arrangements and needs, both while they were on WV WORKS/TANF and after they left the program. As Table 19 indicates, 70.1 percent of the respondents answering this question (345/492) reported that they watched their children themselves when they were on WV WORKS/TANF. That percentage dropped to 58.0 percent after they left the program. The percentage of respondents having other family members care for their children increased from 16.1 percent when they were on WV WORKS to 25.5 percent after they left the program. The use of friends and neighbors to provide child care also increased (from 2.4 percent to 6.2 percent) after they left the program.

<b>Who provides the most care for your children?</b>		
<b>Provider</b>	<b>% while on WV WORKS</b>	<b>% since leaving WV WORKS</b>
Yourself	70.1%	58.0%
Other family member	16.1%	25.5%
Child care center	8.1%	8.9%
Friend or neighbor	2.4%	6.2%
No one	3.3%	1.5%
N = 492		

Nearly one-third (30.6 percent) of all respondents reported that they had children in child care during the week and 15.0 percent reported that they had children in child care during the weekend. As Table 20 indicates, their child care needs varied greatly.

About one out of every three respondents who reported having a child in child care (100/295) reported that their child was in child care all day (between 6 a.m. and noon and between noon and 6 p.m.) during the week. The next most

<b>What time of day are your children in child care on weekdays?</b>	
<b>Time</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.	33.9 %
Between noon and 6 p.m.	23.4%
Between 6 a.m. and noon	13.2%
Between 6 p.m. and midnight	7.4%
Between 6 a.m. and midnight	6.1%
Between midnight and 6 a.m.	3.4%
Between noon and midnight	3.4%
24 hours a day	2.7%
Between midnight and noon and between 6 p.m. and midnight	1.7%
Between 6 a.m. and noon and between 6 p.m. and midnight	1.4%
Between midnight and 6 a.m. and between 6 p.m. and midnight	1.4%
Between midnight and noon	1.0%
Between midnight and 6 a.m., between noon and midnight	0.7%
Between midnight and 6 p.m.	0.3%
N = 295	

frequent times of day their children were in child care during the week were in the afternoon only (23.4 percent between noon and 6 p.m. only) and in the morning only (13.2 percent between 6 a.m. and noon only). By aggregating the data on Table 20, it is possible to determine the distribution of respondents with children in child care during each of the four six-hour intervals. Specifically, 11.1 percent of the respondents with children in child care during the week (33/295) had children in child care between midnight and 6 a.m., 34.4 percent had children in child care between 6 a.m. and noon, 70.5 percent had children in child care between noon and 6 p.m., and 25.2 percent had children in child care between 6 p.m. and midnight.

Table 21 shows the times when respondents with children in child care had their children in child care during the weekend. The distribution of times were a bit different than during the week. The most frequent time was all day (22.2 percent - 32/144 respondents with children in child care had them in child care on the weekends between 6 a.m. and noon and between noon and 6 p.m.). The next most frequent times of day their children were in child care during the weekend were in the afternoon only (16 percent between noon and 6 p.m. only) and in the evening only (13.9 percent between 6 p.m. and midnight only). By aggregating the data on Table 21, it is possible to determine the distribution of respondents with children in child care during each of the four six-hour intervals. Specifically, 21.5 percent of the respondents with children in child care during the weekend (31/144) had children in child care between midnight and 6 a.m., 49.3 percent had children in child care between 6 a.m. and noon, 59 percent had children in child care between noon and 6 p.m., and 41 percent had children in child care between 6 p.m. and midnight.

<b>What time of day are your children in child care on weekends?</b>	
<b>Time</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.	22.2%
Between noon and 6 p.m.	16.0%
Between 6 p.m. and midnight	13.9%
Between 6 a.m. and noon	8.3%
Between 6 a.m. and midnight	8.3%
Between midnight and 6 a.m.	6.9%
Between noon and midnight	5.5%
24 hours a day	5.5%
Between midnight and 6 a.m. and between 6 p.m. and midnight	4.2%
Between midnight and 6 a.m., and between noon and midnight	3.5%
Between midnight and noon	1.5%
Between midnight and 6 p.m.	1.4%
Between 6 a.m. and noon and between 6 p.m. and midnight	1.4%
Between midnight and 6 a.m., between noon and midnight	1.4%
N = 144	

Most of the respondents (73.7 percent - 542/735) indicated that they did not receive assistance from the state to help cover the costs of child care for their children when they were on WV WORKS/TANF. That percentage increased to 82.9 percent (609/735) after they left the program.

Most of the respondents (84.4 percent - 620/735) indicated that it was not difficult to find child care for their children when they were on WV WORKS/TANF. That percentage decreased to 76.2 percent (560/735) after they left the program.

As Table 22 indicates, most of the respondents were either satisfied (36.7 percent of respondents answering this question - 183/499) or very satisfied (46.3 percent) with their current child care arrangement. Another 10.6 percent were dissatisfied and 6.4 percent were very dissatisfied (note: this is not surprising given that most of the child care was provided by the respondents or another family member).

<b>Table 22</b>	
<b>How satisfied are you with your current child care arrangements?</b>	
<b>Satisfaction</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very satisfied	46.3%
Satisfied	36.7%
Dissatisfied	10.6%
Very dissatisfied	6.4%
N = 499	

Those with a spouse or partner in the household were more likely to report that another family member helps with child care than respondents who do not have spouse or a partner in the household. They were also less likely to report needing child care between 6 a.m. and noon on weekdays, and between noon and 6 p.m. on weekdays; that they received child care assistance from the state (both while on WV WORKS/TANF and after leaving the program); and had difficulty finding child care (both while on WV WORKS/TANF and after leaving the program).

Respondents who lacked a high school degree or GED were less likely than others to report needing child care between 6 a.m. and noon, between noon and 6 p.m., and between 6 p.m. and midnight on weekdays. They were also less likely than others to report receiving assistance from the state for child care (both while they were on WV WORKS/TANF and after leaving the program).

Respondents residing in an economically distressed county were 2.5 times more likely to report needing child care between midnight and 6 a.m. on weekdays than respondents in non-distressed counties. Similarly, respondents residing in economically distressed counties were less likely than those residing in other counties to report needing child care during the day (between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.) during the week. Respondents residing in economically distressed counties were also less likely to report receiving state assistance for child care (both while on WV WORKS/TANF and after leaving the program).

Respondents residing in non-rural areas (cities or suburbs) were more likely than respondents residing in rural areas to report that they needed child care during the day (between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.) during the week. They were also more likely to report having received state child care support (both while both on WV WORKS/TANF and after leaving the program) than respondents who reside in rural areas.

Respondents with three or more children were more likely than respondents with less than three children to report difficulty in finding child care after leaving WV WORKS/TANF.

## Open-ended Questions

Respondents were provided space to write in an answer to the following three open-ended questions:

- If there was one thing you could do to improve your own well-being, what would it be?
- If there was one thing you could do to improve your family's well-being, what would it be?
- If there was one thing you could change about WV WORKS, what would it be?

Most of the respondents (83.5 percent - 803/962) answered the question "If there was one thing you could do to improve your own well-being, what would it be?" As Table 23 shows, the most frequently cited response was get a job or get a better paying job.

Most of the respondents (78.3 percent - 753/962) answered the question, "If there was one thing you could do to improve your family's well-being, what would it be?" As Table 24 indicates, the most frequently cited response was get a job or a better paying job.

Most of the respondents (60.4 percent - 581/962) answered the question, "If there was one thing you could change about WV WORKS, what would it be?" As Table 25 shows, the most frequently cited response was improve the sensitivity of DHHR's employees.

<b>Table 23</b>	
<b>If there was one thing you could do to improve your own well-being, what would it be?</b>	
<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Get a job or a better paying job	29.4%
Get more education	16.3%
Get more money	9.6%
Get medical insurance	9.0%
Get healthy	6.6%
Improve self-confidence	5.2%
N = 803	

<b>Table 24</b>	
<b>If there was one thing you could do to improve your family's well-being, what would it be?</b>	
<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Get a job or a better paying job	29.1%
Get more money	11.3%
Get better housing	10.1%
Get more education	8.1%
Get healthy	5.8%
Move	4.4%
N=753	

<b>Table 25</b>	
<b>If there was one thing you could change about WV WORKS, what would it be?</b>	
<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Improve the sensitivity of DHHR's employees	17.1%
Provide additional help finding work	13.9%
Provide transitional benefits	10.1%
Ease eligibility standards	8.1%
Provide more money	7.0%
Provide more assistance for education/college	6.9%
N = 581	

## West Virginia in a Comparative Context

Because states are not required to report the status of their former welfare recipients, the only systematic data currently available on families who have left welfare is from research efforts initiated by states to meet their own information needs (U.S. General Accounting Office 1999). The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) has attempted to keep track of these efforts and to serve as a central depository for information concerning those who have left welfare since the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* went into effect. To date, NCSL has obtained information from 18 states that have conducted or sponsored studies of their state's welfare leavers. Most of the studies were conducted in 1997 and 1998. Also, in 1997 the Urban Institute released its *National Survey of America's Families*. This comprehensive survey of those living at or near poverty in 13 states provided a great deal of information concerning the poor and near poor in the United States. By gleaning information from the Urban Institute's study and the studies conducted in other states, it is possible to compare the experiences of welfare leavers in West Virginia with those in other states.

Before proceeding, it is appropriate to note that the following comparisons are based on information drawn from studies using different sampling techniques, survey designs and question wording. Also, differences in when and how the studies were conducted make it more difficult to compare data across states. With these caveats, the following observations can be made:

- West Virginia's WV WORKS/TANF case load has decreased at a much higher rate than the national average, and it is the highest rate of decline in the Mid-Atlantic region;
- The percentage of those who have left WV WORKS/TANF because they have found work is lower than in other states;
- The median hourly wage of those who have left WV WORKS/TANF is lower than those who have left AFDC/TANF in other states;
- As in other states, West Virginians who left WV WORKS/TANF are having a difficult time making ends meet after they leave the program;
- Barriers to work in West Virginia are similar to those found nationwide. However, illness and disability limits the ability of West Virginians who have left the program to find employment more so than in other states;
- As in other states, the number of West Virginians making use of other sources of public assistance, such as Medicaid, food stamps, and child care subsidies, declines after they leave the program;
- West Virginians' personal assessment of their economic and social well-being after leaving WV WORKS/TANF is relatively positive and similar to the personal assessments found in other states, yet West Virginians face a more difficult labor market and have a higher incidence of physical disability and illness that prevents their employment.

## Case Loads

TANF enrollments have declined dramatically across the United States. Nationally, between January 1993 and June 1999, the number of individuals receiving AFDC/TANF benefits fell 51 percent. During the same time period, the number of individuals receiving benefits in West Virginia fell 74 percent (from 119,916 to 31,032). In recent months, there has been a slight increase in the number of West Virginians receiving benefits due to a policy change that allows SSI income to be excluded from eligibility determinations, but the numbers remain far below the levels prior to the passage of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*. Table 26 compares West Virginia's individual enrollment decline from January 1993 to June 1999 with the declines in its neighboring states over the same time period. West Virginia's rate of decline exceeded the national average, and it was the highest in the Mid-Atlantic region (note: West Virginia's recently rescinded policy of including SSI income in its determination of eligibility was a contributing factor in its relatively high rate of decline - 17.1 percent of the survey's respondents, for example, reported that they left WV WORKS/TANF in 1998 because of the receipt of SSI income).

**Table 26**

### AFDC/TANF Enrollment Decline, West Virginia and Neighboring States (January 1993 - June 1999)

State	Percentage
West Virginia	74%
Ohio	64%
Maryland	60%
Kentucky	59%
Virginia	57%
Pennsylvania	50%
National Average	51%

**Source:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. 1999. "Change in TANF Caseloads," Accessed on line on December 7, 1999 at: [www.acf.dhhs.gov](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov).

## Reasons for Case Closure

The Urban Institute's survey of the poor and near poor in 13 states included a question that asked respondents who had left AFDC/TANF why they left the program. Most of their respondents (69 percent) reported that they left the program because of increased earnings or a new job (Loprest 1999). Almost half (42.7 percent) of the respondents reported that they left the program because of an increase in family earnings from work. Another 19.8 percent reported that they left the program because of non-work related family earnings. (note: this was important because West Virginia counted SSI earnings as earned income in 1997 and 1998). Because the respondents could list more than one reason for leaving WV WORKS, it was necessary to aggregate the data to create a percentage that was comparable with the Urban Institute's report (it is not appropriate to add the two percentages together). More than half of the respondents (51.2 percent - 404/789) reported that they left the program because of increased earnings or a new job.

The experiences of other states also help to put West Virginia in perspective. In Florida, 52.3 percent of the

respondents to a survey of former AFDC/TANF recipients reported that they left the program due to employment. The situation was similar in Iowa and Wisconsin, where the percentages were 53 and 54 percent, respectively. Kentucky reported a rate of 48.3 percent and South Carolina reported a rate of 47 percent. In summary, the percentage of West Virginians leaving WV WORKS/TANF because of employment (42.7 percent) is lower than the national average reported by the Urban Institute, and lower than the percentages reported in other states that have conducted studies of those who have left their AFDC/TANF program (Tweedy, Reichert, and O'Connor 1999).

### Economic and Social Well-Being After WV WORKS/TANF

The respondents' assessment of their personal well-being (46 percent reported that they were either much better off or better off since leaving WV WORKS) was lower than found in Kentucky (63 percent of their respondents reported that their personal situation was better).

The respondents' assessment of their financial well-being (42.6 percent reported that their financial situation was better since leaving WV WORKS) was similar to that found in Kansas where 42 percent of their respondents reported that their financial situation was better (Tweedy, Reichert, and O'Connor 1999). A review of the reports from the 18 states that have conducted studies of those who have left AFDC/TANF suggests that most of those who left the program believe that their financial well-being and personal quality of life had improved since they left the program. However, these improvements were marginal, and there is a significant minority who were struggling to make ends meet on a day-by-day basis (Tweedy, Reichert, and O'Connor 1999).

Personal assessments of one's financial and personal well-being have value, but they are sometimes not as helpful as a more detailed assessment of how individuals and families are actually faring after they leave the program. As Table 27 indicates, many West Virginians who leave the program are having a difficult time making ends meet on a day-by-day basis. For example, 43 percent of the respondents reported

that they have had times when they did not have enough money to buy food. This is much higher than the national average for an even more broadly defined question concerning hunger as reported by the Urban Institute (33 percent) and tied with Florida for the highest percentage among the states who have asked the broadly defined question concerning hunger in their studies of AFDC/TANF leavers.

West Virginians who left WV WORKS/TANF in 1998 were also more likely than others to have difficulty finding affordable housing (10.4 percent of the respondents reported that they had moved in with someone to share expenses compared to the national average as reported by the Urban Institute of 7.1 percent). They were also more likely than others to be unemployed (45.7 percent of the respondents reported that they were unemployed at the time they completed the survey compared to the national average of 35 percent) (Loprest 1999).

West Virginians who left WV WORKS/TANF were also more likely than others to report that they suffered from a disability or a health problem that prevented them from being employed (33.5 percent compared to 25 percent). In addition, another 9.2 percent of the respondents reported that they were unemployed because they had to care for a family member with a disability.

The median hourly wage of West Virginians who left WV WORKS/TANF and were employed at the time they completed the survey was far below the national median (\$5.90 an hour in 1999 compared to the national median of \$6.61 an hour in 1997) (Loprest 1999).

### The Use of Other Public Assistance Resources

*The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* purposively broke the connection between cash assistance and Medicaid eligibility. Now that welfare reform is well underway others, including some advocacy groups, have argued that those who leave TANF may not realize that they may still be eligible for Medicaid, food stamps, and other forms of governmental assistance. They contend that by breaking the linkage between TANF and Medicaid, many poor and near poor people in the United States may not receive the benefits that they were intended to receive. As Table 3 indicated, the percentage of respondents utilizing government services did decline after they left the program (food stamp usage, for example, declined from 72.6 percent of the respondents to 51.8 percent). Some of this decline, of course, was expected because some of the respondents left the program because of higher income. To address this issue further, the utilization of public services by West Virginians who left WV WORKS/TANF was compared to those who left their programs in other states. West Virginia had a higher percentage of individuals utilizing Medicaid after leaving WV WORKS/TANF than the national average (58.4 percent compared to 47 percent nationally) (Loprest 1999). West Virginia also had a higher percentage of individuals utilizing food stamps after leaving WV WORKS/TANF than the national average (51.9 percent compared to the national average of 31 percent reported by the Urban Institute).

**Table 27**

**Percent of respondents reporting that they did not have enough money to buy food, had to skip meals, or decrease the size of their meals after leaving AFDC/TANF**

State	Percentage
West Virginia	43%
Florida	43%
Wisconsin	32%
Kansas	19%
Massachusetts	17%
South Carolina	17%
Mississippi	11%
Washington	8%
National Average	33%

**Source:** All state data, except West Virginia, is from Jack Tweedy, Dana Reichert, and Matt O'Connor, "Tracking Recipients After They Leave Welfare." (National Conference of State Legislatures, accessed on line at: www.ncsl.org). The national average was derived from the Urban Institute's National Survey of America's Families in Pamela Loprest. *How Families That Left Welfare Are Doing: A National Picture* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute 1999).

## Comparative Summary

In some ways, West Virginians' experiences after leaving WV WORKS/TANF mirror national trends. West Virginians who left WV WORKS, like leavers across the nation, have a relatively positive view of their own well-being, of their future and of their children's future, even though they are faced with very significant challenges in making ends meet after they leave the program. In West Virginia, the situation is even more difficult because the state's economy is not as strong as most other states. Although most of the respondents were employed, many who wanted work were unable to find a job, and even those who did find employment typically found employment at or near the national minimum wage. Most of the respondents, even those who were employed, had a family household income that was at or below \$10,000 in 1998 and most of the respondents anticipated having a family household income at or below \$10,000 in 1999. Almost half (40.2 percent) of the respondents reported that they sometimes did not have enough money to put food on the table, to get medicine (40.2 percent) or go to the doctor (39.6 percent). Some of the respondents reported that they have had to go without lights or electricity (9.6 percent), heat (8.8 percent), and water (7.6 percent).

## Concluding Remarks

There is both good news and bad news in this study. The good news is that most of the respondents who left the program in 1998 were still off of the program when they completed the survey, more than half of the respondents were employed, and, as a group, their assessment of their future and their children's future was relatively positive. Also, the respondents' answers, especially to the open-ended questions concerning what they would do to improve their personal and family's well-being, suggest that they are a remarkably resilient group of people that are trying to improve their lives and the lives of their children. Most of them are struggling financially, yet, as a group, they maintain a relatively positive outlook on life.

The bad news is that many of the respondents are experiencing severe financial difficulties. For example, many of them have experienced times when they did not have enough money to buy food, go to the doctor, or buy medicine. Also, 8 percent of the respondents reported that their financial situation was now much worse off since leaving WV WORKS/TANF and 13.5 percent of the respondents reported that their future looked very poor. The situation of those reporting that they were now much worse off since leaving WV WORKS/TANF was best represented by the following response to the question: "If there was one thing you could do to improve your family's well-being, what would it be?" The respondent wrote: "I need a miracle."

Hopefully, the information from this study, and future ones, will be useful to the state's policymakers as they devise new and revise existing policies to address the needs of our state's most vulnerable citizens.

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This research was sponsored by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. They have provided the authors with permission to use this data. The opinions and conclusions expressed are solely those of the authors and should not be considered to represent the views of any agency or individual within West Virginia state government.

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2-2430



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