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***A Report Series of the  
Work First New Jersey  
Evaluation***

*Work First New Jersey Evaluation*

**Reshaping Welfare in  
New Jersey: Lessons  
from the Implementation  
of Work First New Jersey**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Jersey's welfare reform initiative, Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), has transformed the state's assistance program for poor families. The 1997 WFNJ legislation requires most cash assistance recipients to participate in work activities while limiting the duration of their lifetime cash assistance. The focus of the state's welfare system thus shifted from providing cash assistance to preparing people for the workplace.

This report examines New Jersey's implementation and operation of the WFNJ/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which provides cash assistance to families. It focuses on how local agencies have adapted WFNJ/TANF to their own counties. The report is part of a five-year evaluation by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) and its subcontractors, the Roper Group and Mathtech, Inc. Other major components of the evaluation are (1) a longitudinal study of a sample of WFNJ/TANF clients, and (2) case studies of three New Jersey communities.

The assessment of 10 counties' experiences during the first two years of WFNJ/TANF suggests the following key findings:

### **SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS ABOUT WFNJ/TANF IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION**

*New Jersey counties have implemented the main features of WFNJ/TANF.* Although counties vary in how they have implemented and operate WFNJ/TANF, the basic WFNJ/TANF program has been implemented in each county studied.

*County staff support program goals.* Across the 10 program study counties, staff members at all levels support the WFNJ/TANF program, including its "work first" emphasis and sanction policy. Many of them, however, do not believe that the work first approach is appropriate for all clients.

*WFNJ partnerships have been formed at the state and county levels, but integration between welfare and workforce systems can still be improved.* Although partners collaborate at all levels of the WFNJ/TANF system, state- and county-level partners should continue working to develop a seamless system in which clients move easily between welfare and workforce activities and from cash assistance to employment. Currently, in many program study counties, clients meet separately with welfare and workforce workers, but these workers do not work together on behalf of their clients.

*Counties need a more effective management information system.* Most county administrators contend that the state's management information system (MIS) does not meet their management needs. The major criticisms of the MIS are that its main databases are not linked and that MIS data reports are often inconsistent with county records.

*WFNJ/TANF does not yet consistently offer services aimed at the most hard-to-employ clients.* As the state and counties move welfare recipients to employment, a larger percentage of the WFNJ/TANF caseload has severe barriers to success in the labor market. In many counties, these clients do not receive services they need, including a thorough assessment of the barriers to employment, individualized plans to overcome them, and appropriate activities to prepare them for employment.

## **EVALUATING WELFARE REFORM**

New Jersey developed the WFNJ program in 1997 in response to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. For most cash assistance recipients, PRWORA replaced lifetime entitlement to benefits with time-limited cash assistance and work participation requirements.

In addition to a five-year lifetime limit on cash assistance, WFNJ/TANF includes:

- # Requirement of compliance with the child support program as a condition for cash assistance
- # Mandatory participation in WFNJ/TANF work activities after a client's application for cash assistance is approved
- # A sanction policy that imposes a gradual reduction in benefits and ends in closure of the cash assistance case for clients' failure to comply with the work participation requirement
- # Extension of Medicaid and child care benefits for up to two years after a client leaves welfare due to earned income
- # Requirement that teenage parents must live in an adult-supervised setting; if they do not have a high school degree, they must attend secondary school or an equivalency program to be eligible for cash assistance

To understand the effect of changes resulting from WFNJ/TANF, the evaluation team and the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJDHS) selected 10 of New Jersey's 21 counties for an in-depth examination of their WFNJ/TANF programs and systems. These program study counties are Atlantic, Bergen, Camden, Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, and Salem. These counties were chosen to reflect diversity in six dimensions: (1) size of WFNJ/TANF caseloads, (2) size of county population, (3) percentage of minority population, (4) region of the state, (5) population density, and (6) federal work participation rate.

This report, the first of several on program implementation and operations, relies on three data sources: (1) interviews with state welfare officials, (2) site visits to the 10 counties, and (3) administrative data. State administrators at NJDHS and the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOL) were interviewed to highlight state policies and explain the goals of WFNJ/TANF. Fall 1999 visits to the counties included interviews with county welfare agency (CWA) and workforce agency staff, service providers, and others involved in WFNJ/TANF implementation, as well as observations of program operations and reviews of client files. Additional fieldwork to program study counties will be conducted in fall 2000 and 2001. For this report, state administrative data complement the qualitative data obtained through fieldwork.

New Jersey's welfare system has undergone substantial changes in response to federal welfare reform and the introduction of WFNJ/TANF. This executive summary first describes the successes of the state and its counties in the two years of the WFNJ/TANF



program. It then discusses the challenges confronted, which concern three broad components of program implementation:

1. The partnerships and systems critical to the WFNJ/TANF program
2. The staff and processes needed to move clients through the system
3. The participation of clients in WFNJ/TANF work activities and employment

## **SUCCESSSES IN WFNJ/TANF IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION**

The 10 New Jersey counties achieved four major successes in the first two years of WFNJ/TANF.

### **# The policies of WFNJ/TANF have been implemented statewide.**

Across the state, counties have implemented the main features of the new welfare program. Counties have, for the most part, implemented state rules and regulations with respect to the intake process, sanctions for client noncompliance, and provision of supportive and post-TANF services. While there are variations in how counties implemented and are operating the program, they have adhered to the basic program rules and regulations.

### **# WFNJ/TANF has stimulated the development of partnerships between welfare and workforce agencies.**

WFNJ/TANF's emphasis on placing participants in work activities has strengthened the partnerships among county welfare agencies, county workforce agencies, and service providers. Under New Jersey's earlier welfare programs--Realizing Economic Achievement (REACH) and the Family Development Program (FDP)--county entities formed partnerships to reach program goals, but the greatest responsibility for delivering most welfare services lay with the county welfare agency. Since county welfare agencies traditionally have not emphasized their relationship with the labor market and employers, WFNJ/TANF's goal of quickly engaging clients in work activities has spurred welfare agencies in most counties to work with their workforce agencies and local vendors.

### **# The "work first" principle is, as intended, widely promoted and emphasized.**

The rapid connection of clients with jobs has become a clear and consistent goal of agencies assisting welfare recipients. The "work first" goal is made clear in the first activities a new WFNJ/TANF applicant encounters. Even before applicants apply for cash assistance, they register for work with the New Jersey Employment Service. Applicants deemed job ready may be referred to the Early Employment Initiative (EEI), New Jersey's program to divert employable clients from cash assistance and to productive work. Once certified for cash assistance, most new recipients attend a group job search class.

**# The culture of welfare is changing, as reflected in staff attitudes and, to some extent, in client attitudes.**

The “work first” approach has broad support from welfare and workforce county staff at all levels. Many staff believe that this approach is appropriate for clients with a work history who have been working while on cash assistance, but there is a sense that an increasing portion of the caseload is not job ready and thus is not suited for “work first” activities.

Welfare clients and the staff assisting them are adjusting their behavior in response to WFNJ/TANF work requirements. Staff no longer consider cash assistance an entitlement. Many county welfare and workforce staff members are using the WFNJ/TANF sanction policy, which is stricter than the earlier sanction policy, to penalize clients who fail to comply with work requirements and to encourage participation. According to staff, some clients also are beginning to adjust their expectations of the program.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND SYSTEMS FOR WFNJ/TANF**

WFNJ/TANF requires new relationships between organizations providing services to welfare clients and strong support for staff implementing the new program. A strong relationship, as well as collaboration between organizations at the state and county levels, can lead to smooth, efficient delivery of services to clients.

**# Though improving, the relationship among state agencies and between NJDHS and CWAs have at times been strained.**

The new relationships formed under WFNJ/TANF take time to develop. Some county staff perceived that, at the start of WFNJ/TANF, the relationship between NJDHS and NJDOL was strained. Staff attributed this strain to different philosophies and client bases. This, in turn, often resulted in conflicting instructions from state agencies to their county-level counterparts. According to county staff, the two state agencies have been working to present a consistent message and instructions to counties.

County staff felt that their WFNJ/TANF relationship with NJDHS was slow to develop. Many county administrators felt that they had insufficient say about the new program, that the state did not adequately train county staff to implement the new program, and that they did not have an MIS adequate to support the program. Over time, as NJDHS has tried to respond to counties’ needs for more training and more effective communications, the relationship between NJDHS and county welfare agencies has improved. County staff members, however, continue to express frustration over what they regard as excessive paperwork, frequent changes in policy, and an inadequate MIS.

**# County organizations work together to deliver welfare services, but stronger collaborations are possible.**

Many county agencies have developed constructive working relationships with one another, but their coordination of service delivery could be strengthened. Recognizing that the need for collaboration has increased under WFNJ/TANF, most counties have enhanced the interagency coordination that existed under REACH and FDP by continuing and

improving regular meetings among senior administrators. However, the level of collaboration among organizations varies across the program study counties. In some counties, partners discuss issues related to the program and plan strategies to resolve them; in other counties, partners' discussions do not tend to produce resolutions to issues.

The level of coordination between county agency line staff and service provider staff tends to be weaker than it is at the senior administrator level. In some counties, agency line staff are not aware of the different roles of other WFNJ/TANF partners. As a result, staff of different agencies may communicate conflicting information to clients, and clients may become confused about their responsibilities under the program. In only a few counties do agency staff meet regularly to coordinate service delivery for clients.

Counties have various strategies to strengthen collaborations among the WFNJ/TANF partners:

- # ***Integrate WFNJ/TANF services into one agency.*** Atlantic County combined welfare and workforce services into one agency. Clients access welfare and work-related services at one location from staff who work for the same agency. Thus, issues of coordination between welfare and workforce agencies are no longer relevant.
- # ***Colocate staff of different agencies.*** Some counties have grouped services so that clients can access many of them at the same location. This can reduce the amount of time clients must spend locating and accessing welfare and work-related services. Colocating staff from different agencies may encourage more cooperative relationships among the line staff.
- # ***Assign responsibility of multiple services to single county administrator.*** Several counties have given cross-agency authority over the WFNJ/TANF program to a single county official or administrator. Cooperation between separate agencies is enhanced when the agencies report to the same administrator.
- # ***Provide joint training across agencies.*** A few counties provide joint training sessions between WFNJ/TANF agencies to promote a cooperative relationship among line staff.

# **Vendors' roles in WFNJ/TANF are hindered by few referrals and performance-based contracts.**

The participation of WFNJ/TANF service providers (or vendors) in WFNJ/TANF has been lessened by fewer referrals than expected and by performance-based contracts. Many vendors have entered into state or county contracts with estimates of the number of clients they expected to serve during the year; with declining WFNJ/TANF caseloads, however, vendors have received fewer referrals than expected, and their revenues have decreased. Declining caseloads in some counties also increase the competition among vendors for clients. In addition, some vendors who have performance-based contracts, in which payment is linked to attaining certain benchmarks, are struggling because they lack the cash reserves to support the contracts. If the vendor provides services to a client, but the client does not

achieve certain outcomes (such as becoming employed), the vendor does not get paid for its services.

Some of the strategies counties use to address vendor concerns are:

- # *Use contracts that reduce vendor risk.* To address vendor concerns with performance-based contracts, some counties use other contract types, such as cost-reimbursement contracts, with some or all vendors. Cost-reimbursement contracts reduce vendor risk, because vendors are reimbursed for the services they provide.
- # *Distribute referrals evenly among vendors.* One county attempts to distribute referrals equally to vendors by making referrals on a rotating basis. Though equitable, such distribution can cause vendors to serve clients outside their geographic area or targeted client base.
- # *Use local organizations to find more participants.* A couple of large counties have contracted with community-based organizations to help locate and re-engage sanctioned clients.

# **The current management information system does not meet county management needs.**

Most county welfare administrators feel that the state MIS has not sufficiently supported their efforts to provide services to clients. An effective MIS can help county staff provide WFNJ/TANF services to clients. In particular, problems with untimely system reports and weak system links have undercut county efforts to track clients and monitor their movement through the welfare system.

In the absence of an efficient state MIS, several counties have developed their own systems to help them monitor their WFNJ/TANF caseloads. These PC-based systems help counties track the status of their WFNJ/TANF clients. The state also has been working to improve the existing system, but critical issues--such as poor links between the two major welfare databases, the Family Assistance Management Information System and the On-line Management of Economic Goals Achievement System--remain concerns of county workers.

# **While CWA staff tend to support the basic WFNJ/TANF philosophy, staff morale overall is low.**

Despite broad support for the WFNJ philosophy, staff morale has been a problem in many county welfare agencies. In CWAs with low morale, agency staff may be more likely to treat clients poorly.

Two factors unrelated to the goals of WFNJ/TANF have hurt morale. First, staff members in many county welfare agencies worry about losing their jobs due to budget cuts or privatization of welfare services. Federal caps placed on TANF administrative expenses have resulted in layoffs in several counties. Many staff members also worry about the safety of their jobs, because of fears that the state intends to privatize welfare services. Second,

changes in the welfare program--from staffing reorganizations to more complicated rules--affect the attitudes of many workers.

## **THE STAFF AND PROCESSES MOVING THE CLIENTS THROUGH THE SYSTEM**

Clients must navigate a new welfare system to receive cash benefits and begin the transition from welfare to work. As a result of the program's work first emphasis, clients in most counties are introduced to employment and other approved WFNJ/TANF work activities as soon as they apply for cash assistance and other benefits. In response to changes in the welfare program, many CWAs have redefined case management and changed workers' responsibilities to help clients become self-sufficient.

WFNJ/TANF requires additional steps in the intake process for new applicants for cash assistance. The WFNJ/TANF intake process includes compliance with child support program requirements, registration for work with the New Jersey Employment Service (NJES), and possible referrals to the EEI.

### **# New CWA staff roles create pressures on staff.**

CWAs have adopted diverse strategies in configuring staff responsibilities. Six counties maintain separate staff to perform the three key WFNJ/TANF functions of intake, redetermination, and case management, while in four counties, one staff person performs two or more of these functions for a client. Some staff believe that integrating functions into one staff position improves coordination of client activities. Clients must then contact only one person for welfare-related information. It may be, however, that nonintegrated workers are better able to specialize in their respective functions.

Each staffing model poses challenges. Coordination and communications between CWA income maintenance workers and case managers working in nonintegrated staff models are sometimes poor. In integrated models, staff often are not prepared for, or proficient in, their duties, especially those related to case management.

A couple of counties have devised ways to overcome the challenges the different staffing models present:

- # ***Encourage understanding of different roles.*** The Atlantic County welfare agency has paired an income maintenance worker with a case manager to work with the same set of clients. This provides critical cross-training and gives each worker an appreciation of the other's responsibilities.
- # ***Provide more support for workers in the integrated model.*** Monmouth County has an integrated model for its "regular" cases but has placed an experienced case manager (one with a background in social work) in each integrated unit, to provide on-the-job training and as-needed assistance to the integrated workers.

# **Providing intensive one-on-one case management services to WFNJ/TANF participants is difficult because of a shift in program emphasis and lack of resources.**

Most CWAs in the program study do not provide individualized case management to clients. County staff cite several reasons why: (1) the reduced need for case management in a program requiring all clients to work, (2) heavier paperwork burdens under WFNJ/TANF, and (3) fewer staff available to provide individualized services. However, intensive case management--providing counseling services to help clients overcome barriers to participation in WFNJ/TANF and work--may increase in importance as the number of clients with major barriers grows.

Several CWAs are providing more individualized case management and counseling to all or a portion of their caseload, using the following methods:

# *Placing social workers in case management positions.* Three program study counties (Bergen, Monmouth, and Ocean) assign social workers to case manage all or part of the WFNJ/TANF caseload. These workers are trained to counsel clients with major barriers to employment.

# *Creating central units to relieve case managers of some responsibilities.* Some counties have created central units with responsibility for some case managers' client-monitoring functions. For example, these units track clients' sanction and deferral status for the case managers. These units may provide case managers with additional time to work one-on-one with their clients.

# **WFNJ/TANF requires a long WFNJ/TANF intake process, which limits staff-client communication.**

WFNJ/TANF regulations have lengthened the process of applying for cash assistance and other benefits, thus affecting delivery of consistent communication about the program to clients. The additional tasks that intake workers must complete with applicants, along with the complicated program eligibility rules, consume much time when workers are with clients. Thus, during the intake interview, the worker has little time to make clients fully aware of WFNJ/TANF program rules. Even when staff do clearly communicate the rules and regulations of WFNJ/TANF, clients may be too overwhelmed by the intake process to absorb the information.

There are several strategies that some program study counties use to try to improve communications with clients:

# *Develop alternative settings for communicating with clients.* In the Bergen County welfare agency, the intake worker completes the necessary paperwork and makes appropriate referrals but is not responsible for the orientation to WFNJ. An orientation is provided by the case manager once clients' applications for welfare are approved. The CWA requires approved clients to return to the agency to receive their electronic benefit transfer card and to meet with their case manager.

- # ***Hold group orientations.*** In half of the program study counties, clients receive formal introductions to WFNJ/TANF either before they are assigned to their first activity or during their group job search class. These sessions often stress the WFNJ/TANF work participation requirements and the consequences of nonparticipation. However, by the time these orientations are conducted, some clients have already chosen not to comply with the work participation requirement.
- # ***Create a customer-friendly environment.*** Several counties are trying to create a less stressful and more customer-friendly environment in the welfare office, especially at intake. In this type of environment, clients may be more comfortable asking questions of staff and more likely to recall details of program requirements. Atlantic County, for example, is encouraging staff to treat cash assistance recipients as customers.

# **The intake process limits NJES's ability to assess clients' employability and refer them to appropriate job placements.**

NJES could have a larger role in working with clients. Currently, the role of NJES workers is limited, primarily because they have little time with clients during the WFNJ/TANF intake process. In some counties, because of the multiple activities applicants must complete during intake, the NJES worker spends only 5 to 10 minutes with an applicant in completing the work registration form. In several counties, the NJES worker is on site at the CWA only a few days a week. Usually, when the worker is absent, applicants are not assessed by a job specialist.

Giving NJES workers more time with clients during the intake process would allow them to assess clients' employability needs more effectively. Working with clients' case managers, they could help develop an individualized placement strategy for each client.

# **Eligibility criteria and competing programs have affected referrals to the EEI program.**

EEI standards make the program a low priority for many county welfare agency workers. When EEI was implemented in August 1998, the program had high eligibility standards, which few clients met. In July 1999, NJDHS lowered standards. Even under EEI's revised criteria, however, county staff claim that few clients are eligible for the program.

For other reasons, staff in some counties are not inclined to refer clients to EEI. Some county staff see other activities--NJES work registration and group job search--as serving the same function, so they view the EEI program as unnecessary. The EEI program also can affect the success of other activities. For example, if an employable client is referred to the job search program instead of to the EEI program, she most likely will be a positive placement for the job search provider. Because that client is referred to EEI, the job search provider loses a potential job placement. In addition, clients placed in jobs through the EEI program are not counted in a county's WFNJ/TANF participation and employment placement rates, because they are not in the WFNJ/TANF program.

## **PARTICIPATION IN WFNJ/TANF WORK ACTIVITIES AND EMPLOYMENT**

Counties use numerous approaches to encourage WFNJ/TANF clients to participate in work activities and employment. Some WFNJ/TANF policies can encourage participation in WFNJ/TANF by offering a variety of supportive services. For example, the post-TANF child care program may help clients leave work for employment if they know that part of their child care costs can be covered. Other policies, including sanctions and the five-year lifetime limit on benefits, may compel clients to comply with WFNJ/TANF rules or leave welfare for employment.

Client participation in work activities is critical to counties' WFNJ/TANF programs. First, states' federal TANF block grant allocations can be reduced if states do not meet work participation rate targets. Thus, to meet state goals, individual New Jersey counties must maintain appropriate work participation rates. Second, under WFNJ/TANF, clients must participate in activities that will lead to sustainable employment before their 60 months of welfare ends. Therefore, in the WFNJ/TANF program, the effect on the participation rate of such factors as the post-TANF child care program, sanction policy, time limits, and clients' nonattendance at activities are key issues.

### **# High no-show rates affect participation rates.**

All counties are experiencing high no-show rates. The high rate at which clients do not attend the activities to which they are referred affect (1) counties' work participation rates, (2) vendors who expect to serve the clients, and (3) clients who may need assistance finding jobs and other help provided by WFNJ/TANF organizations and vendors.

Program study counties are trying different strategies to improving client attendance:

- # ***Remind clients of their upcoming activity.*** Vendors in most counties mail letters or telephone clients to remind them about their upcoming activity.
- # ***Conduct home visits to remove barriers affecting clients' attendance.*** Some vendors are visiting clients to remind them in person of an upcoming activity and make sure provision has been made for their transportation and child care.
- # ***Initiate programs with community-based organizations to encourage clients' attendance.*** Essex and Hudson counties have contracts with community-based organizations to contact sanctioned clients, determine why they dropped out of their assigned activities, and encourage them to return. For this outreach, these recently initiated projects use former welfare recipients, on the premise that they may be effective in communicating with sanctioned clients and getting them to redress their failure to participate.

### **# Client use of post-TANF child care is low--in part, as a result of agency processes.**

According to county staff, clients are told about the post-TANF benefits available to them. Staff in the program study counties repeatedly inform clients--during intake, WFNJ/TANF orientations, activities, and ongoing contacts with CWA staff--about the post-TANF benefits for which they may be eligible.



Still, client use of the post-TANF child care program is low. The WFNJ client study found that only 22 percent of clients who were employed and no longer receiving TANF were using a government child care subsidy (Rangarajan and Wood 1999). Although some working clients may not have been eligible for the post-TANF child care benefit (for example, if they closed their welfare case for reasons other than employment), there appear to be other reasons for low utilization.

Because clients are told about the program, the low use of the post-TANF child care program in the program study counties appears to be the result of agency processes and client preferences. Even though they are told about the program benefits, some clients may not understand their eligibility for the program and the benefits of participation. This may have to do with the way clients are told about these benefits during the WFNJ/TANF intake process and while they are receiving cash assistance. Lack of participation in the program also may be a consequence of miscommunications between WFNJ/TANF partners. For example, information that a client has found employment may not flow smoothly between a vendor providing job placement services, the CWA, and the unified child care agency (UCCA) responsible for administering the WFNJ/TANF and post-TANF child care programs. County staff believe other clients may choose not to participate in the child care program because they do not want to be involved in the welfare system once they are employed, because they did not tell their CWA workers they found employment, or because they have free child care.

NJDHS and the counties are developing strategies to increase participation in the post-TANF child care program. NJDHS is training county staff in strategies to market the program more effectively. Other strategies counties have developed include:

- # ***Targeting eligible clients through state databases.*** Several UCCAs are trying to reach more clients by identifying those who have left welfare for employment. Some counties use state MIS reports on the WFNJ/TANF cases that have been closed as a result of earnings. Based on these reports, the UCCAs send letters to clients informing them of the child care benefits to which they may be entitled.
- # ***Identifying working clients no longer receiving cash assistance.*** One county is beginning to use the New Hires Database, which was developed in accordance with PRWORA to help collect child support from noncustodial parents. Using this database, county staff hope to identify clients who leave welfare for work and who may be eligible for post-TANF benefits.
- # ***Centralizing responsibility for the post-TANF child care program.*** Hudson County's UCCA, the Urban League, has named one staff person to coordinate the post-TANF child care program. This staff person contacts employed clients who were receiving child care subsidies while participating in WFNJ/TANF to encourage their participation in the post-TANF child care program.

**# According to county staff, the use of sanctions can alter clients' behavior, but the threat of the 60-month lifetime limit for cash assistance does not affect their behavior.**

The attitudes of county staff and clients toward sanctions and time limits are important factors in the use and effectiveness of these tools. If staff do not believe that sanctions will compel clients to participate in WFNJ/TANF activities, they may be less inclined to impose them on noncompliant clients. Similarly, if clients do not believe in the inevitability of time limits, they may not feel the pressure to participate.

County staff believe that the WFNJ/TANF sanction policy for client noncompliance with work participation requirements may affect some clients' participation. In general, county staff believe that younger recipients, and those new to the welfare system, are the most likely to respond to the threat or imposition of a sanction. However, they also think that sanctions are not likely to motivate clients who have been sanctioned numerous times and have not responded, clients whose main interest is in maintaining Medicaid, and clients who receive cash assistance because they are experiencing a momentary interruption of their income. Compelling these clients to participate remains a challenge.

While lifetime limits on clients' eligibility for cash assistance are at least two years away for clients, the looming time limit does not seem to have altered staff or client attitudes, at least not consistently. To be effective, limits should be putting pressure on staff to help clients leave welfare and on clients to find gainful employment. However, most welfare agency staff believe that the state will provide a safety net to recipients who reach their five-year limit. Since the state is not tracking clients' cumulative receipt of welfare (although such a system is now being developed), and since other welfare programs have had short lives, many staff members believe that time limits are not inevitable. When CWA staff believe that the policy will not be enforced, it may be difficult for clients to realize the importance of becoming self-sufficient.

## **CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE**

New Jersey is making great strides toward developing a work first welfare program. The state has transformed the former entitlement welfare program into one that encourages clients to become self-reliant and to assume personal responsibility for their lives. Counties have collaborated with new partners to expand the ranges of services to clients and to encourage clients' participation in WFNJ/TANF activities and help them leave cash assistance for work. Within county agencies, staff members have embraced the new program philosophy. Two areas remain challenges:

- # *Developing an integrated WFNJ/TANF system through better coordination and improved systems.*** Both the state and the counties must continue to work toward better coordination and communications between WFNJ/TANF partners. An improved MIS with linkages between the main welfare databases could help create a fully integrated system.
- # *Moving clients to self-sufficiency with case management, well-informed staff, and post-TANF benefits.*** Greater focus on helping clients overcome challenges to finding and keeping sustainable employment may be needed. One avenue to

achieving this may be to emphasize intensive case management, especially for hard-to-serve clients, so that case managers can diagnose clients' barriers to participation and work to help them overcome their barriers. Although the potential effectiveness of intensive case management is unknown, more individualized planning with hard-to-serve clients seems warranted. Second, a well-trained staff may be better able to implement program policies and communicate program requirements and benefits to clients. Third, more extensive outreach to clients to promote the advantages of post-TANF benefits might encourage clients to make the transition to employment and help them keep their jobs.

# I

## INTRODUCTION

The country's welfare system has undergone dramatic changes. Before 1996, needy families with children were guaranteed lifetime benefits under the federal Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Passage by Congress of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 and the accompanying Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant transformed the country's program to aid poor families. PRWORA ended lifetime benefits; it instituted a 60-month lifetime limit on cash assistance and a work participation requirement for most cash assistance recipients. TANF block grants enabled states to develop their own programs to address the new federal welfare legislation. In many states, implementing reforms has necessitated changes in the relationships among state agencies and between state and local agencies, the creation of new welfare services and service delivery methods, and the development of a new welfare culture.

To understand the effect of these changes in New Jersey and of those resulting from the state's own welfare program, Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJ DHS) contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) and its subcontractors, the Roper Group and Mathtech, Inc., to conduct a comprehensive five-year evaluation of WFNJ, including a program and management study of the institutions responsible for WFNJ. The evaluation's two other major components are (1) a longitudinal study of a sample of WFNJ/TANF clients, and (2) case studies of three New Jersey communities.

This report, the first in a series to be produced as part of the program study, examines the TANF portion of the WFNJ program (hereafter referred to as WFNJ/TANF) about two years after it began. It is based on discussions with state officials, a first set of site visits to selected counties across the state, and administrative data. Three major objectives of the study frame the research and this report: (1) to explain how the counties have implemented WFNJ/TANF, (2) to analyze challenges to program implementation and operations and make recommendations for overcoming them, and (3) to identify promising practices and strategies counties have developed so that other counties may emulate and improve program operations.

The rest of this chapter presents an overview of the context for WFNJ/TANF, further discusses the program study's research methods, and describes the counties included in the study. Chapters II through IV focus on answers to three broad questions:

1. ***How did WFNJ affect county organizations and delivery systems for welfare, and what effect do different county systems have on WFNJ/TANF implementation and operations?*** WFNJ/TANF changed the services counties provide to welfare clients and the culture of expectations for those receiving cash assistance. In many counties, workforce agencies and service vendors have taken on larger roles in delivering services to clients. These broadened

responsibilities and the urgency to move clients to work require strengthened coordination between welfare and workforce agencies and vendors. The selected New Jersey counties' success at coordination depends on their own leadership and history, as well as on management information systems (MIS), staff training, and county-state relationships.

2. ***What challenges have counties faced in delivering services to clients, and how are they working to overcome them?*** WFNJ/TANF imposed a new process for delivering welfare services to clients, and most counties have adapted well to it. However, challenges remain in orienting clients properly to WFNJ/TANF and providing them with effective case management and appropriate services. Some challenges counties face result from the WFNJ/TANF regulations, while others stem from counties' own organizations and processes for WFNJ/TANF.
3. ***What means do counties use to encourage clients' participation in work activities?*** Counties struggle with low client participation in the work-related activities that WFNJ/TANF provides. County staff believe that time limits do little to influence client behavior and participation, while sanctions are better able to persuade clients to participate in WFNJ/TANF. Through WFNJ/TANF,

### **THREE COMPONENTS OF MATHEMATICA'S WFNJ EVALUATION**

- # The **Client Study** is tracking a statewide sample of WFNJ families over a five-year period to establish what happens to them before and after they leave welfare. Focusing on clients who participated in WFNJ during its first 18 months of operation, this study is documenting the welfare receipt, employment levels, income, health, housing arrangements, and other indicators of WFNJ clients' general well-being and quality of life. It will also identify factors affecting clients' success in moving from welfare to work and document changes in the welfare caseload over time. The study uses three main types of data: (1) longitudinal surveys of a statewide sample of up to 2,000 WFNJ clients; (2) information from state administrative data systems on a larger sample of 10,000 WFNJ clients; and (3) a series of in-depth, in-person interviews with a subset of 60 WFNJ clients.
- # The **Program and Management Study** is identifying key issues and operational challenges the state and counties have faced in implementing WFNJ. Promising strategies for overcoming these challenges also are a focus of the study. The analysis draws on state administrative data and three rounds of site visits to 10 of the state's 21 counties. During site visits, staff interview a variety of county staff members, conduct case file reviews, and observe program activities. This study also will help the state develop performance indicators to guide program improvement efforts.
- # The **Community Study** focuses on three urban areas (Newark, Camden, and the population centers of Cumberland County) to understand how WFNJ is unfolding at the local level. The study's primary goal is to identify promising strategies that local institutions can adopt to respond to welfare reform and the needs of low-income families. The analysis will draw on a survey of low-income residents, an employer survey, state administrative data, and interviews with local service providers and other stakeholders.

counties also provide a range of supportive services, such as child care, transportation, and transitional benefits, in an effort to make participating and working attractive options.

Based on the analyses in Chapters II through IV, the concluding chapter of this report presents options on how the state and counties can (1) improve coordination and collaboration to make WFNJ/TANF a more integrated system within counties and across the state, and (2) increase clients' chances for a successful transition from welfare to work. Practices or strategies that some counties have developed to enhance their WFNJ/TANF program are highlighted throughout the report.

## **A. POLICY CONTEXT FOR WFNJ**

Federal laws and policies have stipulated certain requirements for state welfare programs, such as meeting federally established work participation rates.<sup>1</sup> However, states had to define their own welfare programs. New Jersey has been at the forefront of these efforts to reform welfare. WFNJ, the state's new welfare program, emerged in part from its earlier efforts to reform the way it responded to the needs of its poorest citizens. The state's Realizing Economic Achievement (REACH) program in 1987 preceded and pioneered many of the ideas incorporated in the 1988 federal Family Support Act and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) training program it created. In 1992, New Jersey's Family Development Program (FDP) replaced REACH and introduced the family cap, which bars benefit increases to families who have another child while receiving cash assistance, a policy that other states have also included in their current welfare programs.

The WFNJ legislation was signed in July 1997, although the state received its first TANF funds in February 1997. WFNJ consolidated cash welfare, FDP, Emergency Assistance, and the state's General Assistance Program into one program. It also includes the TANF 60-month lifetime limit on benefits and retains the family cap. Other key provisions of WFNJ include:

- # **Work Requirements.** WFNJ stipulates that TANF clients must be in an approved activity within the 24-month period set by TANF. In practice, however, the state and counties require TANF clients' participation in a WFNJ activity soon after their application for cash assistance has been certified.
- # **Child Support Collection.** To be eligible for and to continue to receive cash assistance, clients must cooperate with child support collection efforts.
- # **Sanctions.** If clients do not comply with the work requirement, child support collection, or other WFNJ/TANF rules, they face sanctions on their benefits and their eligibility for benefits. The severity of sanctions increases according to the

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<sup>1</sup>PRWORA requires that, in fiscal year 2000, 40 percent of states' caseloads must be participating in work activities for at least 30 hours per week. By fiscal year 2002, 50 percent of the caseloads must be participating for at least 30 hours per week.

number of months of noncompliance and the number of sanctions accumulated; the maximum penalty is full closure of the case for a minimum of three months.

- # ***Post-TANF Medicaid and Child Care Benefits.*** WFNJ offers families Medicaid health benefits and child care subsidies for up to two years after they leave welfare for work.
- # ***Teen Parents.*** Teen parents must live at home or in another adult-supervised setting to be eligible for aid. If they do not have a high school diploma, they must remain in secondary school or in an equivalency program to be eligible for continued assistance.

Compared with changes made by some states in the country, New Jersey chose to adopt a fairly moderate program (Zedlewski 1998). As Table I.1 demonstrates, some states have shortened clients' lifetime eligibility from the five years allowed under PRWORA; however, WFNJ/TANF maintained the five-year limit. Some states have adopted sanctions for noncompliance that immediately stop the payment of cash benefits to the full case, and some prohibit clients from future cash benefits after repeated failure to comply. WFNJ/TANF's sanction policy imposes a gradual reduction in the case's cash benefits that could lead to the closure of the case, but clients can eventually reapply for cash assistance. The income disregards allowed by some states are more generous than WFNJ/TANF's, while other states disregard a smaller portion of clients' earnings when determining income eligibility for cash assistance.

## **B. STATE AND LOCAL ORGANIZATION FOR WFNJ/TANF**

Understanding how the state is organized to deliver welfare services provides important background for an analysis of WFNJ/TANF. The relationship between the state agencies and the local agencies is likely to influence the ultimate implementation and operation of the program. Similarly, the local structure for delivery of services influences what cash assistance recipients learn about the new welfare policies and the services they receive. Figure I.1 provides a conceptual model for the state and local system. While the federal and state governments impose rules and regulations that counties must follow, WFNJ/TANF is implemented within and by counties with particular characteristics, which are likely to give rise to different organizations, structures, and processes for delivering welfare services.

The state welfare policy is shaped by the Governor's Office, the legislature, NJDHS, the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOL), and the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC). Within NJDHS, the Division of Family Development (DFD) monitors and ensures counties' implementation of federal and state welfare policies by providing procedural manuals that counties must follow, holding regular meetings with county welfare administrators and supervisors, and requiring counties to provide data on their caseloads and participation rates. NJDOL plays a major role in WFNJ/TANF. Through a contract with NJDHS, the NJDOL Employment Service (NJES) is responsible for placing WFNJ/TANF clients in jobs. Other NJDOL staff also are involved in WFNJ/TANF, such as business service representatives responsible for garnering employer interest in WFNJ and staff members responsible for developing community work experience program (CWEP)

TABLE I.1

## WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY (WFNJ) AND OTHER STATE WELFARE REFORM PROGRAMS

	New Jersey		Connecticut	Nebraska	Virginia	Wisconsin
	WFNJ/TANF	FDP				
Maximum TANF Grant for Family of Three	\$424	\$424	\$636 <sup>a</sup>	\$364	\$354	\$673
Time Limit	60 months	--	21 months	24 months within 48 months <sup>b</sup>	24 months within 60 months <sup>b</sup>	60 months
Work Requirement (first activity)	Immediate (job search)	When able (education and training)	Immediate (job search)	Immediate (individualized)	90 days (work)	Immediate (work)
Sanction for Noncompliance	Gradual full	Partial	Gradual full	Immediate full	Immediate full	Gradual lifetime
Transitional Medicaid	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years	1 year	1 year
Eligibility for Child Care Subsidy After Leaving TANF for Work	2 years	1 year	Up to 75% of state median income	Up to 185% of poverty	1 year (if meet income eligibility)	Up to 200% of poverty
Income Disregards	100% first month 50% after	\$30 + <b>a</b>	100% <sup>c</sup>	20%	100% <sup>c</sup>	100% <sup>d</sup>
Family Cap Imposed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Work Participation Rate, Fiscal Year 1998 (percent)	26.5	--	41.4	20.6	27.5	64
Change in TANF Caseload, 1996-1999 (percent)	! 42	--	! 48	! 16	! 45	! 82

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families; National Governors' Association.

NOTE: The states included in this table were selected to demonstrate the diversity found among the country's welfare programs.

FDP = Family Development Program.

<sup>a</sup> Benefits vary by region. The maximum benefit is shown.

<sup>b</sup> The lifetime limit remains 60 months.

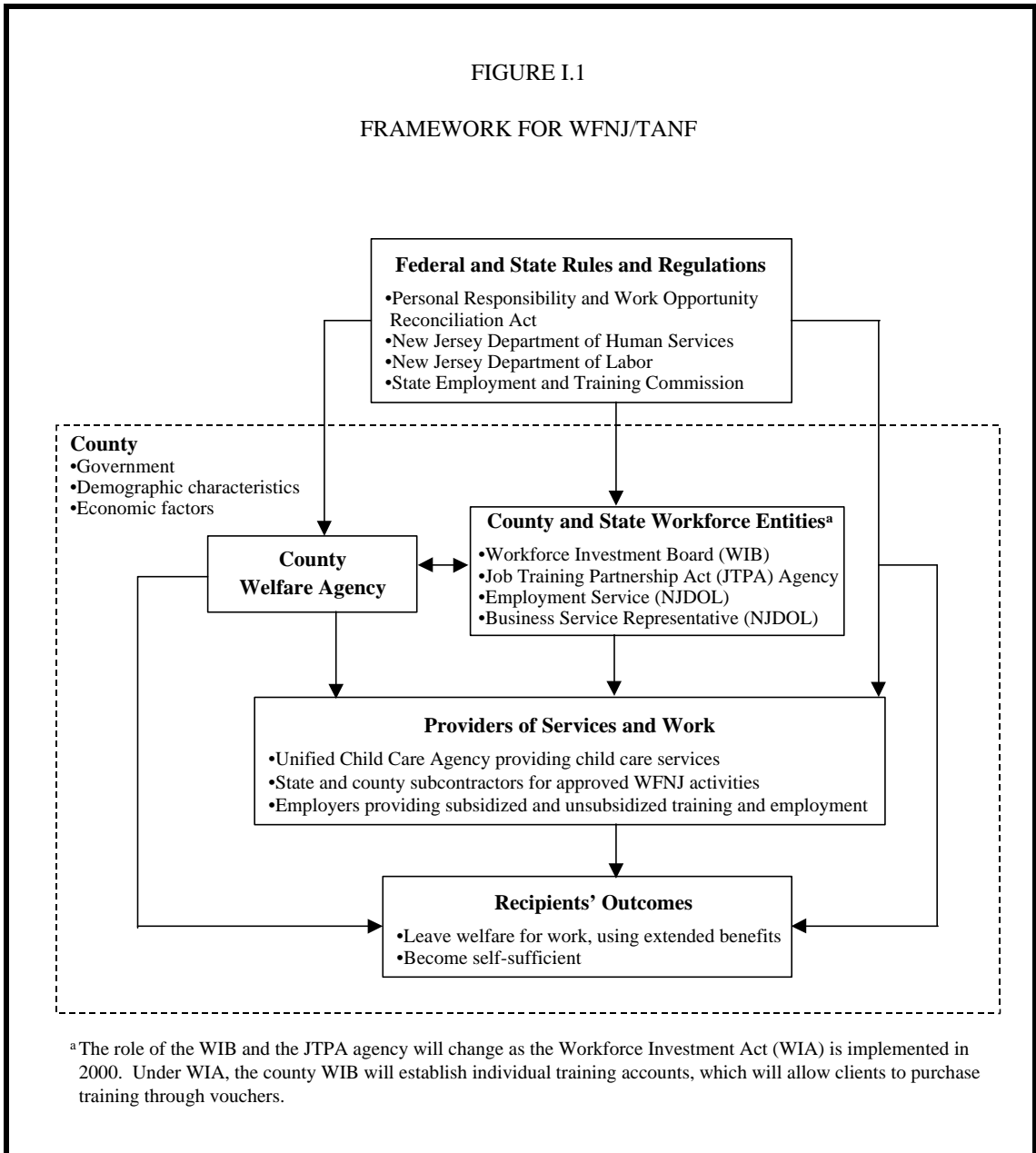
<sup>c</sup> Full disregard as long as unit's gross earnings do not exceed federal poverty guidelines.

<sup>d</sup> Full disregard until unit reaches 115% of poverty level.



FIGURE I.1

FRAMEWORK FOR WFNJ/TANF



positions. The SETC is responsible for workforce planning and policy development and oversees the county workforce investment boards (WIBs).

State agencies direct federal and state funds to counties to operate the WFNJ/TANF program. NJDHS provides most of these funds to counties, including funds for administration, cash benefits, child care, training-related expenses, case management, and work activities. NJDOL also provides funds for work activities to counties: one source is NJDOL's contract with NJDHS; the other is through the U.S. Department of Labor's welfare-to-work grant program. In total, counties received more than \$600 million in calendar year 1999 to operate WFNJ/TANF. (Appendix A provides more details of WFNJ/TANF funding.)

While the state sets policies and provides funding, counties administer the WFNJ/TANF program. Through county welfare agencies, the state's 21 counties provide services to eligible individuals and families. The county welfare agency can be a Board of Social Services (a quasi-government agency) or a division of the county's human services department. County welfare agencies (CWAs) provide clients with cash benefits and other services through WFNJ/TANF, the Food Stamp Program, the child support program, and various medical insurance programs. County WIBs develop counties' workforce plans, including those for WFNJ/TANF participants, and the county entity administering Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) program funds may oversee and provide some of the counties' work-related activities.<sup>2</sup> The regional offices of the NJES register clients for work and, in several counties, provide other services, such as job search activities.

Service providers under contract to the state or a county agency also provide WFNJ services to clients. For example, the state contracts with a unified child care agency in each county to provide child care benefits, and with the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey (NCADD-NJ), to coordinate the Substance Abuse Initiative (SAI). SAI assesses clients' level of substance abuse and makes referrals to appropriate providers. Counties also contract with various providers of services, such as job search, job training, and basic education.

Local agencies must follow federal and state welfare policy, but they have flexibility in how they organize to deliver welfare services and in how they actually implement WFNJ/TANF. The state allows localities discretion in several important areas of activity, including many personnel decisions and the organizational structure of local offices. For example, staff of the county welfare agencies are county employees, and county welfare agencies make all hiring and firing decisions. Counties also can decide which county agency will play the major role in determining the work activities to emphasize and the vendors to provide them.

### **C. EVALUATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WFNJ/TANF**

The purpose of this study is to learn how counties have adopted the state's welfare program for their own counties, to discover what innovative programs and approaches they have designed to best serve their welfare caseloads, and to identify challenges they have faced in the early years of WFNJ/TANF implementation. Ten New Jersey counties were chosen for an in-depth study of their WFNJ/TANF programs and systems. (Appendix B describes how the 10 counties were selected, and Appendix C provides brief summaries of each county.)

MPR's program study includes multiple rounds of data collection at the 10 sites between fall 1999 and fall 2001. This report, based on the first round of data collection, focuses on the experiences of the program study counties in the first two years of the WFNJ/TANF program (1997 to 1999). Subsequent reports will examine changes and emerging issues in counties' operations of WFNJ/TANF.

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<sup>2</sup>The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replaces JTPA in 2000. WIA is likely to affect the WFNJ systems that this report describes. Future WFNJ program study reports will explore system changes resulting from WIA.

This report relies on three data sources: (1) interviews with state welfare officials, (2) site visits to 10 New Jersey counties, and (3) administrative data. Program study team members interviewed state officials at NJDHS and NJDOL to understand state policies and goals for the WFNJ/TANF program. Three-day site visits to the counties were conducted from August to December 1999 to gather information on the local county contexts, county organizations for welfare, counties' implementation of WFNJ/TANF, and agency collaborations. Site visit activities included:

- # Interviews with CWA and workforce agency administrators, supervisors, and line staff
- # Interviews with contractors, county officials, and others involved in the implementation of WFNJ/TANF and provision of services to WFNJ/TANF participants
- # Observations of program operations
- # Reviews of client case files

Site visitors also collected documents that reveal how counties have implemented and are operating WFNJ/TANF. These include memos that outline procedures for case managers, intake forms, and charts of agencies' organizational structure.

The qualitative data collected through the fieldwork is supported by quantitative data from the state's MIS. Data on participant characteristics, participation patterns, program outcomes, and other aspects of program components were obtained from the Family Assistance Management Information System (FAMIS) and the On-Line Management of Economic Goals Achievement (OMEGA) system.<sup>3</sup>

Since this first report is based on state and counties' WFNJ/TANF experiences two years after WFNJ/TANF began, it identifies key issues in implementation and operations that future rounds of data collection will explore more fully. Thus, this report does not provide analysis of an exhaustive set of issues. In addition, the models and strategies for WFNJ/TANF that this report describes are not meant as a definitive set to be used to operate the program. They are presented to describe the ways the counties and state are meeting program challenges. At the time of data collection, counties were just beginning to implement some of these strategies and a full assessment of their effectiveness was not possible. The next major WFNJ program study report will focus on comparisons between different program strategies used by counties and state and county responses to local program challenges.

#### **D. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 10 PROGRAM STUDY COUNTIES**

The 10 program study counties present a cross-section of the counties across the state (Table I.2). The counties include the three counties (Essex, Hudson, and Camden) with the largest WFNJ/TANF caseloads and one (Salem) with a small caseload. One county

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<sup>3</sup>Many of the MIS data included in this report were abstracted from state reports.

TABLE I.2  
KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF PROGRAM STUDY COUNTIES

County	TANF Caseload <sup>a</sup>		Region and County Population <sup>b</sup>	Percentage Minority <sup>b</sup>	Population Density <sup>c</sup>
	Percentage of State Caseload	Number of Cases			
<b>Northern Region<sup>d</sup></b>					
Essex	24.8	26,654	750,273	61	Urban
Hudson	14.5	15,542	557,159	62	Urban
Bergen	2.6	2,796	858,529	24	Suburban
<b>Central Region<sup>d</sup></b>					
Middlesex	5.1	5,490	716,176	30	Suburban
Monmouth	3.7	3,967	603,434	19	Rural
Ocean	2.9	3,153	489,819	9	Suburban
<b>Southern Region<sup>d</sup></b>					
Camden	11.8	12,637	505,204	31	Urban
Cumberland	3.5	3,747	140,341	37	Rural
Atlantic	3.2	3,387	238,047	32	Suburban
Salem	1.0	1,033	64,912	21	Rural

SOURCE: "Population Proportions for WFNJ Research Sample (TANF Caseloads from July 1997 to December 1998), Work First New Jersey Briefing Materials," Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. 1999; "Current Program Statistics for December 1998," New Jersey Department of Human Services, March 2, 1999; U.S. Census Bureau 1990.

<sup>a</sup>TANF data are for the number of cases handled between July 1997 and December 1998.

<sup>b</sup>Population and minority data are estimated for 1998. Minority populations include all nonwhite and white Hispanic population groups.

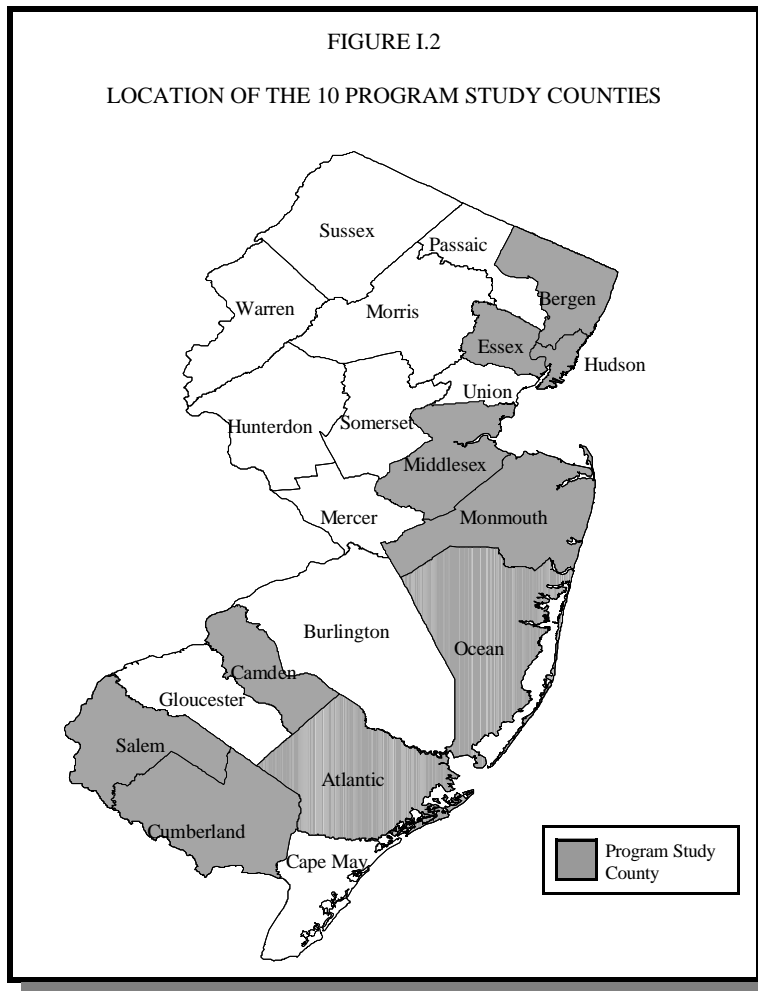
<sup>c</sup>The designations are based on traditional understanding of the counties' population densities.

<sup>d</sup>Regional designations are based on regions used by the Council for Affordable Housing.

(Bergen) has the largest population in the state, and another (Salem) has the smallest. Minority populations in the counties range from 9 percent to 62 percent. The regional representation is balanced: three are located in the northern region, three in the central, and four in the southern (Figure I.2).<sup>4</sup> Three rural counties, three urban counties, and four suburban counties reflect the various densities among the 21 counties.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>An additional northern county (Morris) had been recommended for the program study, but it was dropped from the study because of resource constraints.

<sup>5</sup>In this case, the counties selected do not match the distribution of all counties across these classifications. (continued...)



**# *The program study counties include diverse populations.***

Table I.2 illustrates the diverse populations of the 10 program study counties. Included in the 10 are both densely populated counties with large minority populations and large, sparsely populated counties with few minority residents. Several counties have major urban centers, while others do not.

The size and characteristics of minority populations differ across the 10 counties. In Bergen County, which has the largest population in the state, less than one-quarter of the population is minority. More Asian residents reside there than in any other county in the state. Essex, the state's second-largest county, has approximately 750,000 residents, about 61 percent of whom are minority. African Americans are the predominant minority in Essex (71 percent of all minorities), while Hudson County, whose population is 62 percent minority, has a larger Hispanic population (65 percent of the minority population). Cumberland and Middlesex counties have very diverse populations, with large percentages

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<sup>5</sup>(...continued)

If selected counties reflected the distribution, the study would have included more counties with small caseloads.

of African American, Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific Islander residents. Ocean, one of New Jersey's fastest-growing counties, has a minority population of approximately nine percent, comprising mostly African American and Hispanic residents.

Several large counties contain urban areas that are quite different from the rest of the county. For example, most of the population in the city of Camden is minority (approximately 87 percent), while Camden County, in which the city is located, has a minority population of only 31 percent. Essex County is home to Newark, the state's largest city, with more than 250,000 residents. The city's population is more than 80 percent minority, with 56 percent African American, 26 percent Hispanic, 17 percent non-Hispanic whites, and 1 percent Asian and Pacific Islander. In Hudson County, Union City, a community of approximately 58,000, is almost entirely Hispanic.

**# *Economically, the study counties range from the wealthiest and fastest-growing to the poorest.***

Although the state as a whole is experiencing an economic boom, the state's counties have not shared equally in the strong economy. A comparison of the program study counties on economic measures, such as the level of poverty, the unemployment rate, per-capita personal income, and percent job growth projected from 1996 to 2006, illustrates the counties' disparate economies (Table I.3).

Two of the program study counties clearly demonstrate the differences in counties' wealth. Bergen County is a bedroom community to New York City's corporate and financial elite. Thus, Bergen County is one of the wealthiest counties in the state, with per-capita personal income of just over \$43,000 and a three percent unemployment rate. Housing and services (such as child care) are very expensive in the county. Cumberland, on the other hand, is a southern rural county with approximately 400 farms and more than 99,000 acres of farmland. It is one of the poorest counties in the state, with per-capita income of almost \$22,000 and an unemployment rate of 7.9 percent.

Other counties rely on various industries to fuel their economies, with limited success. Atlantic County depends largely on the casino industry, but the casino industry has not been able to revive the economy of Atlantic City, where it is based. The county has persistently high unemployment and poverty rates, although new casinos are expected to increase the number of new jobs (Table I.3). Camden County's economy is heavily dependent on the service sector, particularly health care, and hopes to benefit from anticipated job growth in the Atlantic City casino industry. The county's per-capita personal income, which is almost \$6,000 below the state average, is driven largely by the city of Camden, a severely distressed urban core that has experienced negative job growth over the past decade.

Ocean and Monmouth, neighboring counties on the Atlantic coast, have two of the fastest-growing economies in the state. Traditionally, Ocean's economy has been based on agriculture and fishing. However, in recent years, the tourism industry in the shore area and the health services industry, including five hospitals and many long-term care facilities serving the county's large population age 65 and older, have expanded significantly. In Monmouth County, which has the second-highest per-capita personal income of the program

TABLE I.3  
SELECTED COUNTY ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

County	Poverty Rate <sup>a</sup> (Percent)	Unemployment Rate <sup>b</sup> (Percent)	Per-Capita Personal Income <sup>c</sup> (In Dollars)	Projected Percent Job Growth 1996-2006	
				All Jobs (Percent)	Entry-Level Jobs (Percent)
Atlantic	10.9	6.1	\$30,187	21.9	24.0
Bergen	4.6	3.0	43,123	9.8	6.6
Camden	12.3	4.0	26,500	11.7	10.0
Cumberland	14.5	7.9	21,663	7.8	5.7
Essex	16.7	4.7	32,581	7.3	5.0
Hudson	17.3	5.8	24,943	9.1	4.1
Middlesex	5.8	3.0	30,881	13.5	10.9
Monmouth	6.3	3.3	33,952	12.9	11.3
Ocean	7.3	4.2	25,725	16.6	15.4
Salem	10.0	4.2	25,162	6.4	4.0
New Jersey (all 21 counties)	8.8	3.9	32,356	11.2	9.7

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, New Jersey Department of Labor.

<sup>a</sup>Poverty rate is for 1995.

<sup>b</sup>Unemployment rate is for December 1999, unadjusted.

<sup>c</sup>Per-capita personal income is for 1997.

study counties (\$33,952), high technology is the leading industry, and efforts are under way to revitalize the county's Bay Shore area. Both counties anticipate a large increase in the number of new job openings in the current period (Table I.3).

**# Each study county is experiencing sharp declines in its welfare caseloads.**

Since implementation of WFNJ/TANF, every county in the state has experienced a decline in its welfare caseload (Table I.4). Statewide, between July 1997 and July 1999, there has been a 38.4 percent reduction in the welfare caseload.<sup>6</sup> Of the 10 program study

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<sup>6</sup>TANF caseloads continue to decline. By December 1999, the TANF caseload was 52,829, a drop of 43 percent since July 1997.

TABLE I.4  
SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF COUNTIES' TANF CASELOADS

County	Total TANF Caseload			Population <sup>a</sup> (July 1999) (Percent)				Average Age of Payee (July 1999) <sup>a</sup>
	July 1997	July 1999	Percent Decline	White	African American	Hispanic	Other	
Atlantic	2,765	1,347	51.3	18.6	65.3	14.5	1.6	31.9
Bergen	2,350	1,199	49.0	44.9	34.1	17.7	3.3	33.4
Camden	10,710	5,854	45.3	15.3	52.1	29.8	2.8	31.1
Cumberland	3,042	1,437	52.8	22.2	46.8	31.0	0.0	31.0
Essex	24,622	18,149	26.3	2.9	76.2	20.3	0.7	31.2
Hudson	14,536	9,761	32.8	12.2	36.1	49.2	2.5	32.1
Middlesex	4,330	1,953	54.9	24.3	37.8	35.4	2.6	31.7
Monmouth	3,454	1,992	42.3	31.4	57.0	11.0	0.5	30.9
Ocean	2,498	1,001	59.9	64.9	22.1	12.6	0.4	31.5
Salem	760	297	60.9	23.8	62.8	12.8	0.6	31.4
New Jersey (all 21 counties)	92,039	56,696	38.4	13.2	58.2	27.2	1.4	31.3

SOURCE: WFNJ administrative records.

<sup>a</sup> Figures are for the total TANF caseload, excluding child-only cases.

counties, Salem has experienced the largest reduction in caseload (60.9 percent), while Essex has experienced the smallest (26.3 percent).

The caseload declines are probably due both to the strong economy and to WFNJ rules and regulations. While no studies have discerned the relative effects of these different factors on caseload declines in New Jersey, most federal, state, and county welfare officials, as well as researchers in the welfare field, give some credit to each of these reasons for caseload declines across the county. (Council of Economic Advisers 1999). This report (especially Chapter IV) attempts to give the county welfare system perspective on the role of the WFNJ rules and regulations in reducing the welfare caseloads.

Falling caseloads do not appear to have changed the composition of welfare in New Jersey, at least with regard to readily measurable characteristics. In July 1999, the average age of a payee on welfare, excluding child-only cases, was 31 years (Table I.4). More than half the caseload was African American, about one-quarter Hispanic, and the rest white and other ethnicities. This profile is similar to the pre-WFNJ caseload (not shown), although



since 1996 the average payee age has increased slightly (from 30.5), and percentages of African American and white payees have changed slightly (from 51 and 20 percent, respectively). Nevertheless, more subtle characteristics of cash assistance recipients may be changing as the WFNJ/TANF caseload declines further.

The makeup of the overall welfare caseload is an important factor for policymakers developing the welfare system. If the current caseload consists largely of long-term welfare recipients with multiple barriers, policies designed for a more diverse caseload may no longer be applicable. As is discussed in Chapter II, many county staff members perceive that their caseloads have become increasingly difficult. The county performance measurement system, which is being developed as part of the WFNJ evaluation's program and management study in conjunction with the NJDHS Division of Family Development, is exploring measurements of caseload complexity.

## II

### CREATING A “WORK FIRST” CULTURE AND SYSTEM

The New Jersey welfare bureaucracy has had to adjust to welfare reform and the resulting changes in welfare policy. As workforce agencies and vendors take on larger roles in providing employment-related services to clients, county welfare agencies (CWAs), which have historically been responsible for providing welfare services to clients in New Jersey, must work cooperatively with these workforce agencies to help cash assistance recipients move toward self-sufficiency. The “culture” also has to be transformed from one in which clients who met eligibility criteria received cash assistance as an ongoing entitlement to one in which clients must participate in work activities in order to receive cash assistance for a limited time. For WFNJ/TANF requirements to be enforced, county staff need to be integrated into this new culture and supported in their implementation and operation of the program.

This chapter addresses three questions pertaining to the WFNJ/TANF system: (1) How are the roles of organizations changing under WFNJ/TANF? (2) How do people within those organizations work together, and what is their commitment to the program? and (3) Do these people have access to the necessary system supports to do their job effectively?

#### A. NEW ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES IN WFNJ/TANF

WFNJ/TANF has broadened the responsibility and the number of organizations involved in delivering services to cash assistance recipients. Under the new welfare program, counties are under pressure to get clients into work activities as soon as they are certified for cash assistance and to move them off cash assistance before their lifetime limit expires. Formerly, the CWA had primary responsibility for ensuring that cash assistance recipients received the full range of services to which they were entitled. While retaining exclusive responsibility for managing cash benefits, the CWA, under WFNJ/TANF, is receiving more assistance from other organizations to implement and operate the “work first” approach. Thus, WFNJ/TANF has increased the role of (1) county workforce agencies, and (2) vendors operating in many counties.<sup>1</sup>

#### # *Workforce agencies have assumed prominent roles in providing services to welfare recipients.*

Before WFNJ/TANF, CWAs were the main county agencies providing services to welfare recipients. For the cash assistance program, they were responsible for determining eligibility for welfare, establishing cash benefits levels, and monitoring continued eligibility

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this report, the term “county workforce agency” describes the county-level agency, whether it is within or outside of county government, that administers federal and state employment and training funds. The term “vendor” refers to a nongovernment organization providing services to WFNJ/TANF clients under contract to the CWA or county workforce agency.

## **CREATING A WORK FIRST CULTURE AND SYSTEM: SELECTED CHALLENGES AND COUNTY STRATEGIES DESIGNED TO OVERCOME THEM**

### **Many counties struggle to attain a high level of interagency coordination.**

- # Atlantic County uses an integrated service delivery system. Staff in one agency provide welfare and employment services to clients, and these staff are located with staff of other agencies in a Workforce Development Center.
- # Several counties colocate staff of several organizations.
- # Counties that have centralized leadership for WFNJ under one county agency have effective coordination, at least at the management staff level.
- # To improve coordination among line staff both within and between county organizations, some counties cross-train staff or bring staff together for joint discussions about clients.

### **Performance-based contracts and a reduced client flow are affecting vendor interest and participation in WFNJ/TANF.**

- # Some counties rely less on performance-based contracts and more on cost reimbursement or a combination of contracts.
- # One county tries to distribute client referrals evenly between vendors to make sure one vendor does not get more referrals than another.
- # Some large counties are working with community-based organizations to identify nonparticipants and encourage them to participate in WFNJ/TANF.

### **State management information systems do not meet counties' management and coordination needs.**

- # The state is working to improve the existing system. In addition, its plan to link county social services agencies through One Ease-E Link is intended to improve county-level coordinations.
- # Smaller counties have developed their own PC-based systems to monitor and track clients.

### **County staff have not received adequate training for WFNJ/TANF.**

- # In response to county training needs, the state is embarking on a new round of training for county staff on various policies and procedures.
- # To supplement state training, several counties that have retained their training staff have offered training to staff. Much of this training is based on the "train-the-trainer" model.

for assistance. Under the FDP, the CWAs provided case management and referred FDP clients to their education and training activities, which were provided by the local workforce agencies, most notably the Private Industry Council (P.I.C.) and the entity administering the JTPA, as well as other vendors.<sup>2</sup> Although the FDP program did have a mandatory component, its focus on education and training, soft penalties for noncompliant participants, and lack of time limits on clients' welfare receipt did not necessitate large roles for these workforce agencies, especially in placing clients in jobs.

While the CWA retains its leading role as the government agency serving welfare recipients, the role of the county workforce agency has broadened in many counties. The state encouraged partnerships between CWAs and workforce agencies to facilitate the speedy placement of mandatory participants in work activities. WFNJ/TANF pressured counties to place clients in employment that would end their need for cash assistance. Workforce

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<sup>2</sup>There is at least one exception. Camden's Resource Center, the agency that administered JTPA in the county, was providing case management under FDP.

agencies in some counties, because of their experience with employers and job placement services, were considered better able than CWAs to provide this service.

### **CHANGING CWA AND WORKFORCE AGENCY ROLES IN ESSEX COUNTY**

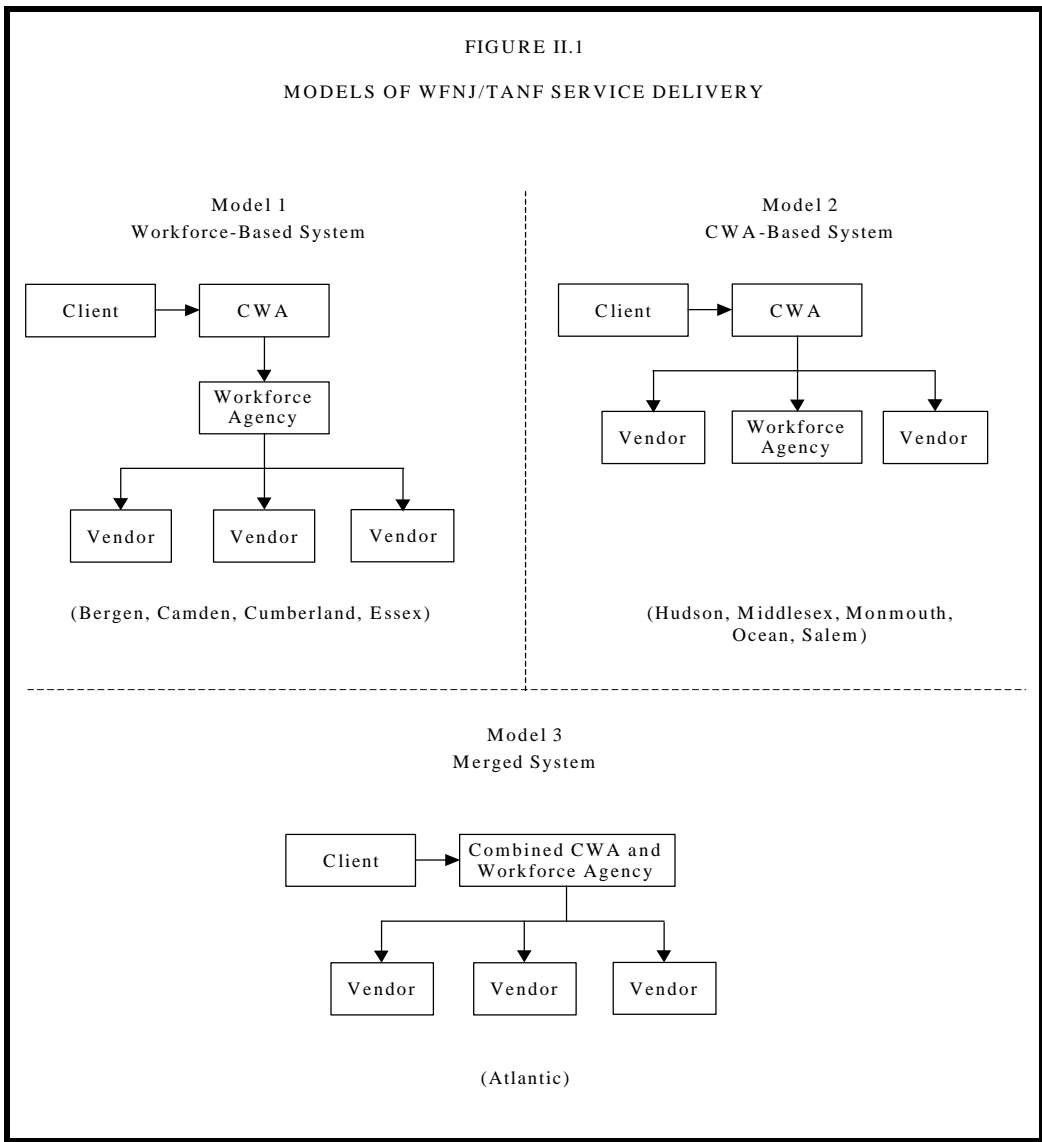
The Essex County CWA bore responsibility for providing the full range of services to welfare recipients under REACH and FDP and during the first year and a half of WFNJ/TANF. The CWA determined welfare eligibility, provided case management, and referred clients to all service providers, including other government agencies and for-profit and nonprofit vendors. In mid-1999, a new county government agency--the Department of Economic Development, Training and Employment (DEDTE)--was created and given the responsibility of placing welfare clients in jobs. This department also houses the WIB and administers the JTPA. The Division of Training and Employment (DTE) within DEDTE carries out the welfare-to-work responsibility by contracting with vendors who provide the services and activities clients need to prepare for employment. Vendors also help place clients in jobs.

In addition, the DTE performs some case management activities, refers clients to the Unified Child Care Agency (UCCA), and authorizes sanctions. The CWA, which also performs case management, implements the sanctions authorized by the DTE.

State and federal policies encouraged larger roles for workforce agencies in two ways. First, the NJDHS entered into a contract with NJDOL for the provision of job placement assistance to WFNJ/TANF clients. NJDOL provides this assistance through its Employment Service (NJES) and business service representatives in the counties in cooperation with the CWAs and workforce agencies. Second, the various funding streams supporting WFNJ/TANF place greater emphasis on the county workforce agencies. The employability funds NJDOL receives from NJDHS for WFNJ/TANF and the Welfare-to-Work funds the state receives from the federal government flow to the county workforce agencies--in particular, those administering JTPA. Since these agencies often control the awarding of subcontracts to county vendors, their role in serving welfare clients increases.

In several counties, these changes under WFNJ/TANF have translated into more involvement by county workforce agencies in directing the flow of clients through the welfare system. While half of the 10 program study counties continue to direct most services through the CWA, the other counties rely on different delivery systems (Figure II.1):

1. ***Workforce-Based System.*** Four of the 10 program study counties--Bergen, Camden, Cumberland, and Essex--have assigned the workforce agency the responsibility for developing clients' plans and directing clients to their WFNJ/TANF activities. In Cumberland, the JTPA entity has this responsibility. In Essex, the function is performed by a new county agency, the DTE in the DEDTE, which also shares case management responsibility with the CWA.



2. **CWA-Based System.** Five counties--Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, and Salem--continue to rely on the CWA to refer clients to activities. In these counties, the workforce agency, which may have subcontracts with vendors, tends to be one of several service providers to which the CWA makes referrals. However, in at least one county, the workforce agency plays a major role in recommending a client's next activity.
3. **Merged System.** One county (Atlantic) has merged the county welfare and workforce functions to create a single agency responsible for all aspects of the welfare program.

Within each model, counties have developed variations in the system for WFNJ/TANF. For example, some CWAs within the workforce-based system have developed central units to control client information (such as client attendance data and referrals for sanctions) between the county welfare agency and the workforce agency, while others have not. In addition, the agencies responsible for establishing subcontracts with WFNJ/TANF vendors

## **A MERGED MODEL FOR DELIVERING WELFARE SERVICES**

Atlantic County has integrated welfare and workforce agency functions into a “one-stop” social service delivery system. The Atlantic County Workforce Development Center (WDC), a unit of the Atlantic County Department of Family and Community Development (DFCD), operates the one-stop and administers the county’s WFNJ/TANF program. Within the one-stop center, people apply for cash assistance, receive job placement services, obtain referrals to vendors of WFNJ/TANF work activities, and participate in some of these activities at the center.

differ. For example, in Salem County, where the CWA directs the flow of clients, the CWA establishes subcontracts for WFNJ/TANF employment funds allocated by the NJDHS, while the Salem County Office of Employment and Training, the workforce agency, allocates NJDOL funds. In Monmouth County, which also has a CWA-based delivery system, the county’s workforce agency, the Monmouth County Department of Employment and Training, manages all WFNJ/TANF employment funds.

Why some counties have adopted one service delivery model over another appears to be mostly the result of county politics and history. For example, in Cumberland County, which uses a workforce model, the Cumberland County Office of Employment and Training, which administers JTPA, has been working with welfare clients since before REACH. However, Hudson County has two service delivery areas (SDAs) for JTPA, which makes it difficult for the county to give authority to one SDA over the other. Thus, the county Department of Health and Human Services was chosen to coordinate work activities.

Previous research (Pavetti et al. 2000) has found that the service delivery model is not as important to the effective delivery of services as coordination between agencies, the capability of the providers used, and clearly defined roles of participating agencies. Observations in New Jersey offer support for these findings. For example, one county using a workforce-based model has poor communication among providers, so confusion exists about the roles and responsibilities of different vendors. However, another county using the same model has been much more successful in directing the clients to services. The advantages the latter county has over the former may be a history of constructive collaboration among agencies, a strong JTPA-administering agency, and a small number of vendors.

### **# *Vendors’ larger roles in WFNJ/TANF are constrained by limited referrals and the existence of performance-based contracts.***

Although most counties relied on vendors to provide services to clients under previous welfare programs, WFNJ/TANF increased their prominence. More vendors are needed in many counties to serve the caseload required to participate in work activities, and vendors providing WFNJ/TANF activities are responsible for helping clients become self-sufficient before their 60 months on welfare expire. Vendors’ role in WFNJ/TANF is limited in practice, however, by a combination of new performance-based contracts and fewer-than-expected referrals to their programs.

## **ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS INCREASING IN ONE COUNTY**

At the start of WFNJ/TANF, several community-based organizations (CBOs) in Camden County were WFNJ/TANF vendors, providing remedial education and AWEP and CWEP services to WFNJ/TANF participants. As the county began planning for additional services, including supported-work and welfare-to-work programs, the CBOs advocated for larger roles in providing services to clients. In May 1999, five Camden CBOs were awarded contracts to provide these services. In all, Camden County subcontracts with 14 vendors to provide services to welfare clients.

In most counties, vendors play key roles in WFNJ/TANF. They provide a range of services to clients, such as group job search, alternative and community work experience program positions, occupational training, and job retention support (Table II.1). In addition, vendors have responsibility for monitoring clients' attendance and referring clients for sanctions if they do not participate. Vendors in some counties also play a key role in determining a client's next activity when her current one ends.

Counties rely on vendors to varying degrees to provide services to welfare recipients (Table II.1). For example, Cumberland County, which has a medium-sized welfare population, has only one vendor, which provides job search and English as a Second Language (ESL) activities to recipients with weak skills, low education levels, and language barriers. However, the JTPA-administering agency (the Cumberland County Office of Employment and Training) itself provides many services and holds individual referral contracts with occupational training programs. On the other hand, Essex County has 21 WFNJ/TANF vendors, which provide job search, supported work, Alternative Work Experience Program (AWEP), Community Work Experience Program (CWEP), education, and skills-training activities. The other eight program study counties contracted with an average of nine vendors to provide group job search, alternative and CWEP occupation training, and other activities.

While WFNJ/TANF has increased most counties' need for vendors, two factors appear to limit their full participation in WFNJ/TANF in many counties: (1) a low number of referrals, and (2) performance-based contracts. Under performance-based contracts, the contracting agency and vendor negotiate a per-client price for services, and the vendor then receives agreed-upon percentages of that price as a client progresses through an activity. For example, a vendor providing job search services may be paid a percentage of the per-client price when the client finds a job, another portion when the client has held the job for 30 days, and the final portion when the client has held the job for 60 days. NJDHS has encouraged this type of contract to provide vendors with incentives consistent with WFNJ/TANF's goal of moving clients off welfare and into jobs. Three of the program study counties (Atlantic, Essex, and Hudson) use these contracts exclusively for WFNJ/TANF, one (Middlesex) relies on cost-reimbursement contracts, and the other counties use a combination of contract types (Table II.1).

Table II.1

## WFNJ/TANF VENDORS

County	Number of Vendors	Contracted Services	Contract Structure
Atlantic	8	Alternative Work Experience Program Early Employment Initiative Job Search/Job Readiness On-the-Job Training Supported Work	Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based
Bergen	8	Alternative Work Experience Program Early Employment Initiative Job Plus Coordination Job Search/Job Readiness On-the-Job Training Supported Work	Cost Reimbursement Performance Based Cost Reimbursement Cost Reimbursement Cost Reimbursement Cost Reimbursement
Camden	14	English as a Second Language Job Search Pre-Apprentice Carpentry Service Coordination Supported Work Training	Performance Based Cost Reimbursement Cost Reimbursement Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based
Cumberland <sup>a</sup>	1	English as a Second Language Job Search	Cost Reimbursement Cost Reimbursement
Essex	21	Alternative Work Experience Program Basic Education Community Work Experience Program Job Placement Job Search Occupational Training Supported Work	Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based
Hudson	14	Alternative Work Experience Program Job Search Occupational Training Supported Work	Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based
Middlesex	5	Alternative Work Experience Program Early Employment Initiative Job Search Supported Work	Cost Reimbursement Cost Reimbursement Cost Reimbursement Cost Reimbursement
Monmouth	10	Alternative Work Experience Program Job Search Job Plus Coordinator Supported Work	Performance Based Performance Based Cost Reimbursement Performance Based
Ocean	4	Adult Basic Education Early Employment Initiative Job Search/Job Readiness Job Retention Occupational Training On-the-Job Training Supported Work	Cost Reimbursement Performance Based Cost Reimbursement Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based Performance Based and Cost Reimbursement
Salem	3	Alternative Work Experience Program Early Employment Initiative Job Search Supported Work	Flat Rate Performance Based Fixed Performance Based

SOURCE: WFNJ site visits.

<sup>a</sup> Cumberland County also relies on individual referral contracts to provide training opportunities to clients.



Many county administrators worry that some vendors will not be able to participate in WFNJ/TANF if they must operate under performance-based contracts. Vendors with small budgets and few staff often do not have the cash reserves to support such contracts. These vendors may provide a full set of services to clients, but if a client does not reach the necessary milestones, the vendor may receive either no payment or only a portion of it. Administrators in several counties indicated that some smaller vendors have declined to continue their WFNJ/TANF contracts because of the difficulties performance-based contracts imposed on them.

#### **ENTERING INTO SUBCONTRACTS BASED ON THE ACTIVITIES PROVIDED**

The type of contract Ocean County decides to use for vendors of WFNJ/TANF-approved work activities--cost-reimbursement or performance-based--depends on the service the contractor provides. In the county's view, performance-based contracting is most appropriate for vendors responsible for the desired final outcome of WFNJ/TANF--placing and keeping clients in jobs. Thus, vendors providing the Early Employment Initiative (EEI), the state's formal diversion program, and job retention services are awarded performance-based contracts. For other types of services that have less definitive outcomes, such as basic education and job readiness assistance, the county uses cost-reimbursement contracts.

Regardless of the type of contract vendors use, rapidly declining caseloads and clients who do not show up for their activities can present challenges for service providers. Vendors enter into state or county contracts with estimates of the number of clients they expect to serve during the year and staff their organizations and anticipate revenue accordingly. However, the declining WFNJ/TANF caseload has meant far fewer referrals than expected, which has decreased vendors' expected revenues. The failure of clients to attend their activities, a common problem in the 10 program study counties, also affects vendors' revenues, especially those providing subsequent activities. For example, if only 60 percent of referred clients attend job search, a common first activity, even fewer clients can be expected to participate in later activities. In one county, promises of large numbers of referrals prompted vendors to increase their staff quickly. However, in the face of lower-than-expected referrals and performance-based contracts, these vendors had to lay off many of the newly hired staff members, which lessened the vendors' interest in providing services under the WFNJ/TANF program.

## COUNTY RESPONSES TO VENDOR CONCERNS

- # *Less Reliance on Performance-Based Contracts.* Several counties have chosen not to use performance-based contracts or to combine them with cost-reimbursement contracts, under which vendors are reimbursed for the costs they incur providing services. Smaller vendors are better able to cope with this type of contract, because they can rely on payments for the services they deliver. To retain vendor's focus on performance goals, such as job placements, these contracts can also contain incentives or bonuses tied to performance.
- # *Equitable Distribution of Referrals.* To address vendor concerns that some county staff have preferences for some vendors over others, Camden county has instituted a rotating system for referring hard-to-serve clients to one of five community-based organizations for WtW and supported-work programs. However, this method can pose other problems, when the community-based organizations expect to receive clients from their communities or from particular ethnic populations.
- # *Efforts to Improve Attendance.* A couple of large counties have enlisted community-based organizations to help locate and re-engage sanctioned clients. In other counties, vendors are trying to improve outreach to referred clients through telephone calls, letters, and home visits.

## B. THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WFNJ/TANF ORGANIZATIONS AND THE COMMITMENT OF THEIR STAFF

Changing agency roles and program rules affect the people within the agencies responsible for delivering services to cash assistance recipients. Increased prominence of some organizations within counties may require the staff within those organizations to develop new ways of interacting with each other. The new welfare program also may change the relationship between state agency staff that enforces these changes and the county agency staff that implements them. How county-level staff respond to these changes and to the goals of the new program has additional implications for program implementation and operations.

WFNJ/TANF results in a web of relationships involving state and county organizations:

- # *State Agency Relationships.* At the state level, NJDOL and NJDHS in particular have responsibility for critical pieces of WFNJ/TANF and must work together to provide a common vision for it.
- # *State-County Relationships.* New Jersey's county-based welfare system also requires state and county agencies to work together. The CWA, whether a Board of Social Services or a county government agency, has to implement the program instructions developed by the NJDHS Division of Family Development (DFD) and provide DFD with various data. DFD, in turn, relies on counties to operate the welfare program and supports county activities with training and

MISs. One state workforce agency, NJDOL, oversees two workforce agencies at the county level--the NJES regional office and the JTPA administering agency--and SETC monitors the county WIBs. Each county workforce agency relies on its state counterparts for support and direction.<sup>3</sup>

# ***County Organization Relationships.*** Interagency relationships at the county level are critical to successful program implementation and operations.

The following discussion of the way people within the county welfare system work together and support the WFNJ/TANF program is based on county staff members' accounts. Thus, it is difficult to present an analysis of these relationships and commitments as hard evidence of what has occurred or what is going on today. Nevertheless, discussions among staff members in the 10 program study counties brought forth key themes that have implications for the past implementation and ongoing operation of WFNJ/TANF. Indeed, many of these themes echo those found by Rutgers University's WFNJ "Change Analysis" Project (Rutgers 1998).<sup>4</sup> This section highlights important themes concerning (1) state agency and state-county relationships, (2) intracounty relationships, and (3) county-level staff commitment to WFNJ/TANF.

# ***According to county staff, relationships between state agencies and between state agencies and their county counterparts have been strained but are improving.***

The complexity of welfare service delivery has grown as a result of the new welfare rules and the increased number of state and county agencies involved in the welfare system. NJDOL has an increased role due to its contract with NJDHS to provide work registration services through NJES. In addition, the NJDHS WFNJ and federal welfare-to-work funds pass through NJDOL to the county workforce agencies administering JTPA. The major revamping of the welfare program further increases the complexity of the types of services required and how they are provided, and it requires state and county agencies to work together.

Many county-level staff members perceive the relationships between state agencies to be strained. In part, these poor relationships are due to the agencies' different philosophies and client bases. NJDOL's history of relating to employers as its primary clients and its limited experience with cash assistance recipients caused some concern among state welfare officials, who, as WFNJ/TANF was being implemented, questioned whether the NJES could shift focus to assist welfare recipients. Concurrently, many county-level administrators and staff perceived the two agencies as having conflicting purposes: NJDHS's goal for WFNJ was "work first," while NJDOL continued to stress clients' training needs. Throughout the

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<sup>3</sup>This report does not focus on the relationship between SETC and the WIBs or the WIBs' role in WFNJ/TANF.

<sup>4</sup>The Rutgers "Change Analysis" Project, which DFD commissioned in late 1997, involved three regional forums with staff members of all levels from the state, county, and municipal agencies involved in WFNJ/TANF. The purpose of these forums was to gather staff members' perspectives on their experiences in their first year implementing WFNJ/TANF.

first two years of WFNJ/TANF, county workforce agencies were often given one message from their state agency, while CWAs received another from theirs.

Most county administrators indicated that the state agencies have begun to better coordinate their own efforts and to provide counties with common directions on how to operate the WFNJ/TANF. However, several administrators still feel that the state agencies need to improve this coordination if they expect their county-level counterparts to have effective collaborations.

Many county welfare administrators expressed further frustration with their lack of involvement in developing the WFNJ/TANF program. Several mentioned that CWAs were not included in the set of organizations responsible for developing WFNJ/TANF. Although various WFNJ/TANF program elements were required under state and federal law, administrators contend that their input would have resulted in a program more sensitive to county-level experiences and needs. For example, many county welfare staff members mentioned that the WFNJ/TANF application for cash assistance is twice as long as the FDP/AFDC application, which greatly increases the staff workload.

Other CWA complaints involved the state's hurried implementation of WFNJ/TANF. Some county staff contend that, in pushing implementation, the state did not fully develop the program and, as a result, had difficulty responding to questions and issues CWA staff raised as they tried to implement WFNJ/TANF. In response to these issues, the state often changed rules and procedures, which made it difficult for county workers to be aware of the most current policy.

In addition, some county staff felt that the initial WFNJ/TANF program was not comprehensive; it did not include plans and strategies for all welfare populations. As a result, the state had to develop "boutique" initiatives that serve only a few clients but required considerable time to implement. For example, counties were asked to implement the SAI, which provides services to WFNJ/TANF clients with alcohol or drug addictions, while they were in the midst of implementing WFNJ/TANF. County staff critical of these initiatives acknowledged that any new welfare program would have needed modifications but felt that some of what they encountered could have been avoided if they had been more involved in the planning of the program and if the state had taken more time to consider the implications of the program.

Many of these criticisms of NJDHS and DFD reflected the first months of implementation in 1997. Since then, relations between NJDHS (and particularly DFD) and the CWAs have improved. In part because of the Rutgers project, some county administrators feel that the state has become more responsive to their needs and concerns. However, local concerns about excessive paperwork, frequent changes in procedures, and inadequate MISs are still evident.

**# *In general, counties have developed constructive WFNJ/TANF collaborations, but their service delivery coordination could be improved.***

Under WFNJ, the need for cooperation and coordination has increased, largely because other state and county agencies have been incorporated into counties' welfare infrastructures. For example, NJES, under contract to NJDHS, now provides work registration and placement assistance to welfare recipients. After clients comply with child support program

requirements and before they complete their WFNJ/TANF application, they must register for work with an NJES worker. The NJES regional offices have to work cooperatively with CWAs to integrate the work-registration process into the intake process for cash assistance and with other county workforce agencies to share responsibility for work placements.

To foster collaboration, most counties have built on interagency relationships they had established under the REACH and FDP programs, in which program partners met regularly to discuss factors affecting service delivery, such as client problems, information needs, and program and procedural issues. Counties have continued and strengthened these meetings under WFNJ/TANF, and as the number of entities has increased, the meetings have grown much larger. For example, in Ocean County, the meeting has grown from a small group sitting around a table to a large group filling up a boardroom.

Although most counties have these collaborative meetings, the quality of the collaboration is not the same across all counties. Not surprisingly, counties with weak leadership, turf battles over clients and services, and little collaborative history have weaker WFNJ/TANF collaborations. In one county with these characteristics, the working relationship between the WFNJ/TANF partners is strained, and many feel that the agreements and decisions made at these meetings are never realized. However, counties with a history of communication and cooperation between organizations, and where senior administrators have focused on strengthening interagency coordination, have more effective collaborations.

Collaborations among agency line staff, which often mirror administrator-level relationships, also vary. In only a few counties do agency line staff meet with each other regularly to discuss particular clients, visit each other's agencies to understand their respective roles and responsibilities, or share client assessment information.

In other counties, the poor line staff communications result in inconsistent delivery of services to clients. In one county, line staff across agencies were not clear on their different roles and responsibilities, in part because agency administrators were still at odds about their own agency's respective roles in WFNJ/TANF. Poor communications between agency line staff resulted in errors in client processing. Another CWA established a central control unit to coordinate communications from the workforce agency and vendors. As a result, CWA staff working with clients have no communication with their workforce agency counterparts, which isolates them from the activities being provided through WFNJ/TANF.

## STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE COUNTY-LEVEL COORDINATION

- # ***Service Integration.*** Atlantic County provides the clearest example of service integration through collaboration. There, welfare and workforce services are centralized into a single agency so that clients can access multiple services through one agency and at one location. The Atlantic County Workforce Development Center stands out among the study counties because of the ease with which WFNJ/TANF clients can access available services.
- # ***Colocation of Staff.*** Colocation of staff members who provide welfare-related services is another way of facilitating interagency cooperation and easing clients' access to services. Recent research indicates that colocation also reduces delays in client participation in work activities (Brown 1997). With one-stop career centers that provide clients with access to centralized workforce information, agencies and service vendors can work in close association to assist clients. Since the federal Work Investment Act of 1998 requires creation of one-stop career centers as a means of enhancing the delivery of job placement assistance, more counties will be creating these centers.
- # ***Centralized Leadership.*** Centralizing oversight of the welfare program ensures clear, reciprocated communication between the staff and administrators regarding how the program is to operate and serve clients. Several counties have given cross-agency authority over the WFNJ/TANF program to one county official or administrator. For example, in Ocean County, one person is the director of the Human Services Advisory Council, the county Department of Human Services, and the WIB. In Monmouth County, the welfare and workforce agencies are under the purview of the county Department of Human Services.
- # ***Joint Staff Training and Case Conferences.*** Atlantic County cross-trains staff, which brings together staff from different units within the same agency as a means of building intra-agency cooperation. Similarly, joint staff training provides opportunities to build interagency cooperative relationships. In Bergen County, line staff members, including CWA case managers, workforce job developers, job search counselors, NJES workers, and representatives from vendors, discuss individual clients' status during monthly case conferences.

- # ***County staff members tend to support the basic WFNJ philosophy. However, the perception that caseload composition is becoming increasingly hard to serve and a drop in morale among CWA staff have impeded a full embrace of the program.***

WFNJ has introduced the need for changes in behavior and attitude of the people who work with cash assistance recipients. In many counties, CWA staff in particular have had to focus their attention on quick assignment of clients to work activities, instead of providing other supports, such as counseling and social work. Workforce and vendor staff have had to shift their focus from education and training services to provide job placement and

retention activities. The importance of county-level support for WFNJ is clear: without the support of those who implement the rules and regulations, the program could falter. Even with their support, other factors could intervene to dampen their morale and affect program implementation and operations.

CWA staff have been largely supportive of WFNJ/TANF's philosophy and goals. Staff members at all levels and in most counties feel that WFNJ/TANF is a better program than its predecessors, FDP and REACH. Many staff members believe that the large numbers of clients who left the welfare rolls rather than comply with program rules were already working or had other support. Thus, WFNJ/TANF helped to remove these clients from the welfare program.

Although CWA staff members are largely supportive of WFNJ/TANF's philosophy and policies, several factors have eroded their enthusiasm for the program. According to CWA administrators and staff, morale in many CWAs has been affected by (1) caps placed on administrative expenses by federal legislation, (2) fear that the state intended to privatize the provision of welfare services, and (3) the perception of an increasingly hard-to-serve caseload.

Shortly before and during the introduction of WFNJ/TANF, the administrative funds of many CWAs were cut because of the 15 percent cap PRWORA placed on TANF administrative expenses. Before PRWORA, CWAs faced no limitation on administrative funding, although counties had to match the federal funds they received for administrative purposes. Some program study counties barely felt the effects of the cap, because their administrative budgets were already lean, but other counties that had provided their welfare agencies with generous budgets for administrative costs had to lay off staff. For example, one CWA laid off about 60 staff members at the beginning of WFNJ/TANF.<sup>5</sup> Several other counties instituted a hiring freeze and have not replaced staff members who left the agency.

Thus, as staff were being asked to take on new and different responsibilities (as discussed further in Chapter III), they feared the loss of their jobs and were told they had to produce more results with fewer monetary resources. It has been contended that CWAs can survive on these budget cuts, since their caseloads are declining rapidly (Ragonese 1999). However, many CWA staff members maintain that WFNJ/TANF has increased their actual workload, because various policies (such as that for sanctions), a lengthier application, and a new Medicaid-only caseload have outweighed the effect of falling caseloads.

Officials in all but a few study counties reported that the fear of privatization exacerbated the heightened anxiety stemming from budget reductions. CWA staff felt that a central tenet of New Jersey's welfare reform movement was to advance the privatization of welfare services, citing as evidence new state contracts with county vendors to provide client services. For example, the state removed responsibility for the child care program from the CWA and contracted directly with mostly private entities to provide these services. Some of these fears were allayed when staff recognized that, under WFNJ/TANF, the CWA continued to have primary responsibility for administering TANF.

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<sup>5</sup>Some of these staff members were laid off because of other budget cuts. For example, CWAs' allocations for case management were reduced when the state removed their responsibility for the child care program.

Finally, in all counties, staff members have a growing perception that the remaining caseload is made up of clients with serious barriers to employment. Welfare staff are beginning to view the “work first” goal of the program as inappropriate for this set of clients. The WFNJ evaluation’s client study provides some evidence that the least disadvantaged and more job ready clients left the program the soonest, and the ones remaining on WFNJ/TANF longer were less job ready and more disadvantaged. For instance, about two-thirds of clients leaving WFNJ/TANF for work had their high school diploma or GED (or recent work history), while more than one-half of clients remaining on cash assistance and not working had not finished high school or obtained a GED, or had no recent work histories (Rangarajan and Wood 1999).<sup>6</sup>

#### COUNTY RESPONSES TO UNSUPPORTIVE STAFF

- # ***Winnowing out Unsupportive Staff.*** Atlantic County screened its staff, assigned WFNJ/TANF roles only to those who supported the program, and reassigned others to non-WFNJ/TANF roles within the social services agency. To identify committed staff, county administrators developed an extensive screening process, including a staff “audition,” to ensure that only committed workers would be providing WFNJ/TANF services to clients. Other counties used a less aggressive approach, letting workers disenchanted with WFNJ/TANF leave through attrition.
  
- # ***Relying on Program Successes.*** Counties have been able to use positive program results to counteract some negative staff attitudes. Many staff members are encouraged by their ability to help find stable employment for clients who do not want to remain on welfare. Some staff members sense that they are helping clients move toward self-sufficiency and an improved sense of self-worth, a feeling of gratification some have not felt since early in their careers.

Most county workforce agency staff members with new responsibilities for placing WFNJ/TANF clients in employment also question the appropriateness of “work first” for many clients. These staff members, who have less history working with WFNJ/TANF clients, tend to believe that many clients are not ready to be placed with employers. This attitude stems in part from NJDOL’s “employer-as-primary-client” orientation. Welfare clients, especially long-term ones, generally are viewed in this NJDOL framework as being difficult to employ because they face multiple barriers to self-sufficiency. Workforce agency staff may be reluctant to place these clients in jobs, because of fears of alienating employers, with whom they need to maintain good relationships to ensure placement opportunities for their non-WFNJ/TANF clients. They argue that WFNJ/TANF clients need more and better education and training, not less, to be competitive in the labor market.

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<sup>6</sup>The client study is tracking clients and the barriers they face over the course of the multiyear evaluation.



### C. SUPPORTS NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT WFNJ/TANF

The major changes WFNJ/TANF introduced require strong supports for the staff responsible for implementing them. WFNJ/TANF developed new rules that affect every stage of the process that people seeking cash assistance must navigate. Although the welfare system has witnessed many changes in its 60-year history, welfare administrators maintain that those changes implemented by WFNJ/TANF have been overwhelming in their scope and complexity. While all staff involved in WFNJ/TANF have had to adjust to some level of change, CWA staff have been most affected by the new rules, regulations, and procedures. Two critical supports that local welfare agencies need to enable managers, supervisors, and frontline staff to implement and operate WFNJ/TANF are (1) training, and (2) MISs.

#### # *WFNJ/TANF staff did not feel they received sufficient training to implement the program.*

The state provided county welfare staff members with training on the WFNJ/TANF program shortly before it was implemented. This training covered WFNJ/TANF policies and instructions to implement them. CWA staff throughout the state attended the training at remote locations; that is, the training was conducted at one location and was broadcast via satellite to county staff members at different locations throughout the state.

Many county staff members claimed that the training inadequately prepared them for their new responsibilities under WFNJ/TANF and the new rules and processes it required. Staff members said that the two-day session provided little hands-on instruction in how to implement the program and mostly just reviewed the protocols in the WFNJ/TANF manual. CWA staff members themselves did not receive their manuals until the day before WFNJ/TANF implementation.

While the state has since provided other workshops on such topics as imposing sanctions, helping clients obtain transitional services, and following Medicaid eligibility rules, county staff members are eager for more training on specific operational issues. For example, several staff members indicated that training in more effective use of the Individual Responsibility Plan would be useful.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to their concerns about the breadth and quality of the state training, some CWA administrators suggested ways to improve training offered by the state. For example, although they would like more training, staff felt that the time commitment required to attend training--one or more days--requires them to be away from their offices for too long. Highly focused sessions may be more appropriate. Other suggestions included (1) providing follow-up sessions after trained staff members have applied what they learned in training; (2) creating more on-line resources, such as the existing on-line TANF manual; and (3) offering training on special issues, such as addressing clients' emergency needs.

To compensate for inadequacies they perceive in the state-provided training, a number of program study counties have designed and implemented their own training programs. These counties tend to use a "train-the-trainer" model, in which several staff members are trained formally and then share their knowledge with their colleagues. Other counties have

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<sup>7</sup>The state has since offered training on this topic.

initiated modest local training efforts to help staff stay abreast of some of the changes in state welfare policy.<sup>8</sup>

### **COUNTY-LEVEL TRAINING TO SUPPLEMENT STATE TRAINING**

To address the perceived inadequacies of the initial state-sponsored WFNJ training, the Bergen County Board of Social Services created an internal training unit. This unit, which consists of a supervisor and an assistant training supervisor, presents client case studies to agency administrators, supervisors, and line staff each month to train staff on various procedures. Staff consider the training sessions, which can last for up to two hours, to be helpful because they offer detailed explanations of how to implement particular WFNJ/TANF policies.

#### **# *MISs do not provide sufficient support to counties' provision of welfare services.***

MISs also are a key support that counties need for implementing and maintaining operation of WFNJ/TANF. There is broad agreement at the state level and among the counties that electronic information processing offers tremendous benefits in managing the welfare system. This technology can (1) make the collection of information more efficient as different agencies share client information through an integrated system, (2) allow more time for staff members to focus on individual clients as the MIS takes the place of paperwork, and (3) increase coordination among agencies. It also can provide reports to help administrators manage the program effectively.

In New Jersey's welfare system, the potential for an integrated MIS has not been realized. As a result of the state's choice to adapt existing systems for WFNJ/TANF, the current MIS does not meet counties' needs for effectively monitoring their programs. FAMIS and OMEGA, the two key pieces of the welfare MIS, do not meet all the needs of counties to implement and manage WFNJ/TANF effectively. CWA line staff across program study counties described three specific ways in which the MIS does not adequately support their work:

1. ***FAMIS and OMEGA are not linked.*** To access needed client information, workers must leave one system and enter the other. While information in FAMIS can be accessed for use in OMEGA, information in OMEGA cannot be accessed for use in FAMIS.
2. ***OMEGA reports often contain inaccurate data.*** CWA staff maintain that the data are not up-to-date because OMEGA reports are produced on a weekly basis and, therefore, may not reflect a client's current activity status. In some counties, especially ones in which different agencies authorize and implement sanctions, lack of up-to-date information results in some clients being improperly sanctioned.

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<sup>8</sup>Some counties that lost their training staff in the face of budget cuts discussed above have not been able to supplement the state training.

3. ***Client history is limited on OMEGA.*** Staff in several CWAs complained about the limited amount of case notes and employment information that can be contained in OMEGA. Since OMEGA only allows for five pages of case notes, workers must erase existing information before adding new information. OMEGA also only provides room for four employment descriptions; as a result, any additional work history information is omitted.

Many county staff also had difficulties using the Universal Application (UAP), an on-line application for welfare and other CWA services that links with FAMIS. UAP is supposed to provide efficiencies since application information is entered directly into the system, obviating the need for later data entry. CWA staff in counties that have implemented UAP indicate that (1) it is often difficult to log into UAP; (2) once in UAP, the network is often slow; (3) information put into UAP earlier is frequently lost; and (4) the server needs to be rebooted almost daily because it goes down on a regular basis. Staff indicate that they often produce paper versions of the information entered into UAP in case the system fails.

In some cases, MIS problems county welfare staff experience point to the need for training in the use of computer hardware and software. Many staff acknowledge that they often have difficulty because they are not sufficiently familiar with the equipment. Training on MISs, however, is only one way to improve use of the systems. Weaknesses in the MISs that cause county staff to question their reliability pose additional challenges.

The state and counties have to tried to address some deficiencies. Several program study counties have created their own PC-based MISs to help manage their caseloads. County managers use these systems to track clients who have been sanctioned and deferred from participation in work activities and to monitor clients who are in their activities.

The state plans to implement a system that would help integrate the work of various county agencies. "One Ease-E Link" would connect various county agencies, including welfare and workforce agencies, and provide them with common eligibility and case management information on their clients. A One Ease-E Link pilot is currently under way in Atlantic County, and several program study counties are scheduled to implement One Ease-E Link in spring 2000. Although Atlantic County staff have found the system helpful in reducing the flow of paperwork between agencies, other county agency staff members (CWA staff in particular), question the usefulness of the system, in part because data will have to be entered both into their own systems and into the One Ease-E Link system. In other counties, WFNJ/TANF is not even included in the start-up phase of the system, so One Ease-E Link benefits to WFNJ/TANF will not be realized for some time.

### III

## MOVING CLIENTS THROUGH THE WELFARE SYSTEM

**W**FNJ/TANF has led to major changes in how clients are expected to move through the county welfare system--changes that have transformed both the work of the welfare staff and the experiences of clients. Under WFNJ/TANF, county staff, especially welfare agency staff, must begin moving clients to gainful employment from the time they first apply for cash assistance. As a result of this pressure, many county welfare agencies have reallocated and shifted the responsibilities of their staff. At the same time, clients face new processes as they apply for cash assistance and as they move through their first WFNJ/TANF activities.

This chapter focuses on questions raised by three aspects of the WFNJ/TANF welfare system: (1) How have CWAs structured staff responsibilities and case management services under WFNJ/TANF? (2) How are new WFNJ/TANF clients introduced to the welfare system and referred to activities? and (3) What factors affect clients' success at finding employment through their first activities in WFNJ/TANF?

#### **A. REALLOCATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE CWA**

Despite the increased significance of workforce agencies and vendors under WFNJ/TANF, CWAs continue to play significant roles in providing welfare services. Staff in most welfare offices process applications for welfare, monitor clients' continued eligibility for cash assistance, refer clients to the work activities, and implement the major penalties and incentives used to encourage compliance with program rules. Traditionally, two categories of CWA staff--income maintenance workers and case managers--have performed these tasks. As a result of WFNJ/TANF, in many CWAs, these separate jobs have been restructured to (1) merge the duties of income maintenance workers and case managers, and (2) redefine the meaning of case management.

##### **1. Shift in Staff Responsibilities**

Traditionally, CWAs staffed their welfare programs with income maintenance workers and case managers. Income maintenance workers determined clients' income eligibility for cash assistance and benefit levels both at the time of intake and throughout clients' stay on welfare. Case managers referred clients to their work activities and provided them with ongoing counseling and supportive services. The case manager positions were often filled by professional social workers, but, in some counties, income maintenance staff with different backgrounds also filled these positions. In other words, under the previous welfare programs, REACH and FDP, the income maintenance workers generally had responsibility for the AFDC program, while the case managers managed clients' participation in the work program.

## **MOVING CLIENTS THROUGH THE WELFARE SYSTEM: SELECTED CHALLENGES AND COUNTY STRATEGIES DESIGNED TO OVERCOME THEM**

**While staff members in an integrated county welfare agency staffing structure--one that combines income maintenance and case management functions into one worker--struggle to learn their new duties, staff in a nonintegrated staffing structure often lack coordination.**

- # Monmouth County placed social workers in units with integrated workers to aid former income maintenance workers with their new case management tasks.
- # In Atlantic County, workers are paired to work with clients and are cross-trained to create better coordination between staff in its nonintegrated staffing structure.

**Many county welfare agencies are not able to provide intensive case management to WFNJ/TANF clients because of insufficient county support or overburdened case managers.**

- # Three program study counties with county government support use professional social workers to provide intensive case management to all or a portion of their WFNJ/TANF caseloads.
- # Some counties have developed central control units to take on some of case managers' paperwork and client-tracking functions. This may allow case managers more time to provide more individualized services to clients.
- # The Essex CWA contracts with another county organization to provide more intensive case management to clients.

**WFNJ/TANF's longer intake process for new applicants makes it difficult for intake workers to communicate effectively with the applicants.**

- # One county provides a group orientation to WFNJ/TANF before the intake process, while other counties provide an orientation after clients have been certified for cash assistance.
- # In Bergen County, clients approved for cash assistance return to the welfare agency to receive their electronics benefit transfer card and to discuss WFNJ/TANF with their case manager.
- # Atlantic County has instituted a customer service desk to help applicants move through the intake process and to answer their questions.

In recent years, the state government has suggested that county welfare agencies combine the two critical staff positions, for two reasons. First, there is some evidence that workers who perform both functions for their caseloads are better able to promote the idea of work and monitor clients' participation in work activities. In one study (Brock and Harknett 1998), an integrated model resulted in significantly higher rates of participation in work activities than the traditional staffing model. Second, since PRWORA has limited the administrative spending of welfare programs, combining staff functions may be a way of using resources more efficiently.

# **Counties have adopted diverse staffing strategies for performing income maintenance and case management functions.**

Counties responded differently to the state’s encouragement to integrate the two positions: some have done so; others have not.<sup>1</sup> Their decision appears to have been based mostly on senior county welfare administrators’ own analysis of the advantages and disadvantages that accompany each staffing structure.

Table III.1 illustrates different staffing models that the program study counties use. In the nonintegrated models (models 1 and 2), separate CWA staff members perform the three

TABLE III.1  
STRUCTURE OF INCOME MAINTENANCE AND CASE MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS IN CWAs

Model	Cases Affected	Functions		
		Intake	Redetermination	Case Management
<b>NONINTEGRATED MODELS</b>				
1	All	Workers in one unit handle initial income eligibility for cash assistance and determine cash benefits. These workers may also provide some initial case management functions.	Workers in one unit handle all ongoing income maintenance functions.	Workers in one unit handle case management activities.
2	All	In one unit, workers perform intake eligibility. A case manager within the unit performs initial case management functions for clients.	Workers in one unit provide ongoing income maintenance functions. A case manager within the same unit performs case management functions for the clients.	
<b>INTEGRATED MODEL</b>				
3	All	Workers in one unit handle initial income eligibility for cash assistance and determine cash benefits. These workers may also provide some initial case management functions.	The same workers in a unit provide ongoing income maintenance and case management functions for their caseload.	
<b>COMBINED MODEL</b>				
4	“Regular” Cases	Workers in a unit handle all three functions.		
	“Hard-to-Serve” Cases	Workers within one unit determine initial and ongoing eligibility.	Case managers perform case management functions for “hard-to-serve” cases, such as long-term cash assistance recipients, teen parents, and substance abusers.	

SOURCE: WFNJ evaluation site visits.

<sup>1</sup>Consistent with the literature in this field (Brown 1997; Brock and Harknett 1998; and Meckstroth et al. 1999), this report uses the term “integrated” to describe the combining of income maintenance and case management tasks into one staff position. The New Jersey welfare system tends to refer to the staff members performing these combined tasks as “generic” workers.

key WFNJ/TANF functions of intake, redetermination, and case management. Six of the program study counties use these models or variants of them. In these counties, workers in intake units take and process clients' applications for cash assistance. In some instances (model 1), these workers also are responsible for initial case management functions, such as completing clients' individual responsibility plan (IRP), asking them questions about their use of substances, and referring them to their first activity. In other instances (model 2), a case manager may be assigned to the intake unit to perform these initial case management functions.

In a nonintegrated model, after clients are approved for cash assistance, their case is transferred to different staff workers. Typically, one staff member is responsible for ongoing income determinations (or redeterminations), while another provides ongoing case management functions. In some counties, these two staff members are in the same unit (model 2) and share a caseload, while in others they work in separate units (model 1).

Other counties have integrated the ongoing eligibility and case management functions. Models 3 and 4 in Table III.1 illustrate ways in which CWAs have integrated staff for all or a portion of their caseload. In some counties, after clients have been certified for cash assistance, their cases are transferred to a unit in which they receive both income maintenance and case management services from one staff member (model 3). Two program study counties have adopted this model for their entire caseload. Two other program study counties combined at least the redetermination and case management functions into the role of one staff person for their regular cases, but chose to maintain the distinction between case management and income maintenance functions for their clients with the greatest barriers to employment (model 4).

In addition to defining the structure of the income maintenance and case management functions, counties also have to make decisions about the qualifications and backgrounds of the staff who provide case management services. In integrated models, many of the CWAs have chosen to have staff with income maintenance backgrounds provide integrated services, including case management. In some counties, workers with case management backgrounds have also taken on these integrated roles. Counties that have not integrated staff for all or a portion of their caseload have continued to staff the case management positions with either experienced social workers or people who have provided individual and work-related counseling and support to clients in the past.

**# *Integrating income maintenance and case management has created pressure on staff, but some staff see advantages to integrating staff functions.***

The experiences of the program study counties demonstrate the advantages and limitations of the two staffing models. As may be expected with any major change in roles and responsibilities, staff who have had to integrate functions have found adjusting to their new roles difficult. Part of the difficulty stems from their different experiences and skills. For instance, some former case managers who now provide ongoing income maintenance services to their caseloads find their new responsibilities too routine. In contrast, income maintenance workers who also now provide case management may be uncomfortable with their new responsibilities, which include working with clients on a more personal level than before. People without much experience providing work-related activities may be

discouraged about their chances of success in changing clients' dependency on cash assistance.

In addition, in all but a very few cases, CWA integrated staff members believe their work has become more complicated. For instance, taking on different responsibilities means familiarizing themselves with another MIS. In New Jersey, these two groups of staff have traditionally used separate systems: income maintenance workers have used FAMIS, which contains eligibility information, and case managers have used OMEGA, which includes data on program activities and support services. Case managers who have taken on income maintenance functions had to learn to navigate FAMIS, and income maintenance workers taking on case management functions had to learn to use OMEGA. Learning these new systems was made even more difficult because the program rules and regulations under WFNJ/TANF differ dramatically from those of the previous welfare program.

Some CWA staff members do, however, perceive advantages to integrating functions. The main advantage they report is that clients are assigned to only one worker and are therefore less confused about whom to contact about a particular issue involving eligibility or work. For example, in a nonintegrated CWA, a client might provide an income maintenance worker with information relevant to the case manager, but the income maintenance worker might not pass on the information appropriately (unless explicitly asked by the client to do so). If the crucial information was the reason the client failed to attend her work activity, the result could be an inappropriately imposed sanction. In other cases, the client might pass on the information to one worker, expecting it to go to the "correct" worker, and might become frustrated if the "correct" worker never received the information. In contrast, under integration, the client has only one case worker to communicate with about issues involving TANF, employment, and case management.

Integration can also improve coordination of client activities within the CWA. When functions are not integrated, the two sets of workers may have little understanding of or regard for each other's tasks. In these cases, income maintenance workers frequently may not present information about the welfare program clearly to clients or may not collect all the information that case managers would find useful. Similarly, case managers may not share with income maintenance workers the information they need to perform their tasks. These coordination issues are similar to the issues that can arise between county welfare and workforce agencies' staff, as discussed in Chapter II.

At this stage of the program's development, it is not evident which staffing structure--integrated or nonintegrated--better supports the WFNJ/TANF program. At the time of site visits, many counties were still working through the staff changes brought on by WFNJ/TANF, and some of the challenges both structures faced will probably dissipate over time. Indeed, an integrated model may work best in some counties, and a structure in which different staff perform the separate functions may work best in others. For example, a CWA with a good communication and tracking system may be better able to accommodate a nonintegrated staffing structure than a CWA with a less structured system.



# *Staff preparation and training can help make staffing models more successful.*

The early experiences of the program study counties suggest that greater preparation and training could have helped staff adjust to the changes in their work, regardless of the staffing structure. WFNJ/TANF greatly affected the roles and responsibilities of all staff. Staff who were adjusting to new positions under an integrated structure while trying to learn the new welfare program experienced even greater pressures. As discussed in Chapter II, many CWA staff members felt that they had not been adequately prepared for their new responsibilities.

When adopting an integrated model, counties need to prepare their staff for their new roles. Workers need to become familiar with their new tasks and with the MISs they are expected to use. Since many workers claim that on-the-job training is the best way to learn their new tasks, one way to supply ongoing training is to provide sufficient staff support for workers.

Counties that have maintained the staff distinctions need to establish a common sense of purpose for the income maintenance and case management staff. Without a common understanding, income maintenance workers and case managers may provide different instructions to clients. Establishing such goals is more important now under time-limited welfare than it was in the earlier welfare program.

#### **STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE CWA STAFFING STRUCTURES**

- # *Train Integrated Workers.* Monmouth County has an integrated model for its “regular” cases but has placed an experienced case manager (one with a social work background) in each integrated unit to provide on-the-job training and as-needed assistance to the integrated workers.
- # *Promote Understanding Between Nonintegrated Workers.* The Atlantic County welfare agency has sought this sense of unity by pairing an income maintenance worker with a case manager to form a team. This provides critical cross-training and gives each a sense of appreciation of the other’s responsibilities.

## **2. Redefined Meaning for Case Management Services**

Time-limited welfare and the importance of getting clients into jobs quickly make it critical for programs to provide effective case management services. Case management functions in a welfare-to-work program include assessing clients’ employability, enrolling clients in appropriate services, arranging support services, monitoring participation in required activities, and initiating sanctions for those who fail to comply with program rules (Brock and Harknett 1998). Pressures on case managers to provide these services are greater now than under previous welfare programs with respect to directing clients to appropriate support services and activities.

# ***In response to loose WFNJ/TANF guidance, counties have adopted different definitions of case management.***

WFNJ/TANF regulations allow counties to determine the case management services most appropriate for their CWA staffing structures. While some state programs require case managers to develop action plans tailored to each client's particular history, experiences, and life situation (Meckstroth et al. 1999), WFNJ/TANF does not provide many specific instructions for its case managers. The WFNJ/TANF regulations instruct case managers to conduct an assessment and develop clients' IRPs but do not specify what should be contained in the assessment. In addition, "intensive case management" is required for those clients "facing the most serious barriers to employment," but the regulations do not define "intensive case management" or "serious barriers."

Counties' interpretations of these broad guidelines have resulted in very different case management in the program study counties, from intensive individualized services to less personalized and intensive ones. Three program study counties use professional social workers to provide intensive services to all or their hardest-to-serve caseloads. Other counties have limited case management to basic services. In these counties, case management provided now is less intensive than the case management provided under FDP, when case managers learned about clients' goals and challenges, developed their plans, and referred them to supportive activities (Camasso et al. 1998).

An example from two program study counties illustrates these different levels of case management:

# ***Intensive Case Management.*** In Ocean County, professional social workers provide intensive case management to the WFNJ/TANF clients who are members of two-parent families and those with serious barriers to employment such as homelessness, substance abuse, long-term dependence on cash assistance, and being teenage parents. Clients with these characteristics are identified by workers in intake and referred to the case management unit. At first, the social workers consult one-on-one with these clients to learn about their barriers and devise a strategy for overcoming them. They also refer their clients to appropriate WFNJ/TANF activities and supportive services. Beyond these initial services, the social workers follow up with clients to assess their progress, ensure their participation in WFNJ/TANF activities, and impose sanctions if appropriate. The social workers try to maintain regular contact with their caseload.

# ***Less Intensive Case Management.*** In another county, nonintegrated case managers (who are not social workers) spend most of their time processing the paperwork necessary for clients' participation in WFNJ/TANF activities. The case managers process clients' referrals to WFNJ/TANF activities, monitor their attendance in these activities, and impose sanctions for nonparticipation. Case managers and clients have little face-to-face contact; most communication is by telephone.

In another variant of case management, clients may receive most of their case management services from workforce staff. In one program study county, Essex, most case management functions, such as referring clients to supportive services and helping them overcome challenges to employment and self-sufficiency, are conducted by the county workforce agency. The CWA's integrated workers devote most of their time to their income maintenance functions.

**# *Insufficient support, increased paperwork, and large caseloads all contribute to the provision of less intensive case management.***

Administrators in several counties express interest in providing more case management services to clients but feel constrained by several factors, including (1) staff perceptions of the goals of WFNJ/TANF, (2) insufficient support for case management, (3) the amount of paperwork WFNJ/TANF generates, and (4) high caseloads.

First, many county case managers believe that WFNJ/TANF does not allow them much room to develop individualized plans for clients.<sup>2</sup> The work first focus of getting clients quickly into jobs limits the need for case managers to work one-on-one with clients to develop plans for long-term employment. Furthermore, WFNJ/TANF's list of acceptable work-related activities puts constraints on the activities to which case managers can refer clients. For example, only 20 percent of the state's WFNJ/TANF caseload can be in occupational training, which limits the number of clients that case managers can refer to training programs.

Second, in recent years, state support of case management has lessened. As a result, several counties have restructured their case management services to reduce costs (for example, by replacing social workers with income maintenance technicians). Thus, case managers in many counties do not have adequate background or training to provide these services.

Third, all case managers report that WFNJ/TANF has increased the paperwork they must process for clients, which in turn has decreased the time they can spend with clients to provide individualized services. One reason the paperwork has increased is that, under WFNJ/TANF, clients tend to be in short-term activities that require the completion of more referral forms and the monitoring of more attendance records. The current program's increased focus on sanctions also results in more paperwork, as case managers must deal with clients who do not comply with the work participation requirements. Many of these sanctions end up in fair hearings, which generate even more paperwork.

Finally, case managers' caseloads are still high in many of the large counties, especially as some counties have laid off staff. For example, case managers have as many as 500 cases in Camden County and as many as 1,000 in Essex. Although a large portion of these cases may not be actively participating in WFNJ/TANF, administrators maintain that these numbers are too high for case managers to provide more than very basic case management services.

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<sup>2</sup>Another common complaint was the inadequacy of the IRP form to help case managers meet clients' individual needs and address their goals. Case managers in many counties complained both about the content of the form and the way in which intake workers completed it. DFD is currently revising the form.

Because they are strongly committed to counseling and social services, and because the size of their caseloads is reasonable, a few program study counties have been able to maintain a high level of case management in the face of these challenges. A couple of these counties also have obtained additional county financial resources to maintain professional social workers in the case management positions.

#### **COUNTY STRATEGIES TO PROVIDE INTENSIVE CASE MANAGEMENT**

- # ***Provide Additional Training and Support.*** Having experienced case managers help inexperienced case managers provide services may improve the level of case management supplied. As described above, in Monmouth County, social workers provide support and on-the-job to integrated workers providing case management.
- # ***Lessen Case Managers' Burdens.*** Some CWAs established central control units to centralize some functions, such as monitoring sanctions and deferrals. These units may also relieve some of case managers' paperwork and monitoring functions and allow them more time to work one-on-one with clients.

#### **B. WFNJ/TANF INTAKE AND REFERRAL PROCESSES**

Clients entering a welfare program follow a series of steps to receive their cash benefits and begin the transition from welfare to work. First, they must pass through the application or intake process at the CWA. Once their applications for cash assistance are certified, clients not deferred from participating in WFNJ activities must be assigned to the appropriate activities.

The state has prescribed a series of steps that an application for WFNJ/TANF must follow (Figure III.1). Applicants enter the system by going to a CWA office and asking about cash assistance. A screener determines whether the client is applying for the right program and, if not, directs the client to other county services.

The applicant who appears eligible for TANF then meets with three separate workers. First, she is interviewed by a child support worker to ensure compliance with child support requirements.<sup>3</sup> If she does comply, she then registers for work with the NJES worker. The clients' final step is a meeting with a CWA intake worker, who provides an orientation on WFNJ/TANF, completes the IRP with the client, determines whether the applicant will be deferred from work, and completes the application, which includes detailed questions on income and resources to determine eligibility for TANF. The worker also determines

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<sup>3</sup>To be in compliance with WFNJ/TANF child support requirements, applicants must provide the full name of the noncustodial parent and three of the following pieces of information about the noncustodial parent: (1) date of birth, (2) social security number, (3) address (current or last known), (4) employer (current or last known), (5) automobile information, and (6) driver's license. The applicant can provide other information if it is reasonably equivalent to one of the six items above. If the applicant cannot provide the information, she can sign an affidavit explaining her inability to do so. Otherwise, the client's application for cash assistance is denied.

FIGURE III.1

WFNJ/TANF CLIENT PROCESS

PART 1: The Intake Process

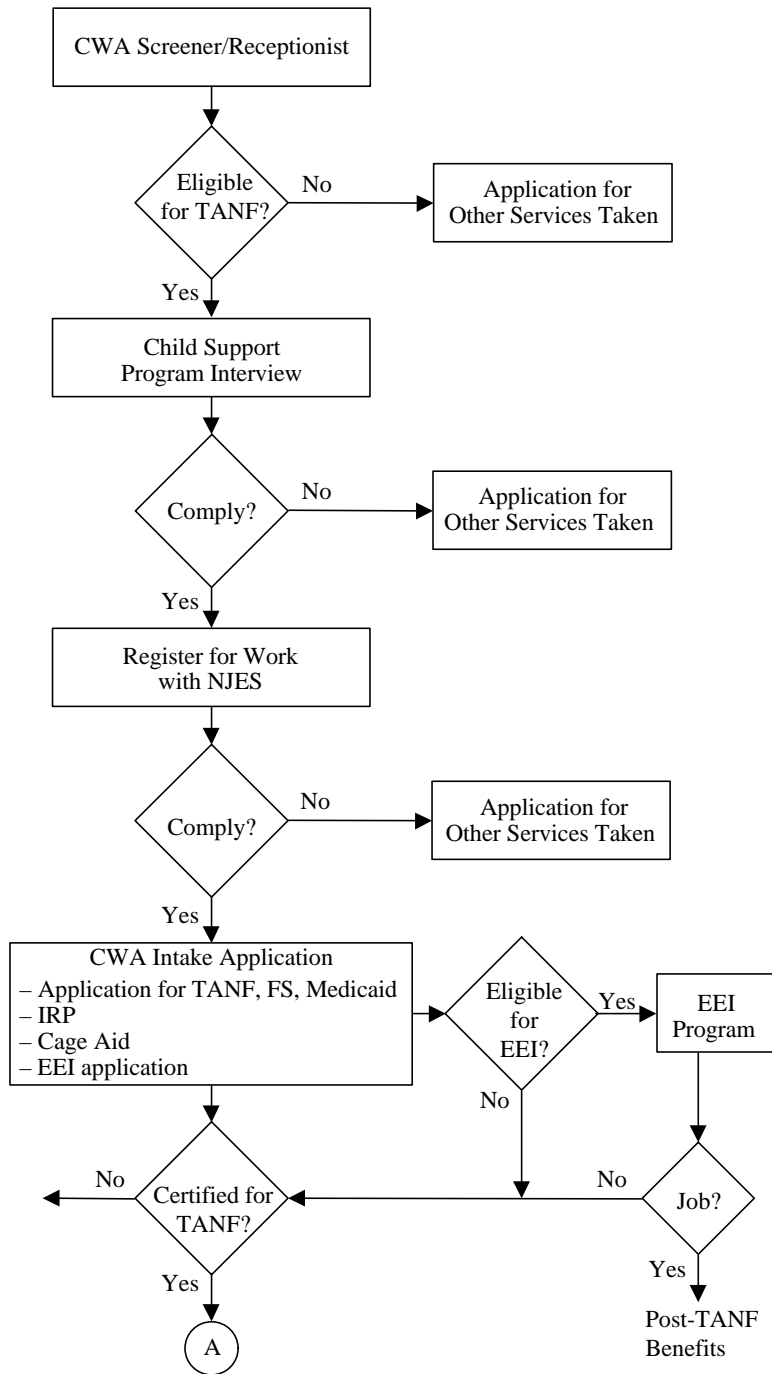
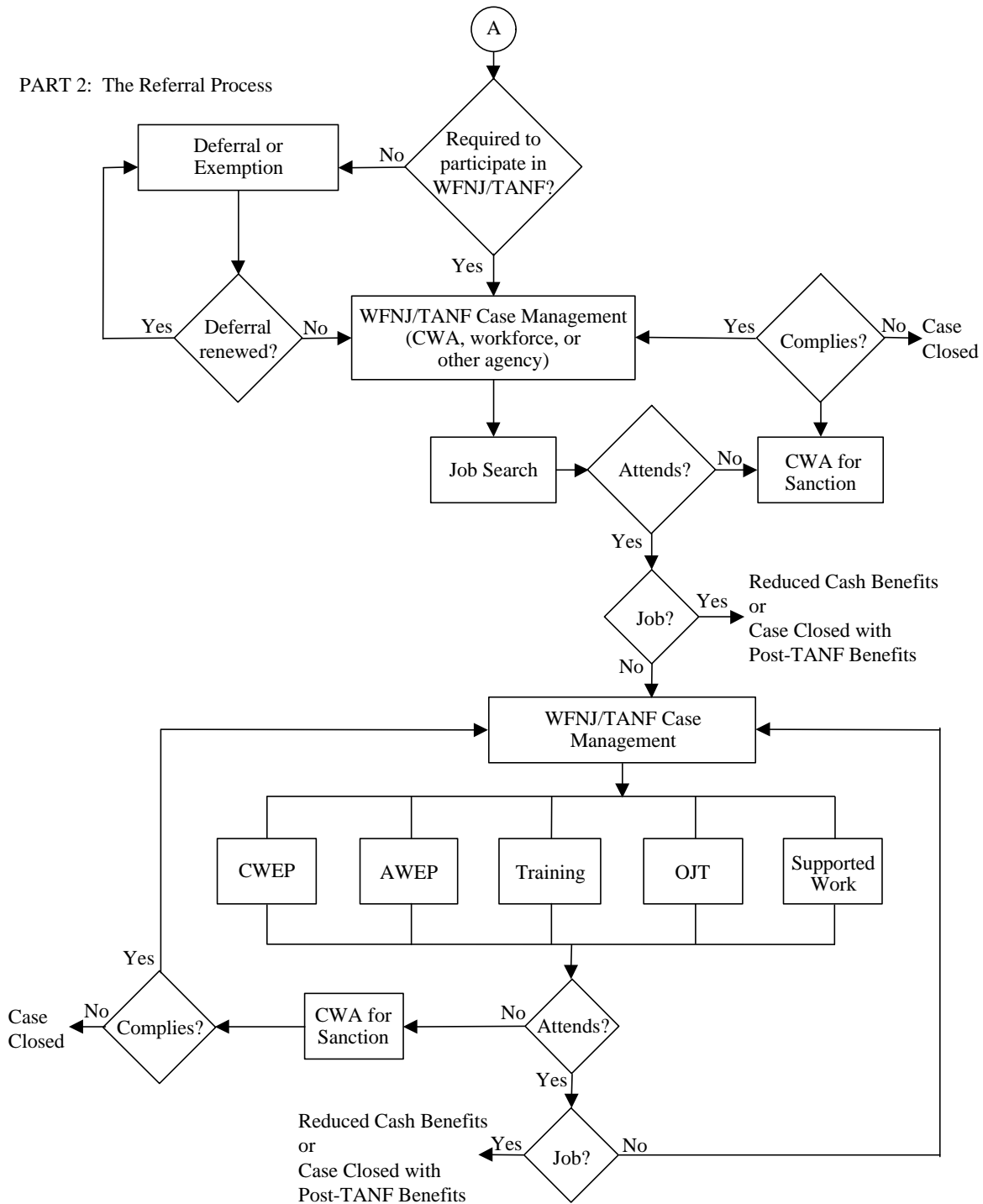


FIGURE III.1 (continued)

PART 2: The Referral Process



whether the client is eligible for EEI, the state's program to divert clients from cash assistance. If so, the intake worker makes the appropriate referral to the EEI vendor. Finally, the worker asks the client a series of questions (the Cage Aid) about the use of alcohol and other addictive substances.

This prescribed intake process differs from the pre-WF NJ/TANF process in two important ways. First, WF NJ/TANF incorporates work registration. By requiring work registration, the state hopes to impress upon clients the importance of work and to get clients attached to the labor market quickly. Second, compliance with the child support program also now comes at the beginning of the process. Under FDP/AFDC, clients met with child support workers after their application for cash assistance was taken. Failure to comply resulted in loss of cash benefits for the custodial parent's share of the grant, but the case remained active. By placing this step first, WF NJ/TANF emphasizes the importance of both the enforcement of child support orders and of the search for financial support other than cash assistance.

A client certified for cash assistance is expected to participate in an activity. As discussed in Chapter II, either the CWA or a county workforce agency may have primary responsibility for assessing the client and referring her to activities (Figure III.1). Because "work first" is the goal of WF NJ, unless the client has found employment through the NJES work registration process or is diverted from welfare through EEI, her first activity is usually group job search. If the client does not find employment after her four weeks in that activity, she is referred to a second activity, which could include occupational training, alternative and community work experience programs, or other approved activities.

**# *The longer intake process affects delivery of consistent communications about WF NJ/TANF.***

Program study counties have generally implemented the intake process as prescribed by the state. However, some counties have made slight variations. For example, one county has the client meet with a child support worker at the start of the intake process to determine the client's initial compliance and then again at the end of the intake process to determine appropriate steps for the case. Another county had not moved the child support interview to the beginning of the process after WF NJ/TANF was introduced but now plans to do so. A third county has clients meet with the NJES worker after the application for WF NJ/TANF is taken.

However, the prescribed intake process is long, leading to inconsistent communications regarding the WF NJ/TANF program. Intake workers across the program study counties estimate that their time with clients has almost doubled (to two hours) as a result of the lengthier application for cash assistance and their added responsibilities. For instance, at intake, these workers have to complete the IRP with clients, ask them questions about their use of addictive substances, and determine their eligibility for the EEI program. As a result, intake workers have little time to spend with clients to make sure that they understand their entitlements and obligations under WF NJ/TANF. A general comment heard from CWA staff was that intake workers, even the most skilled, have so much to do during their intake interview that information on WF NJ/TANF is not presented in a way in which clients remember it.

Because of the long intake process, most CWAs are not able to conduct client group orientations where initial information on cash assistance would enhance and clarify the information customarily provided by the intake worker. Only one program study county (Atlantic) conducts a group orientation for new clients at intake, and, according to staff, it does appear to help clients understand the program. In the other counties, the different workers (screener, child support program worker, NJES worker, and intake worker) the clients see during the intake process provide their own interpretation of the program. An administrator in one county admitted that each of her intake workers is likely to put her own “spin” on introducing the program, which results in differing and inconsistent orientations communicated by each intake worker.

Even when staff communicate information clearly and provide written materials on the program, clients may have difficulty absorbing all the information. For instance, new applicants may be so overwhelmed by their circumstances, the various interviews required, and the numerous forms and information presented that they may have difficulty processing what they are told. At the time of the application, clients also are likely to be more concerned about the cash assistance than the work participation requirements and what will happen if they are still on cash assistance in five years. In addition, by the time clients see the intake worker, they may already have been in the welfare office for several hours and may have become eager to leave the agency rather than ask questions about what they might not understand. Data collected from the evaluation’s client study confirms this and indicates that many clients report knowing about the basic WFNJ/TANF provisions, such as time limits and work requirements, but are less sure of the specifics of the rules (Rangarajan and Wood 1999).

#### **COUNTY STRATEGIES FOR MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS**

- # ***Create a Customer-Friendly Environment.*** Several counties are trying to make the welfare system, especially at intake, more customer oriented.
- # ***Develop Alternative Settings for Communicating to Clients.*** Clients approved for cash assistance in Bergen County return to the county welfare agency to receive their electronic benefit transfer card and to meet with their case manager. When they meet with their case manager, they receive an orientation to the program. This setting is more conducive to telling clients about their responsibilities and the benefits available to them than the stressful and long intake process.
- # ***Hold Group Orientations.*** In 5 of the 10 program study counties, clients received formal introductions to WFNJ/TANF either before they were assigned to their first activity or during their group job search class. These sessions often stress the WFNJ/TANF work participation requirements and the consequences of nonparticipation. In addition, the county’s UCCA often gives presentations on its child care services during these group orientations. However, by the time these orientations are conducted, some WFNJ/TANF clients have already chosen not to participate in WFNJ/TANF work activities and do not attend these initial events.



# ***The ability of program staff to make appropriate referrals to activities can be limited by case managers' knowledge of vendors and by vendors' need for referrals.***

Once through intake and certified for cash assistance, clients who are required to participate in WFNJ/TANF are assigned to their first activity, usually group job search. There they learn about job search techniques and the requirement to actively seek employment.<sup>4</sup>

Clients who do not find employment through the group job search activities need to be referred quickly to their next activities. If the time between activities is long, clients who have already participated in the group job search activity may lose interest and not continue in the program. If clients have no interest in the activity to which they have been referred, their participation may also falter.

Counties use two approaches to referring clients to activities from job search:

1. ***Develop plan in job search.*** Most counties work with clients while they are in job search to identify an appropriate next activity (assuming they do not find a job by the end of the four weeks). Workers, often CWA case managers or workforce agency counselors, visit the job search class and interview clients to determine which next activity is appropriate. In Camden County, this interview occurs in the clients' second week of job search. In Bergen County, clients attend a focus group at the end of job search, where they express their interests and cite the kinds of activities and support they need to become self-sufficient. Clients entering AWEPs are encouraged to select the AWEP most appropriate for them, based on their own sense of their skills and the results of the assessments conducted during job search.
2. ***Rely on vendor recommendations.*** Several counties rely on the group job search providers' assessment of the next appropriate activity. In these counties, the vendor recommends a client's next activity based on experience with that client, and the CWA or workforce agency accepts the recommendation and makes the referral.

Discussions with program staff highlighted aspects of the relationship between the referring agency and the vendor that can affect the referral process.<sup>5</sup> First, staff members responsible for referring clients to activities may have a different understanding of the

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<sup>4</sup>Counties provide clients with notice of their referrals to group job search at different points in the process. For instance, most program study counties inform clients of their first activity through appointment letters. In Ocean County, clients receive these letters directly (hand-delivered) from a CWA worker during the intake process. Ocean County began scheduling appointments this way because many clients who failed to attend their first activity claimed they never received their appointment letter in the mail and sought to overturn the resulting sanction. Handing the appointment letter to clients ensured their knowledge of the appointment. Several other counties bring clients in for a group orientation after certification, and CWA or workforce case managers determine the clients' first referral at that orientation.

<sup>5</sup>Future analyses of how quickly counties refer clients to their next activities will be conducted based on administrative data.

services the county vendors provide. Presumably, the more knowledge case managers have about the vendors, the more likely they will be able to refer clients to the appropriate activity. For example, the case managers/social workers in Ocean County appear more aware than the county's integrated workers of the vendors and the services they provide to clients. This is consistent with the emphasis the county has placed on intensive case management for its hardest-to-serve clients. To increase case managers' knowledge of vendors, some counties encourage case managers to visit the vendor sites and observe activities.

Second, in counties where several vendors provide similar services, county staff members referring clients may need to balance their need to provide individualized service to clients with vendors' need for a constant and sufficient supply of referrals. In some counties, case managers may exercise a great deal of authority in referrals, which might result in favoring some vendors over others. When this occurs--and vendors, because of decreasing caseloads, already receive fewer referrals than expected--tensions between the referring agency and the vendor heighten. Camden County is trying to distribute referrals evenly over the five community-based organizations that provide welfare-to-work and supported-work programs. The CWA refers clients to these organizations on a rotating basis to maintain an equitable distribution.

### **C. THE WORK FIRST EMPHASIS OF EARLY WFNJ/TANF ACTIVITIES**

Three WFNJ/TANF activities, which are available to eligible clients soon after they apply for or begin receiving cash assistance, are designed to orient clients to work: (1) work registration with the NJES; (2) the EEI program, which diverts eligible clients from cash assistance; and (3) the group job search activity. The success of these activities in promoting the WFNJ/TANF program's emphasis on work and in connecting clients to the labor market is the focus of this section.

#### **# *Various up-front WFNJ/TANF activities make clear to clients that the program is about work.***

Requiring clients to look for work from the time they enter the welfare system conveys the message that the new welfare program is first and foremost about work. WFNJ/TANF first delivers this message through the work registration requirement at the time of intake. In effect, work registration and NJES's role in referring WFNJ/TANF applicants for job orders is an attempt to divert clients from welfare--a client who gets a job through an NJES referral is less likely to need cash assistance. Two other up-front activities make clear that the program is about work. Both EEI (the state's formal diversion from welfare program) and group job search (the first activity for most WFNJ/TANF clients) reinforce the message that WFNJ/TANF is most interested in keeping clients off welfare and in jobs.

The work registration process occurs during the intake process (shown in Figure III.1). The NJES worker meets with the client, typically after the child support interview, and helps the client complete the work registration form. The NJES worker then enters the relevant information from the work registration form into the NJES data system, which links clients' skills and occupational interests with job orders posted on the database. The computer then tries to find matches and makes an automated call to the client about the match. Clients receiving the message are required to respond, and failure to do so could result in sanctions.

In addition to the work registration process, the EEI program and the group job search activity provide job placement services early in the WFNJ/TANF process. EEI, which started in August 1998, provides job search and placement services to work-ready clients before their applications for cash assistance have been certified. Clients who become employed through this program do not receive cash assistance through TANF. However, they do receive a payment at the beginning of the program to cover expenses they incur while looking for a job, as well as a payment once they find a job (to cover expenses until their first paycheck). As of October 1999, two of the program study counties (Hudson and Monmouth) either had not yet implemented EEI or had not referred applicants to it.

Group job search is the first WFNJ/TANF activity for most new welfare clients. In the four-week program, participants learn job search techniques and are required to seek employment actively.<sup>6</sup> In some counties, clients attend morning classes where they develop their resumes, learn how to search for employment, and practice interviewing and job skills. In the afternoon, clients conduct their own job search, making contacts with employers and going on job interviews. In other counties, clients may attend class full-time for two weeks and then spend the remaining two weeks actively seeking work. In all cases, when clients are in self-directed job search, they provide evidence of their job search activity, such as business cards from potential employers and times and dates of their interviews.

**# *Compressed intake procedures limit the effectiveness of the NJES worker.***

The WFNJ/TANF intake process limits NJES workers' ability to thoroughly assess clients' employment possibilities. In several counties, the NJES worker, who typically is a job placement specialist, spends only 5 to 10 minutes with each client, because the NJES interview is scheduled between two other intake activities (the interview with the child support worker and the interview with the CWA intake worker). In addition, in some counties, the NJES worker is on-site at the CWA only a few days a week. In these instances, the CWA intake staff has the client complete the work registration form, and no assessment is done by a job placement specialist. Consequently, perhaps, work registration by NJES results in relatively few job placements (Hulsey and Haimson 2000).

NJES workers who cannot conduct thorough assessments of clients may be unable to place clients in sustainable employment. While the NJES computer can identify possible matches, the NJES workers or job placement counselors using thorough assessments of clients' abilities and skills may be able to better evaluate a client's ability to be successful in the job, uncovering other employment areas for which the client may be suitable, and suggesting ways the client can improve her employability. Through this process, counselors may be able to identify more matches between clients' job interests and skills than the automated system can (Hulsey and Haimson 2000).

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<sup>6</sup>Because of PRWORA regulations, group job search activity is a four-week activity. Under PRWORA, clients' participation in job search is counted toward states' work participation rates for up to six weeks, of which no more than four can be consecutive.

# *Eligibility criteria and competing programs have affected implementation of EEI.*

When EEI was first implemented in 1998, CWA intake workers, who are most responsible for referring clients to EEI, were making very few referrals. Reasons for this include (1) the program's eligibility criteria, (2) competing job search programs, and (3) the timing between the program and clients' certification for cash assistance.

When first implemented, EEI had high standards for program eligibility. To be eligible for EEI, applicants had to have a high school diploma or GED and must have worked for 6 of the preceding 12 months. Few clients met these criteria. To address the low referrals, the state lowered the standards for the program in July 1999, doing away with the education requirement and requiring participants to have been employed for only 4 out of the preceding 12 months. To make the program more attractive to county welfare agency workers and clients, they also revised rules to make successful EEI participants eligible for post-TANF child care benefits. An increase in the number of EEI referrals has resulted (Table III.2).

Even under the program's revised education and work experience eligibility requirements, most county staff claim that few clients can be referred to the program. Applicants who may have worked for 4 of the preceding 12 months may not be eligible for the program because they have an "immediate need," such as at risk of becoming homeless,

TABLE III.2  
EEI REFERRALS AND EMPLOYMENT RATES

County	Number of EEI Referrals					Percentage of EEI Referrals Placed in Employment				
	Aug. to Dec. 98	Jan. to Mar. 99	Apr. to June 99	July to Sept. 99	Total	Aug. to Dec. 98	Jan. to Mar. 99	Apr. to June 99	July to Sept. 99	Total
Atlantic	29	20	45	147	241	45	35	38	36	37
Bergen	3	0	1	0	4	0	--	0	--	0
Camden	0	0	0	6	6	--	--	--	33	33
Cumberland	15	0	7	11	33	0	--	0	--	3
Essex	10	26	1	0	37	20	31	0	--	27
Hudson	0	0	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
Middlesex	21	44	37	75	177	52	50	38	49	47
Monmouth	0	0	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
Ocean	23	13	8	20	64	26	54	13	15	27
Salem	8	4	2	14	28	38	0	0	0	11
<b>New Jersey (all 21 counties)</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>1,168</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>

SOURCE: NJDHS DFD report on EEI program.

or need to clear a TANF sanction. For example, in August 1999, Middlesex County, which has one of the larger EEI programs in the state, referred only 10 percent of new applicants for cash assistance to EEI.

In addition, some staff members see EEI as competing with other WFNJ/TANF job search activities for job placements. For instance, clients who may have been appropriate for EEI may already have found jobs through the NJES work registration process. In addition to these pressures, EEI participants who participate in and find employment through the program are not included in counties' federal work participation rates, affecting CWA staff's interest in the program. Pressure from vendors of the group job search activity for more employable clients that they can place in employment to help meet goals in their performance-based contracts also may limit referrals to EEI.

Finally, some counties claim that they process clients TANF applications too quickly to make EEI worthwhile. Administrators in these counties claim that they certify clients' applications within days, so that clients are in the EEI program too briefly to find employment.

**# *Up-front job search activities may not be the most suitable path for all clients.***

Staff in most counties have raised concerns that many clients are unprepared for employment and doubt that the up-front job search activities are going to enable them to find sustained employment. For instance, while the new EEI eligibility criteria have increased referrals, several EEI providers now find some clients to be unprepared for employment and unlikely to find permanent jobs.<sup>7</sup> This is a particular concern to most EEI providers, whose contracts for EEI are performance based, which means that a client must be placed and retained in a job for full payment to be rendered.

Similarly, many CWA staff members feel that group job search is an inappropriate activity for many welfare clients. Most new WFNJ/TANF clients required to participate in work activities (that is, they do not have a deferral or exemption from participation) are steered directly into group job search without regard for their employment history or educational background. Many staff members, from CWA administrators to line staff, strongly believe that many clients need more employability skills and even basic skills before they are ready for the job market. In an attempt to address this concern, some of the group job search programs try to do more than teach clients typical job search skills before sending them out to look for jobs.

Although clients are finding jobs through these programs or on their own, some agency staff are concerned about the types of jobs many clients get. For instance, many clients enter low-wage entry-level jobs that do not offer fringe benefits and opportunities for advancement. Such jobs are unlikely to allow clients to stay financially independent from welfare. Indeed, in the WFNJ client study, WFNJ clients' first jobs were paying just over \$7 on average, and only 40 percent of employed clients were in jobs offering health

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<sup>7</sup>This information is anecdotal and based on providers' perceptions. Monthly data on EEI participants employed (Table III.2) show some decline in placements since June 1999, but the decline could be due to seasonal changes rather than the changed eligibility criteria.

insurance (Rangarajan and Wood 1999). However, over time, these clients may find better jobs.

Staff in several counties also mentioned their concern that many clients are obtaining jobs at temporary agencies, which may provide an entry into the labor market and some job experience but not necessarily stable employment. As a result, many return to welfare. For instance, welfare agency staff in one county feel that some applicants come into the welfare office having heard about EEI as a way to obtain money for little effort. These applicants receive their activity support payments, spend some time in the program, easily find a job with a temporary employment agency--a job they could have found on their own--and receive their lump sum payment. Similarly, there is a perception that some clients are continually leaving welfare for temporary jobs and returning when the temporary job ends. Consistent with these perceptions, the WFNJ client study indicates that about one in three employed WFNJ clients' current or most recent job was a temporary or seasonal one (Rangarajan and Wood 1999).

## IV

### ENCOURAGING CLIENTS' PARTICIPATION AND WORK

**T**wo forces drive state and county efforts to engage clients in initial and ongoing WFNJ/TANF activities. First, federal regulations set targets for statewide participation for each fiscal year. In fiscal year 2000, 40 percent of a state's TANF caseload must be participating in an approved work activity for at least 30 hours a week. States that are not able to reach the participation levels face reductions in their TANF block grants.<sup>1</sup> Second, clients' participation in work-related activities is important to prepare clients for work and move them from welfare to gainful employment.

WFNJ/TANF gives counties many tools to encourage WFNJ/TANF clients to participate in the activities to which they are referred. Various support services, such as those that provide child care and transportation, can make participation in WFNJ/TANF and work attractive. At the same time, clients can be threatened with closure of their case when they fail to redress a sanction, and the looming 60-month lifetime limit can increase pressure on clients to move off cash assistance. Together, these policies can compel clients to participate in WFNJ activities or induce them to leave welfare for employment.

This chapter addresses three questions raised by the focus on clients' participation in work activities: (1) What supports does WFNJ/TANF provide in order to make participation in work activities and work appealing to WFNJ/TANF participants? (2) What WFNJ/TANF policies place pressure on clients to participate? and (3) What are the consequences of these policies, and what role do other factors have for counties' work participation rates?

#### A. SUPPORTS ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION AND WORK

WFNJ/TANF provides clients with a range of services designed to support their participation in WFNJ/TANF activities and encourage them to work. Clients who are receiving cash assistance and are in a WFNJ/TANF activity or working can receive free child care; Medicaid as long as they are income eligible or for two years after they leave welfare for work; transportation assistance to and from their activities, work, or child care; and reimbursement for their work-related expenses.<sup>2</sup> WFNJ/TANF also disregards the working client's first full month of earned income and 50 percent of earned income in the following months. Clients who leave welfare because of earned income are eligible for up to two years of post-TANF child care subsidies and Medicaid benefits. These clients can also participate in the Food Stamp Program, as long as they remain income eligible.

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed, in fiscal year 1999, New Jersey met the participation rate for all families but failed to meet the participation rate mandated for two-parent families. As a result, New Jersey created a separate two-parent family program that is no longer counted in federal participation rates.

<sup>2</sup>Clients can be reimbursed up to \$500 (a lifetime payment) for books, uniforms, tools, and other work-related expenses.

## **ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION AND WORK: SELECTED CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES DESIGNED TO OVERCOME THEM**

**The WFNJ child care program requires coordination between CWAs and unified child care agencies (UCCAs). When that coordination is lacking, some clients may not get the child care they need.**

- # In several counties, UCCA staff are colocated with the CWA. Clients who have completed the intake process for TANF can walk down the hall to begin arranging for their child care for WFNJ/TANF activities. Even though clients still are responsible for contacting the UCCA to arrange child care, making the UCCA more accessible may increase clients' participation.

**Clients, even those informed about post-TANF benefits, do not take advantage of these benefits.**

- # Several counties are reaching out to clients who may have left welfare for employment. Using the MIS report on WFNJ/TANF cases closed because of earnings, counties can identify former clients who are working but not participating in the post-TANF child care program. Middlesex County is beginning to use the new state database that collects information on new employees to identify clients who did not report that they left welfare for work.
- # Other counties (Hudson County, for example) have centralized the post-TANF child care program into the role of one staff person. One designated staff person may be better able to follow up with clients to enroll them in the program.

**Many staff perceive transportation barriers to clients' success at participating in WFNJ/TANF and finding and retaining employment.**

- # Some counties are seeking to expand public transportation routes using federal grants, such as the Job Access and Reverse Commute program, or working with New Jersey Transit.
- # Cumberland County is developing a transportation brokerage system to link clients with existing transportation services offered by various county agencies.
- # Bergen County has developed a Post-TANF Wrap-Around fund to help clients who leave welfare for employment cover various one-time transportation and other expenses.

**County staff members perceive that the 60-month lifetime limit on cash assistance has not affected clients' behavior.**

- # The state is beginning to develop a system to track clients' cumulative months of welfare receipt. This may help to convince clients as well as staff members that time limits are real.

**High rates of clients not attending activities affect county work participation rates.**

- # Most counties are calling and mailing clients to remind them about their referred activities. Ocean County has scheduled the first day of group job search activity on Tuesday to use Monday to make reminder calls. Middlesex County sends the list of referrals to vendors two weeks in advance, so they can begin making contacts with referred clients.
- # Hudson and Essex Counties are sending field visitors to the homes of clients who failed to show for activities and were sanctioned. These field visitors, who are often former welfare clients, identify the reasons why these people failed to attend their activities and then encourage them to reapply for cash assistance and participate in WFNJ/TANF.

**Several counties defer a large number of clients from participating in work activities because of their health or other family members' health.**

- # Cumberland and Salem Counties are working with the local NJDOL Division of Vocational Rehabilitation office to assess and provide services to medically restricted clients.



Many of these incentives to participate and work are stronger than they were under FDP. For example, WFNJ/TANF's income disregards are more generous. While clients were working, FDP disregarded the first \$30 of earned income and one-third of the remaining income. The WFNJ/TANF income disregards provide more incentive for clients to work, since clients can keep more of their earned income. In addition, under FDP, clients' eligibility for post-TANF Medicaid and child care benefits when they left welfare for employment lasted only one year, in contrast to the two years allowed under WFNJ/TANF.

While these supports are all important to clients' decisions about their WFNJ/TANF participation and work, three particular supports raise implementation and operational issues in the program study counties: the WFNJ/TANF child care program, post-TANF benefits, and transportation services.

**# *Deficiencies in the system for providing child care can affect some clients' access to it.***

In 1997, the state created unified child care agencies (UCCAs) to administer its child care programs. Before 1997, most CWAs administered the programs, while resource and referral agencies referred clients to available child care providers.<sup>3</sup> Now, the Division of Family Development in NJDHS contracts with a UCCA in each county to supply all child care services, including both referrals of clients to child care providers and issuance of payments to providers.<sup>4</sup> The UCCAs provide these services to WFNJ/TANF clients and other low-income families.

The new child care system requires coordination between CWAs and the UCCAs. At intake, the CWA worker refers the WFNJ/TANF applicant to the county's UCCA, which works with the client to find child care in time for her first WFNJ/TANF activity. Thus, the CWAs depend on the UCCAs to provide the client with timely child care services so she can participate in her WFNJ/TANF activities. If the UCCA cannot secure child care before the client begins her activity, then she cannot be required to participate. The UCCA, in turn, relies on the CWA to inform them of the activity to which the client is being referred and the time that activity begins and ends. Workers at the CWA enter this information into the OMEGA system, so that the UCCA can set up the client's child care. Since provision of child care is tied to the client's activity, the UCCA cannot work with the client if the proper information has not been entered into the system.

Counties can coordinate the delivery of child care services differently. Some have established a formal process in which the UCCA receives a referral form from the CWA for each client referred. Clients are responsible for calling the UCCA for child care, but, only in a couple of counties, the UCCA is expected to follow up with referred clients who do not do so. Other counties have a less formal process; clients are given the UCCA's name and

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<sup>3</sup>While there appears to be an adequate supply of child care in the program study counties, staff in most counties mentioned the need for more specialized child care. In particular, they say their communities need more facilities that provide child care for infants and special-needs children and serve clients who work nontraditional hours.

<sup>4</sup>Some agencies serve as the UCCA for multiple counties. For example, the Tri-County Community Action Agency (TCCAA) is the UCCA for both Cumberland and Salem Counties. Catholic Charities is the UCCA for Middlesex and Somerset counties.

telephone number and told to arrange child care. In these counties, the UCCA does not know which clients should be calling, so the CWA case worker may be unaware of a client's failure to make child care arrangements until her case is sanctioned for nonparticipation and she claims she has no child care.

Regardless of the system used, the client has the main responsibility for making the necessary contacts and arrangements with the UCCA. When the client speaks with the UCCA worker (much of the communication is by telephone), she is given three child care referrals in her community to visit. The client decides on the child care provider she would like to use, and the UCCA processes the paperwork, including client and provider contracts. The UCCA also is the conduit for the payments the state makes to the providers.

The WFNJ evaluation's client study supports anecdotal evidence from counties that many clients do not make the initial contact with the UCCA; apparently, just 35 percent of working WFNJ/TANF clients were using child care subsidies (Rangarajan and Wood 1999). Presumably, clients are failing to take advantage of the child care program, because they have no interest in participating in WFNJ/TANF, have their own child care arrangements, or (despite information they receive) remain unaware of the benefits or how to obtain them.

Besides clients' own reasons for not participating in the child care program, the relationship between the CWA and UCCA may also play a part. In several counties, the UCCA staff are not located at the CWA, and most of the UCCA's communications with clients are by telephone and mail. Since the UCCA is not conveniently located, clients in these counties may not make the necessary contact with the UCCA for their child care benefits.

#### **COLOCATION CAN IMPROVE COORDINATION OF CHILD CARE SERVICES**

In roughly half of the program study counties, where the UCCA is colocated with the CWA, the CWA case worker can direct the client to a child care worker within the same building, which provides some continuity and increases the chances that the client will follow through with the UCCA. In Hudson County, the colocation of UCCA staff at the CWA also can help clients when they need to change their child care arrangements. According to case managers, when necessary, they can walk a child care referral form to the UCCA to expedite changes in clients' child care arrangements.

Coordination between the CWAs and UCCAs is also affected by the MIS. Both agencies work with the MIS, which triggers a client's access to the child care program. To be able to process the client's request for child care, UCCAs have to rely on the CWA caseworkers to input the client's activity information into the OMEGA system. In some counties, however, the UCCAs claim that this information is not there when they need it. At the same time, the UCCAs have had to learn OMEGA to determine the appropriate period for the client's child care. When either agency does not use the system effectively, a client may lose her child care even though she is participating in work activities. This is most likely to happen when clients are moving from one activity to the next, because codes need to be entered into OMEGA to reflect the new activity and the UCCA needs to use the new information in OMEGA to modify its client and provider contracts.

These coordination issues have been complicated by CWA concerns about the state's intention to privatize the provision of welfare services. As discussed in Chapter II, some CWA staff interpreted the assignment of the child care program to the UCCAs as a signal that the state had indeed planned to do so. In several counties, this resulted in initial tensions between the UCCAs and the CWAs, which affected communications and the provision of services. Over time and as CWA staff fears of privatization have faded, the two agencies in these counties have begun to develop working relationships. In fact, many CWA staff members in hindsight are pleased to have been relieved of the responsibility for the child care program.

**# *County agencies inform clients about available benefits when they leave welfare for work, but agency procedures and client attitudes limit their use.***

To receive the post-TANF Medicaid and child care benefits, clients need to inform workers at the CWA, workforce agency, or vendor that they have found employment. If their welfare case is closed as a result of their earnings, they can receive the post-TANF benefits. After verifying the client's employment and income, the CWA worker enters into the MIS a code that allows for the continuation of Medicaid and child care benefits. The CWA monitors Medicaid-only cases, while the UCCA administers post-TANF child care.

There are two main differences between the child care that clients receive while on cash assistance and the post-TANF child care that they receive upon leaving cash assistance for work. First, clients pay a portion of the child care based on a sliding scale in the post-TANF child care program.<sup>5</sup> Second, clients receiving post-TANF child care benefits must present eligibility information to the UCCA after one year in the program. Based on the client's employment information, the UCCA may find the client no longer eligible (for example, if she is no longer employed) or may need to readjust her co-pay if her earned income has changed over the course of the year. At her one-year redetermination, in most counties, the client is encouraged to apply for the low-income child care program, New Jersey Care for Kids, which also is administered by the UCCA, to ensure continued child care coverage when her post-TANF child care benefits expire.

There is concern at all levels of government over the low participation rates in the post-TANF child care program and other programs for clients who leave welfare for work (Dion and Pavetti 2000). For example, the WFNJ client study found that only 22 percent of clients who were employed and no longer receiving TANF were using a government child care subsidy (Rangarajan and Wood 1999). Although some of these clients may not have been eligible for the post-TANF child care benefit (for example, if the income from their job was not high enough to close their case because of earnings), the low utilization rate raises the question of what counties are doing or not doing to promote the use of post-TANF benefits.

Low usage of the program does not appear to result from counties' failure to inform clients. WFNJ/TANF staff in the program study counties repeatedly tell clients about the benefits for which they may be eligible. Clients are told about the post-TANF benefits at intake, at WFNJ/TANF orientations, during activities provided by vendors, and in ongoing contacts with their case managers and income maintenance workers. In addition, once a case

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<sup>5</sup>Employed clients receiving cash assistance may also have to pay a portion of their child care costs.

is closed, clients receive a standard letter advising them to contact the welfare office to determine eligibility for additional benefits.

However, the information does not translate into clients' use of the program. Findings from other studies (Rangarajan and Wood 1999; and Legal Services 1999) show a gap in WFNJ/TANF clients' knowledge of these programs. In the WFNJ client study, 26 percent of employed clients off assistance and with a young child said they were unaware of the transitional child care program (Rangarajan and Wood 1999). Possible explanations for this contradiction, which were touched on in Chapter III, are that (1) the benefits information is communicated in ways that are confusing or hard for clients to remember, (2) clients are too distracted when told about the post-TANF benefits, or (3) clients simply forget the information they have been told.

Clients' nonparticipation also may result from their own choices or from problems in the county processes for providing the benefits. Although it appears straightforward for clients who verify their employment to the CWA to get post-TANF benefits, miscommunications between agencies may disrupt the process. For example, in one county, information about clients' employment does not always get passed between the vendors who are working to place clients in employment and the CWA. If the CWA does not receive timely notice of a client's employment, they cannot process the case to activate the post-TANF benefits.

Other clients may know about these benefits and still choose not to participate. County staff members across the program study counties gave several reasons for this. First, some clients who no longer need cash assistance want nothing more to do with the system and want to sever their ties with the welfare office. Second, other clients, who have not disclosed

#### **COUNTY STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE USE OF POST-TANF CHILD CARE**

- # ***Target Eligible Clients Through State Databases.*** Several UCCAs are trying to reach more clients by identifying those who have left welfare for employment. Some counties use the reports counties receive from the state MIS on the WFNJ/TANF cases that have been closed as a result of earnings. Based on these reports, the UCCAs send letters to clients informing them of the child care benefits to which they may be entitled.
- # ***Identify Working Clients No Longer Receiving Cash Assistance.*** Middlesex County is beginning to use the New Hires Database, which was developed in accordance with PRWORA to help collect child support from noncustodial parents. Using this database, county staff hope to identify those clients who are leaving welfare for work and may be eligible for post-TANF benefits.
- # ***Centralize the Process.*** Some UCCAs have centralized the post-TANF child care program and designated one staff person to focus on it. For example, Hudson County's UCCA, the Urban League, has centralized the post-TANF child care program into one staff person to follow up with employed clients who were receiving child care subsidies while participating in WFNJ/TANF. If these clients are no longer receiving child care subsidies, the staff person is expected to contact the client.

that they were working while on welfare, will refrain from revealing that they are leaving welfare for employment. These workers will simply allow their cases to close in sanction or will fail to appear at their TANF redetermination appointments. A third set of clients have free child care, so they are not interested in paying the transitional child care co-pay or bothering to contact the welfare agency. Some of these clients may not be able to afford the co-pay, anyway.

**# *Some counties are developing transportation initiatives to help clients access WFNJ/TANF activities and employment.***

To help WFNJ/TANF participants get to their jobs and attend their activities, county welfare agencies can provide one of two types of transportation assistance. First, they can supply training-related expenses (TREs), payments of up to \$6 a day for travel to a work activity, job interview, or child care.<sup>6</sup> Second, the WorkPass program provides WFNJ/TANF participants in work activities with monthly New Jersey Transit (NJT) bus or rail passes.<sup>7</sup>

Counties vary in their use of TREs and bus passes. Some counties prefer using WorkPass, because they consider the process of getting TREs for clients to be cumbersome.<sup>8</sup> Since TREs are given only after clients have begun an activity, it may take about three weeks for the client to receive her first check from the state. On the other hand, the WorkPass can be given to clients as they enter their first activity. The WorkPass also may be more valuable than the TREs, since clients can use the WorkPass repeatedly, even for non-WFNJ/TANF activities. Other counties prefer the TREs because of the additional burden the WorkPass program may place on workers. Under the WorkPass program, workers need to help clients identify the bus or train routes that will take them to their activities; in effect, they become transportation planners and help design clients' commuter routes.

The usefulness of these programs may be limited by the public transportation systems in many counties. In rural counties, many WFNJ participants live in outlying areas and have difficulty getting to stops along the few public transportation routes that do exist. The length of travel to available jobs on these limited routes can be significant, too, especially when clients need to take children to child care at one location and then travel to work at another. In largely urban counties, public transportation is available during the day but may not operate during the hours of second- and third-shift jobs. In addition, although public transportation is accessible in major cities, it often does not extend to the industrial parks where many WFNJ/TANF clients' job opportunities are located (Hulsey and Haimson 2000).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>On a case-by-case basis, the NJDHS Division of Family Development can approve transportation expenses of more than \$6 per day.

<sup>7</sup>When clients leave welfare for employment and are working at least 20 hours per week, they are eligible for a free bus or rail pass for one month through the "Get a Job. Get a Ride!" program, an extension of the WorkPass program.

<sup>8</sup>As of the end of 1999, 12 of the state's 21 counties had implemented the WorkPass program.

<sup>9</sup>Few WFNJ/TANF clients who have worked since entering the program say transportation posed a problem to their continued employment, however. Although about two-thirds of clients who had worked at  
(continued...)

## TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES IN BERGEN COUNTY

Finding transportation to and from work is a challenge for many WFNJ/TANF clients in Bergen County. There is no direct bus route from Garfield or Lodi (in southern Bergen, where many recipients live) to Woodcliff in northern Bergen (where many corporate headquarters are located). To get to their jobs, many clients must take a 35-minute bus ride to New York City, take another 35-minute bus ride back to Bergen County, and then transfer to a third bus that passes near the corporate parks.

To improve clients' access to activities, jobs, and child care, counties are working to expand their transportation services. Most of the program study counties are taking advantage of available federal and state programs to improve clients' transportation options, and some are using county and private resources. Some strategies being developed to address transportation challenges include:

1. ***Expand Public Transportation.*** More than half of the program study counties are using funds from the federal Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program to improve their public transportation systems. For example, Camden County is expanding its Employment Shuttle service by purchasing vans to transport people during off-hours. Some counties are also working with NJT to add bus routes. For example, Middlesex County began talks with NJT to add a new bus line to industrial parks south of the major urban areas that are currently inaccessible to clients by public transportation.
2. ***Coordinate Existing Transportation.*** Other counties hope to take advantage of other transportation resources in the county. Cumberland County plans to create a transportation brokerage system, which is intended to coordinate its existing informal transit network in which various county agencies transport their own clients. As now planned, a client would call the transportation broker, who would link WFNJ/TANF clients with an existing informal system, such as one transporting elderly or disabled people. This initiative is being funded by Empowerment Zone and Welfare-to-Work funds.
3. ***Help Clients with Costs Related to Private Automobiles.*** WFNJ/TANF policies and other county initiatives are designed to make car ownership feasible. Under WFNJ/TANF, a case is allowed one car, whose value cannot exceed \$9,500 (as opposed to the \$1,500 allowed under FDP). In some counties, public and private funds are encouraging car ownership. For example, Bergen County's "Post-TANF Wrap-Around Fund" covers various one-time expenses, such as car repairs and insurance, for former WFNJ/TANF clients who are now working.

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<sup>9</sup>(...continued)

some time since their entry into WFNJ/TANF stated that problems outside work had affected their employment, only one in four cited transportation as one of them (Rangarajan and Wood 1999).

In Monmouth County, a community-based organization has a program in which old cars are renovated and given to WFNJ/TANF clients.

**B. TOOLS PRESSURING CLIENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN WFNJ/TANF**

While a supportive program can help make participation feasible for WFNJ/TANF clients, two other policies--sanctions and time limits--can help compel clients to participate. Compared to the policies of other states, the sanction and time limit policies contained in WFNJ/TANF are of moderate intensity (Zedlewski 1998). Both the intensity of these policies, and clients’ and staff members’ belief in their enforcement, have implications for clients’ participation. Similarly, the process for imposing sanctions may affect staff members’ use of them as a tool to coerce participation.

While policies enforcing time limits are still in the future, counties enforce WFNJ/TANF participation requirements soon after clients have been certified for cash assistance.<sup>10</sup> Sanctioning for a WFNJ/TANF offense begins when a client fails to participate in an activity to which she has been referred. This means that some clients are sanctioned shortly after their TANF case has been certified, when they fail to attend the group job search activity. A sanction for a first offense is a minimum one-month per capita reduction in the cash assistance benefit. (Table IV.1 provides details of WFNJ/TANF’s sanction policy.) The

TABLE IV.1	
WFNJ/TANF SANCTION POLICY FOR SINGLE ADULT WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN	
<b>First Offense</b>	
#	Cash assistance benefits are reduced for one month by the per capita share of the person in noncompliance.
#	If the client is still noncompliant at the end of first month, then the per capita reduction of cash assistance benefits continues for an additional two months.
#	If the client is still noncompliant by the end of the third month, then the case is closed for cash assistance benefits.
<b>Second Offense</b>	
#	Cash assistance benefits are reduced for one month by the per capita share of the person in noncompliance.
#	If the client proves her compliance by the end of the first month, then the per capita reduction of cash assistance benefits continues for an additional month and the full grant is reinstated in month three.
#	If the client is still noncompliant by the end of the first month, then the full case does not receive cash assistance for the second month.
#	If the client is still noncompliant by the end of the second month, then the case is closed.
<b>Third Offense</b>	
#	The full case does not receive cash assistance for three months.
#	If the client is still noncompliant by the end of the third month, then the case is closed.
#	If the client proves her compliance by the end of the third month, then the full grant is reinstated.

<sup>10</sup>WFNJ legislation states that clients must be in an activity at some point before receiving 24 months of benefits. Most counties, however, expect clients to participate in WFNJ/TANF soon after their applications for cash assistance have been approved. Counties interpret the “24-month clock” as a benchmark against which the state assesses their success at engaging clients promptly in activities.

sanction becomes increasingly severe for continued noncompliance, and the severity of the sanction increases for subsequent offenses. When a client whose case was closed because of a sanction reapplies for cash assistance, she must demonstrate a willingness to comply by participating in an approved work activity for ten consecutive days.

Generally, when a WFNJ/TANF entity, whether the CWA, workforce agency, or vendor, determines that the client is not participating in WFNJ/TANF, a referral is made to the appropriate CWA worker. The CWA worker may or may not investigate the cause of the noncompliance and, if a sanction is deemed warranted, completes the necessary paperwork to impose the sanction.

**# *The WFNJ/TANF sanction policy has the potential to affect some clients' participation.***

County staff are not sure about the effects that sanctions have on clients' behavior, although they do think that sanctions *can* motivate particular types of clients: younger recipients and those new to the welfare system. Some staff members mentioned that clients may not worry about the first sanction, but after repeated sanctions they understand the seriousness of the program and comply. The selected case files reviewed for this study revealed a number of instances where one or more sanctions were followed by client compliance with program requirements.

However, staff generally find that sanctions are unlikely to motivate three other categories of clients. The first includes those who have been in and out of sanctions numerous times and never seem able to participate. These clients cannot even complete the 10 continuous days of participation required to lift their sanction. Staff surmise that these clients face major barriers to their participation, such as their or their children's health problems, transportation issues, and limited basic skills. Repeatedly sanctioning some of these clients is unlikely to induce their participation, since they must overcome multiple barriers. The second category of unmotivated clients includes those whose main interest is in maintaining their Medicaid eligibility; those for whom a reduction and eventual closure of their TANF case is not a major concern. These clients may be supplementing their cash benefits with unreported income and do not miss the loss of income that follows their nonparticipation. A third set of clients includes those who are experiencing a momentary interruption in their income and need cash assistance only to tide them over until their alternative income stream is restored. Thus, they are not interested in participating in WFNJ/TANF for more than a few months.

Some county staff feel that the WFNJ/TANF policy gives clients, especially those in the last two categories, too many opportunities to comply. Under WFNJ/TANF, clients sanctioned multiple times can eventually reapply for cash assistance and attempt to comply. From the perspective of the county welfare agency, this means that some clients may comply in the short term but then receive another sanction. This creates a cycle of sanctions and compliance, without a change in the behavior of some clients. Some staff feel that a more vigorous sanction policy is warranted to address the clients who take advantage of the system.



# *State systems and county staff and organizations have implications for how counties enforce the WFNJ/TANF sanction policy.*

All counties use sanctions to enforce clients' participation. Discussions with county staff, as well as examination of administrative data, indicate that counties initiate sanctions when clients fail to participate in their activities, beginning with the very first activity after certification for cash assistance. However, some counties may be using sanctions more aggressively than others, as demonstrated in Table IV.2.<sup>11</sup> In October 1999, five program study counties had sanctioned more than 50 percent of their WFNJ/TANF clients who were not in a countable activity. Of the other five, three are counties with the largest WFNJ/TANF caseloads in the state.

Several factors contribute to the varying degrees with which counties impose sanctions. First, some WFNJ/TANF staff, including CWA, workforce, and vendor staff, may exercise more judgment than other staff about whether to impose a sanction. Second, coordination between different county agencies can affect the rate at which sanctions are imposed. Third, the sanction process itself can be burdensome, affecting CWA staff members' willingness to impose a sanction.

TABLE IV.2  
USE OF SANCTIONS  
OCTOBER 1999

County	(1) Total Persons	(2) Number of Persons Not in Countable Activity	(3) Number of Sanctions	(3)/(2) Ratio of Sanctions to Clients Not in Countable Activities
Atlantic	622	133	96	.72
Bergen	825	194	68	.35
Camden	3,956	1,837	366	.20
Cumberland	898	191	113	.59
Essex	14,975	7,343	1,160	.16
Hudson	7,129	2,389	574	.24
Middlesex	1,152	376	209	.56
Monmouth	1,336	390	102	.26
Ocean	522	106	52	.49
Salem	152	27	25	.93
<b>New Jersey (all 21 counties)</b>	<b>40,836</b>	<b>16,264</b>	<b>4,011</b>	<b>.25</b>

SOURCE: NJDHS DFD MIS report.

<sup>11</sup>The data in Table IV.2 should be used cautiously, for several reasons. First, in some counties, there may be clients who are engaged in some activity even though it is not "countable." These clients would not be sanctioned. Second, the number of clients in a countable activity and the number of clients in sanctions fluctuates from month to month.

Many county workers exercise some judgment when deciding whether to sanction a client. WFNJ/TANF vendors and case managers in many counties say they have flexibility in deciding when to send a referral for nonparticipation to the CWA or when to initiate an actual sanction. When they exercise judgment, workers, whether with a vendor or the CWA, may decide to give the client a second chance before imposing the sanction.

Case managers' own attitudes and experiences, in particular, may affect their decisions to impose sanctions. Case managers who do not feel that sanctions are a fair or effective means of coercing clients' participation may not impose them as readily as case managers who believe in their potential to change clients' behavior. Case managers more steeped in traditional case management may be more persistent in working with clients to avoid sanctions.

Case managers' use of judgment may depend on their ability to investigate reasons for a client's noncompliance. Managers with large caseloads may find it impossible to learn the particular circumstances leading to a sanction before ruling on its merits, regardless of whether they would be inclined toward leniency. For example, according to WFNJ/TANF training staff in Hudson County, they encourage case managers to learn more about the reasons for a vendor referral before imposing a sanction, but case managers rarely actually have the time for this type of problem solving, and routinely initiate sanctions based on the vendors' referrals.

A second set of issues that affect counties' use of sanctions concerns coordination between agencies. For example, regardless of the role the workforce agency plays in making referrals for sanctions, the actual imposition of the sanction remains a CWA function. If CWA workers trust the workforce agency's referral, they may not investigate further and may impose the sanction. However, in counties where there is a strong workforce agency, there has been some distrust between the welfare and workforce agencies. For example, in one such county, some CWA workers who feel that the workforce agency is too strict with clients may be inclined to investigate further the reasons for a client's nonparticipation. However, the workforce agency then tends to see the welfare agency as too lenient and resents the second-guessing of its referrals.

In an extreme case, poor relationships and coordination between county agencies can result in errors. In one county, the responsibilities of the welfare and workforce agencies are not clearly defined. The workforce agency refers clients to activities based on reports generated from the MIS. If clients do not attend, the workforce agency sends sanction referrals to the CWA, often without checking clients' status on the MIS. The CWA also does not check the MIS before processing the workforce agency's sanction referrals. Since some of the initial reports may be outdated and neither agency believes its role is to verify clients' status, sanctions are imposed in error.

A final issue affecting county use of sanctions is the process itself. Many county staff, especially CWA workers, often express dissatisfaction with the sanction process, which they see as complicated and cumbersome. One issue involves the rules for multiple sanction offenses and levels. In some cases, CWA intake workers find it difficult to ascertain whether an applicant's case had been previously closed as a result of a sanction, and case workers are not always able to uncover what level sanction to impose on a noncompliant client. Part of the problem lies with the current MIS and the amount of paperwork needed to maintain a proper case history. Case workers cannot use the MIS to identify the correct sanction level

and must depend on other case workers who may be familiar with the case to include the proper paperwork in the client's file.

**# *Lifetime limits on clients' eligibility for cash assistance do not appear to have altered staff or client attitudes consistently.***

In addition to sanction policy, the five-year limit on clients' receipt of cash assistance should also put pressure on clients to become self-supporting before their five years expire. Time limits should engage both clients and their WFNJ/TANF case workers in finding the right opportunities and activities to ensure that clients have some means of support when their cash assistance ends.

For time limits to be effective, welfare recipients and their case workers have to believe in their inevitability. Welfare staff in most counties reported that many clients do not believe the time limits will be enforced at the end of their five years. At least one staff member in every county echoed this sentiment, saying that the state will provide a safety net for welfare recipients who reach their five-year limit.

Clearly, when welfare agency staff themselves do not believe that the policy will be enforced, it is hard to impress upon clients the urgency of finding employment and becoming self-supporting. Even in Virginia, where workers took the state-enacted two-year time limit seriously and worked hard on behalf of clients, they were unable to instill a sense of urgency in clients (Pavetti et al. 1999).

Staff members may not believe in the inevitability of time limits, for two reasons. First, the state has no means of tracking the clients' cumulative receipt of welfare. The state MIS cannot sum the number of months that someone has been receiving assistance, especially if a client has ever been sanctioned or has cycled on and off cash assistance.<sup>12</sup> Although WFNJ/TANF case managers may tell clients that they need to prepare for the eventuality of time limits, they cannot readily tell them how much time they have remaining. Few, if any, attempt to calculate manually the clients' remaining time on cash assistance, so clients are often unaware of the time they have left. This is in contrast to procedures in Virginia, where workers repeatedly tell clients how much time they have remaining and, in some cases, have clients sign an acknowledgment (Pavetti et al. 1999).

Second, many staff members, especially veterans of the welfare system, have witnessed different versions of welfare reform in the past 13 years. They do not think that the current program will have a longer life than its predecessors, REACH and FDP.

There may be other reasons that clients do not worry about time limits. In discussions with and surveys of clients, researchers (Brown et al. 1997) have uncovered client attitudes with respect to time limits. They found that many people who receive cash assistance are most concerned about their current situation; they have too many immediate pressures to worry about what will happen five years hence, when their eligibility for cash assistance ends. Other clients may think that they will be self-sufficient by the time the five years are up, so they do not think the time limit will apply to them. Anecdotal information heard

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<sup>12</sup>The state has begun to develop a tracking system, but the implementation date is unknown.

### **IMMEDIATE PRESSURES LESSEN THE IMPACT OF TIME LIMITS**

A 35-year-old client has two children, one of whom has documented psychiatric problems. The client applied for SSI on behalf of her child, but the application was denied. The client participates in WFNJ/TANF activities during the months when her child is in school, but she receives deferrals each summer to stay home with her child. Although she is aware of the 60-month time limit, immediate concerns for her child outweigh any pressures she feels to find employment before she loses her cash benefits.

during reviews of WFNJ/TANF case files supports these two reasons for the inability of time limits to affect client behavior.

### **C. PARTICIPATION IN WFNJ/TANF ACTIVITIES**

The WFNJ/TANF supports and penalties are designed to influence county and state work participation rates. Through the child care program, post-TANF child care, and transportation supports, as well as through other programs, such as Medicaid and food stamps, the state hopes to remove barriers to participation that some clients face. The immediate and long-term threats to cash benefits from sanctions and time limits are expected to goad clients into participating.

PRWORA and WFNJ/TANF consider individual clients to be active participants in WFNJ/TANF if they spend the minimum hours per week at work or attend a WFNJ/TANF activity. In addition to unsubsidized employment, clients can participate in a range of activities that focus on placing them in employment, such as job search, community or alternative work experience programs, on-the-job training positions, and vocational training classes. Table IV.3 describes the main allowable WFNJ/TANF activities.<sup>13</sup> In fiscal year 2000, federal work participation policies require 30 hours of client participation per week in one or a combination of these activities. In New Jersey, clients are required to participate for 35 hours per week.

The state and counties focus on getting clients into these activities to meet the federal calculation of the state's work participation rates. The federal formula includes all adult clients considered mandatory for participation. Those not considered mandatory are people with children for whom child care is unavailable. The federal calculation of work participation does not include clients who have been sanctioned for nonparticipation or those with children under the age of 12 weeks.<sup>14</sup> All other cases, including those deferred from participating (for example, because of an illness or pregnancy), are included in the calculation.

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<sup>13</sup>There are some limits on participation. For example, only 20 percent of the state's caseload can participate in vocational training at any one time, and an individual can only participate in a vocational training program for 12 months. A client in an AWEP activity must spend at least 20 hours in a work experience.

<sup>14</sup>PRWORA defers clients with children up to the age of one, but WFNJ/TANF requires clients with children older than 12 weeks to participate.

TABLE IV.3

## SELECTED WFNJ/TANF WORK ACTIVITIES

**EMPLOYMENT AND JOB SEARCH**

**Unsubsidized Employment** is work in the public or private sectors. Clients' wages are not subsidized.

**Supported Employment** addresses the needs of WFNJ/TANF participants who have serious barriers to employment by offering them support while they are working. Participants are assigned a job coach who interacts with employers to resolve problems.

**EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

**Education** involves participants studying to earn their general equivalency diploma (GED) or postsecondary education when it is combined with community work experience or other approved work activities.

**Vocational Educational Training** involves institutional or classroom training in specific occupational areas in either a work site or non-work site setting.

**Job Skills Training** is an activity that relates directly to employment and may include job coaching and mentoring for those WFNJ/TANF participants facing significant barriers to work.

**WORKPLACE TRAINING**

**Alternative Work Experience Program (AWEP)** prepares WFNJ/TANF participants for unsubsidized employment by offering them a combination of education and work experience. Persons in an AWEP slot work for public or private nonprofit employers.

**Community Work Experience Program (CWEP)** provides recipients with training and unpaid work experience for public or private nonprofit employers with the goal of enabling participants to learn how to function in an employment setting.

**On-the-Job Training (OJT)** is an employment opportunity, performed for a defined contract period, that includes training. In this activity, participants are hired by a private or public employer, receive training, and are retained as regular employees if they have made satisfactory progress.

**Job Search and Readiness** activities require clients to seek full-time employment. Job readiness is provided to those clients who need additional basic employment skills.

WFNJ/TANF participation rates have remained fairly constant over time, although there have been some fluctuations. At the start of WFNJ/TANF, in July 1997, the state's work participation rate was 25.1 percent (Table IV.4). While some program study counties quickly engaged their clients in work activities, others were less able to engage large numbers of clients in the early months. Over time, the rates of some program study counties have improved, but others have worsened.<sup>15</sup> By January 2000, the state participation rate was 30.1 percent.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>The increase in the participation rate was due, in part, to the state's removal of two-parent families from its overall participation rate.

<sup>16</sup>This participation rate is below the state participation rate of 40 percent mandated by PRWORA. However, PRWORA adjusts the state's participation rates to account for falling caseloads. For example, in fiscal year 1998, New Jersey's work participation rate of 26.5 percent was below the 30 percent standard, but it met the adjusted standard of 14.7 percent.

TABLE IV.4  
FEDERAL WORK PARTICIPATION RATES

County	Jan. 1997 <sup>a</sup>	July 1997	Jan. 1998	July 1998	Jan. 1999	July 1999 <sup>b</sup>	Jan. 2000 <sup>b</sup>
Atlantic	61.2	52.1	88.4	28.5	32.0	33.4	28.2
Bergen	27.0	29.6	63.9	32.3	34.7	34.6	39.2
Camden	18.6	15.8	57.0	29.9	23.0	32.2	25.6
Cumberland	57.7	38.1	75.6	34.2	30.2	27.6	24.8
Essex	21.6	17.9	25.9	20.4	21.7	28.9	25.7
Hudson	27.2	22.1	40.8	29.6	24.6	34.2	31.9
Middlesex	44.5	52.8	100.0	31.2	26.2	29.1	33.6
Monmouth	31.0	29.1	57.2	40.4	41.7	41.5	41.1
Ocean	21.0	30.5	69.7	32.6	23.3	27.4	26.1
Salem	47.7	29.6	85.2	38.8	37.3	47.6	36.5
<b>New Jersey (all 21 counties)</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>48.4</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>32.4</b>	<b>30.1</b>

SOURCE: NJDHS DFD Current Program Statistics reports.

NOTE: The formula used to calculate the work participation rate changed after January 1997 in accordance with PRWORA. The formula was revised again after January 1998.

<sup>a</sup> JOBS/FDP participation.

<sup>b</sup> Estimates. Excludes two-parent households.

Many county administrators feel that the overall work participation rates do not take into account their work with their caseloads. For example, federal participation rates for a particular month do not include the clients who are deferred from participation, who are temporarily between activities, or who begin participating late in the month. Another factor that affects clients' participation rates is the large numbers of clients who do not show for their activities. This section examines the effect of counties' high no-show and deferral rates on the participation rate.

**# *All counties are experiencing high no-show rates despite county efforts to boost attendance.***

No-show rates, the rates at which clients never attend an activity to which they have been referred, are high across the state.<sup>17</sup> One county administrator stated that the no-show rate for group job search has been as high as 70 percent in his county--of 10 clients referred, only three would attend the activity. In time, the other clients would be sanctioned and their cases closed.

<sup>17</sup>High no-show rates are also a national problem. See Hamilton and Scrivener (1999).

Beyond their effect on work participation rates, high no-show rates pose two concerns. From a policy perspective, these clients are not receiving services that may help them obtain and retain jobs in advance of the time limits. From a vendor perspective, the activities to which these clients are referred become underutilized and the vendor is unlikely to meet all of its costs.

A variety of factors contribute to low rates of entry into activities. Some of these factors have to do with clients' own reasons about why they need cash assistance and how they perceive the WFNJ/TANF sanction policy. Another explanation for the high no-show rates may involve the gap clients experience between their WFNJ/TANF activities. For example, there can be a delay from the time the client's application for cash assistance is approved to the date she is required to attend her first activity, typically group job search. There also can be a gap between the end of one activity and the start of the next.

Gaps between WFNJ/TANF activities can contribute to clients' failure to show (Hershey 1988). For example, a client who attends a WFNJ/TANF orientation and is enthusiastic about the program may begin to lose interest if she has to wait several weeks before her first activity begins.

Thus, counties that have a fixed start date for their group job search activities may be exacerbating clients' poor attendance. At the start of WFNJ/TANF, many counties operated the group job search activity as an open-entry program to engage clients quickly--that is, clients could begin the program soon after TANF certification and after their child care was in place. The advantage of an open-entry class is that clients who develop an interest in participating after their initial orientation can be engaged quickly, before they change their minds. The disadvantage is that clients who begin the activity in the middle of the month

#### COUNTY STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE CLIENT ATTENDANCE

- # ***Reminder Telephone Calls and Letters.*** Vendors in most counties mail letters or telephone clients to remind them about their upcoming activity. For example, the Middlesex CWA sends the list of referred clients to their providers two weeks before the activity starts, so that the providers can start contacting clients and encouraging their participation. Ocean County moved the first day of job search to a Tuesday so that they could use Monday for reminder calls. County administrators thought that when reminder calls were made on a Friday for a Monday class, the intervening weekend distracted clients, and their commitment to attend waned.
- # ***Home Visits.*** Some vendors are also visiting clients to remind them in person of their upcoming activity and make sure they have transportation and child care in place.
- # ***Collaborations with Community-Based Organizations.*** Essex and Hudson Counties have contracts with community-based organizations to contact sanctioned no-shows and determine why they dropped out of their assigned activities and encourage them to return. For this outreach, these recently initiated projects use former welfare recipients, who may be effective in communicating with sanctioned clients and getting them to redress their failure to participate.

are not counted toward that month's federal work participation rate. Thus, several counties now begin their job search class on the first Monday of the month to improve their participation rates, but perhaps at the cost of some client momentum.

# *Deferrals also contribute to low work participation rates.*

Medical deferrals raise two concerns related to clients' participation in WFNJ/TANF. First, such deferred clients are still included in the federal participation rates. Thus, counties with higher deferral rates, such as Camden and Cumberland, are likely to have lower participation rates than they would otherwise (Table IV.5). Most deferrals are for clients who have health issues, who are the sole caretakers of a disabled dependent, or who are pregnant or have a child less than 12 weeks old.<sup>18</sup> Second, while clients are deferred, they are using up their lifetime limit of cash assistance and not receiving services that will help them leave welfare for employment.

County	Deferrals (as percentage of mandatory cases)				
	Physical or Mental Illness	Pregnancy or Child Less Than 12 Weeks	Caretaker of Disabled Dependent Child	All Others	Total Deferrals
Atlantic	12.9	0.3	5.0	0.3	18.5
Bergen	12.7	0.2	3.1	1.3	17.4
Camden	3.1	0.5	2.5	2.4	8.5
Cumberland	18.6	6.7	9.3	5.0	39.6
Essex	1.9	0.2	0.6	0.1	2.8
Hudson	1.3	0.1	1.0	0.8	3.3
Middlesex	6.1	1.4	3.8	0.4	11.7
Monmouth	6.6	2.2	2.1	6.1	17.0
Ocean	22.7	3.9	5.0	3.1	34.7
Salem	7.5	0.7	1.4	3.4	13.0
<b>New Jersey (all 21 counties)</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>7.8</b>

SOURCE: NJDHS DFD MIS reports.

NOTE: Number of deferrals is for July 1999. The denominator is the number of mandatory cases in June 1999.

<sup>18</sup>There are 13 reasons clients can be temporarily deferred from the WFNJ/TANF work participation requirement, including a physical or mental illness lasting more or less than 12 months, a pregnancy or responsibility for a child less than 12 weeks (or older if medically necessary), a disability due to a CWEP or AWEP position, participation in a CWEP or AWEP position while eligible for leave under the state Family Leave Act, responsibility for a seriously disabled dependent, victim of domestic violence, resident of an Indian Reservation, or chronically unemployable (not valid until July 2000).



The process for acquiring a deferral is standard across counties. Once a client requests a deferral, the case worker informs the client that she must have her physician complete a medical deferral form (WFNJ-5S). The client's physician completes the form, certifying the medical cause for the deferral and the likely duration of the illness. In accordance with the form, the case worker defers the client from participation.

Differences in deferral rates across the 10 program study counties may result from variations in procedures, in addition to the health of county residents. While the evaluation did not identify any county procedures that encouraged or discouraged clients from applying for deferrals, in some counties, CWA staff members may not inform clients adequately of the deferral process. In these counties, clients may not be aware of their ability to ask for and seek a deferral from participation. A high deferral rate also may be due to a higher incidence of health problems within the county. Certainly, the fact that some counties have high deferrals rates for medical reasons is consistent with the evaluation's client study, which found that welfare recipients have serious health problems (Rangarajan and Wood 1999).

Although counties may not control the rate of deferrals, they can improve upon the monitoring of deferrals and make efforts to engage these clients. Several counties centralized the deferral process along with the sanctioning process, in part to ease case managers' burden but also to keep better track of the deferrals and to engage quickly those clients whose deferrals have expired.

Cumberland and Salem counties also have begun working with the regional office of the NJDOL Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to help establish clients' health status and their ability to participate in WFNJ/TANF activities.<sup>19</sup> When the physician indicates on the deferral form that the client can participate in limited activities, the client is referred to DVR for an assessment and assignment to a suitable activity.

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<sup>19</sup>NJDHS also has developed an initiative with the New Jersey Legal Services to help clients with severe medical problems apply for benefits under the Supplemental Security Income program. In addition, NJDHS has begun a formal program with DVR to provide services to clients with limited mental or physical abilities. However, these initiatives started just before or after the program study visits, so site visitors were not able to learn much about counties' role in them.

## V

### EARLY IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS

New Jersey counties have made considerable progress in implementing a “work first” program. They have transformed the former entitlement welfare program into one that encourages clients to become self-reliant and to assume personal responsibility for their lives. They have strengthened partnerships to expand the ranges of services to clients. Together, these partners--county welfare and workforce agencies and vendors--have worked to encourage clients’ participation in WFNJ/TANF activities and to help them leave cash assistance for work. Within CWAs, staff members have broadly embraced the new program philosophy. Even with added stress in their jobs, these staff members have worked hard to implement the WFNJ/TANF program in their counties. Similarly, workforce agency and vendor staff have assumed greater responsibility for the program.

Indeed, the efforts of the program study counties have resulted in a fairly consistent program across the state. New Jersey’s state-supervised, county-administered welfare system permits each county considerable latitude in how it organizes its WFNJ/TANF structure and operates its local welfare program. The program study highlights the fact, however, that there are more similarities than differences in how counties provide welfare services. While there are variations among counties in how services are organized and delivered, key features of WFNJ/TANF, such as how clients flow, what the sanction policy is, and how work activities are provided, are managed in a relatively uniform manner by all counties. In effect, across the counties, there is a single program, as defined by federal and state policy and local practices.

However, variations in county systems and processes could cause counties to implement WFNJ/TANF with varying results. The system a county has established for delivering services to clients could affect clients’ participation in WFNJ/TANF activities, as could the level of collaboration between partners at the state and county levels. In addition, a county’s use of sanctions and the level of staff acceptance of the new program could influence a county’s work participation rate and other measures of performance. The confluence of these factors and others can affect the county’s performance.

This report highlights county variations that may prove to be effective strategies to implement WFNJ/TANF. For example, Chapter II focused on Atlantic County’s service delivery model in which the county welfare and workforce agencies were combined under one agency as a strategy that may help to provide clients with a smooth and effective delivery of services. Chapter III described Ocean County’s use of intensive case management, implying it may be an effective means of assessing hard-to-serve clients’ barriers and working with them to participate in WFNJ/TANF and find employment. Chapter IV mentioned some counties’ more aggressive use of sanctions to persuade clients to participate in WFNJ/TANF. This strategy may increase these counties’ work participation rates and also may improve clients’ chances to move to gainful employment.

To attribute various county strategies and practices to county performance requires a set of performance measures and indication over time as to how strategies are working. It is not

sufficient to base a county's performance on a sole indicator of performance, such as the work participation rate. For example, counties' success at implementation of WFNJ/TANF also involves the clients who leave welfare for employment and those who remain off welfare.

NJDHS and the evaluation team are jointly working on a system that would provide a set of indicators to measure performance. In fall 1999, program study team members identified challenges counties face in implementation of WFNJ/TANF. Initial visits to counties also identified the county strategies that were designed to overcome these challenges to create better systems and processes for WFNJ/TANF. Future program study reports, using the performance measurement system and understanding of how various county strategies have worked over time, will attempt to identify strategies that are most effective.

This first look at the implementation of WFNJ/TANF shows that the state and counties continue to face challenges that may affect WFNJ/TANF implementation and county performance. Some combination of these challenges may be contributing to the low rates of federal work participation, sanctions, and deferrals in counties with large WFNJ/TANF caseloads, as well as in other counties (as seen in data presented in Chapter IV). As described in the previous chapters, these challenges concern two major areas of program implementation:

1. ***Establishing an Integrated System for WFNJ/TANF.*** Discussions in early chapters suggest that the state and counties have faced challenges to developing a fully integrated system for WFNJ/TANF. The challenges include developing smooth relationships between agencies at the state and county levels and creating a flow of information across agencies through a supportive MIS and better communications among line staff.
2. ***Working to Improve Clients' Chances for Success.*** The second set of challenges are policy and service delivery issues that affect clients' success in moving off welfare and into employment. These include providing (1) sufficient staff training, (2) effective case management for an increasingly hard-to-serve caseload, (3) appropriate employment assessment and placement through NJES, (4) clear communications to clients, and (5) suitable arrangements for vendors.

This chapter discusses the lessons learned from these different challenges. The recommendations this chapter offers to overcoming the challenges are suggestions for improving continued implementation of WFNJ/TANF. They are not intended to eliminate county variations in welfare administration. Indeed, many of the variations that counties use to implement WFNJ/TANF are well suited for their local contexts and organizations.

## **A. IMPROVING THE WELFARE SYSTEM**

Although the state and county agencies have made great strides in developing the WFNJ/TANF system, the current system is not fully integrated. For instance, different WFNJ/TANF partners are not always working cooperatively with each other and toward one

common purpose. Observations from the field provide some suggestions for how these agencies can move toward a coherent system.

**# *Strengthen relationships between state agencies by aiming for clear and consistent messages at all levels.***

NJDOL and NJDHS have historically served different clients and provided different services. NJDOL's focus has been on connecting employers with experienced workers and training people for employment opportunities with known employers. NJDHS's focus has been on providing clients with welfare benefits and linking them with employment and training services. Certainly, the two agencies have worked together in the past, namely in providing education and training services to welfare clients, but collaboration between the two agencies was limited.

Under the new welfare program, the two agencies have had to work together and deal with their differences. Through frequent meetings and candid discussions, senior officials responsible for WFNJ/TANF oversight in these departments have forged effective relationships in their joint efforts to place WFNJ/TANF clients in jobs.

County agency staff, however, continue to see a divide between the missions of these state agencies. At times, this results in each department giving a different set of policy instructions to their counterpart agencies at the county level. When the county agencies confer, they find they each have a different understanding of the policy. Thus, counties perceive mixed signals about the main goals of WFNJ/TANF. For instance, is the goal to get clients to improve their chances for long-term self-sufficiency or is it to encourage them to leave the welfare rolls quickly?

If county agencies are to work together to attain WFNJ/TANF goals, they need clear direction from state agencies. This means further strengthening of relationships at the state level, so that clear and consistent messages are sent to the county agencies. As long-term clients near their five-year time limit for cash assistance, the need for this level of cooperation between the state agencies grows as they strive to develop mutually supportive strategies to move these clients off welfare.

**# *Forge stronger county interagency collaborations through centralized leadership, colocation, or improved understanding of roles.***

All program study counties have formed partnerships for WFNJ/TANF, but the quality and extent of their collaborations vary. Clearly, counties with a history of agencies competing for resources and clients, as well as counties with weak leadership, have not been able to develop strong collaborations. Consequently, in those counties, WFNJ/TANF clients may not receive consistent messages and may not clearly understand their responsibilities under the program.

While agency histories play a key role, if welfare reform is to succeed, county agencies have to forge better collaborations. Atlantic County provides the clearest example of service integration through collaboration. There, welfare and workforce services are centralized into a single agency so that clients can access multiple services through one agency and at one

location. The Atlantic County Workforce Development Center stands out because of the ease with which WFNJ/TANF clients can access available services.

However, a fully integrated approach may be difficult for most counties to achieve. Other strategies could improve their collaboration, however. Strategies being used by some program study counties to facilitate interagency cooperation include (1) centralizing leadership for WFNJ/TANF under one agency, (2) colocating staff of organizations involved in delivering welfare services to clients, and (3) promoting understanding of partners' roles in WFNJ/TANF.

**# *Even after a unified welfare system is established, additional supports are needed to facilitate the smooth delivery of services.***

A well-coordinated and comprehensive WFNJ/TANF program requires a computer system that is reliable, easy to use, and linked to other systems. Such a system can help welfare staff identify resources its WFNJ/TANF clients are accessing, provide managers with useful reports to monitor the program, and reduce paperwork.

The state's MIS falls short of meeting counties' information needs for case management, planning, and program oversight. The inability of FAMIS and OMEGA to share information about clients is the principal deficiency of the system, but problems with data entry and storage also limit its value for WFNJ/TANF.

The state has made some improvements to the system. In the past year, the state adapted old FDP codes to accommodate WFNJ/TANF codes and prepared the system for the year 2000. It is now working on a system to calculate the amount of time clients have been receiving cash assistance since the enactment of PRWORA. The state also has pushed for implementation of a county-linked system through One Ease-E Link to help county agencies coordinate their information and provision of services.

However, the state needs to go further to develop an efficient MIS. Although this will take time and require resources, the consequences of a poor system require that the state make the development of a reliable and coordinated system a priority.

**# *County administrators should ensure that information is being shared across staff to fill gaps left by the MIS.***

Systematic information sharing within CWAs, as well as between CWAs and workforce agencies, can help fill the gap left by the current MIS. This study found, however, that line staff across agencies often were not communicating with each other to share information about clients' assessments, activity status, skills needs, or other barriers to employment. As a consequence, agencies often collect duplicate client information and, in the process, unnecessarily lengthen the time it takes a client to access services or move through the system. Alternatively, they are missing critical information. Counties should attempt to increase information flow among workers and across agencies. Regular interagency staff meetings that include vendor representatives could be part of such a strategy. Cross-training of staff from different agencies also could be initiated to improve communication and deepen mutual appreciation among staff.

## **B. IMPROVING CLIENTS' PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS**

WFNJ/TANF increases pressures on clients to find jobs and pressures on staff to help them do so. Staff of CWAs, workforce agencies, and vendors need to provide services to clients faced with immediate work expectation and lifetime limits for cash assistance. Because clients have varied abilities and needs, the many agencies and vendors need to be able to identify appropriate services to provide.

The WFNJ program study identified several ways in which WFNJ/TANF implementation could be improved to enhance service delivery to clients.

### **# *In the program study counties, changes in CWA staffing and staff responsibilities require more training on WFNJ/TANF policies and case management.***

More training of county welfare staff might improve implementation of the WFNJ/TANF program. Additional training appears particularly warranted in counties that have integrated their income maintenance and case management functions. In the early stage of WFNJ/TANF implementation, integrated workers were not thoroughly trained on their new functions. As a result, case management functions, such as referrals to activities and tracking of client attendance, were not performed efficiently by income maintenance workers who were taking on the case management functions, and case managers were not as effective as income maintenance workers.

Both the state and the counties could strengthen and broaden their training activities to equip workers to perform their responsibilities better. More consultations with counties about their training needs could strengthen the training provided. For example, some county staff suggestions included shortened, better-focused training sessions and more attention to topics such as IRP preparation, sanctions policy, and transitional services. More training in the use of the MIS components also could be provided, especially in the use of FAMIS and OMEGA. At the same time, counties need to consider more cross-training of staff to deepen communication and facilitate sharing of information among staff who have assumed new assignments.

### **# *Redefine the role of NJES so it can play a larger role in assessing clients' employability.***

NJES should help clients connect with the labor market. It is the agency most ready to help clients enter the workforce. However, many county welfare and workforce staff members feel that some clients are not ready for the labor market when they first register for work with NJES. As the clients remaining on WFNJ/TANF are those with serious barriers to employment, the ability of NJES to place them in jobs becomes more difficult.

NJES workers could be given more time to assess the employability of WFNJ/TANF clients. Giving NJES workers more time with clients during the intake process would allow them to assess clients' employability needs. Working with clients' case managers, they could help develop individualized placement strategies for each client. Perhaps those clients found to have serious barriers to employment could be routed to activities other than group job search, and clients ready for employment could continue to work with the NJES worker for suitable job referrals and placements. Together, NJDHS and NJDOL also need to

reexamine how to use the NJES placement experience and its relationship with employers to benefit WFNJ/TANF recipients most.<sup>1</sup>

**# *Provide more individualized case management to clients to help them overcome their barriers to employment.***

As agency caseloads have declined, people remaining on the rolls appear to have major barriers to quick job placement. A consequence of the “work first” program is that job-ready clients with few barriers leave welfare, while those with multiple barriers continue to receive assistance. Thus, many clients remaining on welfare have limited education and work experiences and more health problems (Rangarajan and Wood 1999). Counties realize that responding to the needs of people with multiple barriers to employment, which include low-level skills, long-term welfare dependency, substance abuse, and physical or mental health problems, is perhaps their most daunting challenge. An adequate response may require a greater reliance on individualized case management to help this population move off welfare.

Intensive case management may be valuable to those who face multiple barriers. Case managers providing intensive services may help clients navigate the welfare system, overcome their barriers, and eventually succeed in finding employment and leaving welfare. While some counties do have case managers who work one-on-one with clients to help them overcome their barriers, case managers in other counties are responsible mostly for monitoring clients’ attendance in activities and for initiating appropriate actions when clients do not comply with work requirements or when they change activities.

As the WFNJ/TANF caseload becomes increasingly hard to serve, the state and counties may want to work toward this more individualized level of case management for all clients, but especially for the hardest to serve. The state can advance this by offering more training on case management functions and perhaps providing counties with more resources with which to employ WFNJ/TANF workers skilled in social work and counseling. The training may be most helpful for the integrated workers who come from income maintenance backgrounds.

Counties also can help their case managers increase the level of services they provide to clients. Although not all counties may be able to hire social workers for case management positions, two other strategies identified in the report may help. First, counties could hire a few trained social workers or staff with experience providing this level of service to clients. These workers could help train case managers in how to work one-on-one with clients, identify clients’ needs, and help clients with serious barriers overcome them. Second, CWAs can help reduce some of the other responsibilities of case managers to allow them more time to work with clients. For example, some counties have established central units to handle the paperwork involving clients’ attendance in activities, sanctions, and deferrals. Without such a heavy paperwork load, case managers may be able to spend more time working with their clients.

In the absence of one-on-one case management in the county welfare agencies, some counties are turning to job coaches to provide additional support to clients. Typically, a

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<sup>1</sup>Employer attitudes and working relationships with WFNJ/TANF clients and the agencies that serve them will be featured in the WFNJ evaluation’s community study.

county welfare or workforce agency contracts with a local vendor to hire job coaches to work one-on-one with hard-to-serve clients to help them obtain their jobs and help them keep their jobs once they are placed. Future fieldwork will examine the roles of these job coaches and their ability to provide individualized services.

**# *Inform clients of their responsibilities and benefits under WFNJ/TANF in more effective ways, such as after the intake process and as they leave welfare for employment.***

County staff tell clients about their welfare and post-welfare benefits. From the time of their application for welfare, clients are told about their lifetime limit for cash assistance, the consequences of not participating in work activities, and the child care and medical benefits available to them. However, many clients do not appear to digest this information, and many remain unaware of or uninterested in some benefits, especially the post-welfare child care services available.

At the county level, organizations involved in implementing WFNJ/TANF need to be more systematic and aggressive in providing information to clients about transitional services. If information about services is provided at the point at which a client enters the welfare system, the client will probably not retain it unless the transition to work occurs quickly. Workers acknowledge that, even if placement is quick, clients are given so much information as they navigate the welfare system that much of it is probably not absorbed.

Informing clients about all their benefits and responsibilities at intake is not sufficient. At intake, clients are overwhelmed by the paperwork, and staff have too much work to help clients understand all the information. To inform clients better, one county brings them back to the CWA after their application has been processed, so that they can receive their electronic benefit transfer card and meet with their case manager. In this less pressurized setting, the CWA case manager provides an orientation to the program. Other counties may want to try this method.

A more focused approach in communicating with clients about post-TANF services also seems necessary. Perhaps greater emphasis should be placed on providing information when the client is about to begin, or has just begun, the transition to work. Transition interviews with case managers, in which clients are informed of the services available and told how to access them, are conducted in some counties and have produced good results. These interviews are useful to those clients who wish to continue drawing on services for which they are eligible.

Clients who want to end all contact with the welfare system may not respond to these approaches. However, vendors and other community-based organizations who work with these clients in other contexts may be able to promote these benefits. They could further clients' understanding of the advantages of informing county staff about their employment and encourage them to apply for the post-TANF benefits.



**# *Adopt contractual arrangements that continue vendor involvement in WFNJ/TANF and also encourage WFNJ/TANF goals.***

Vendors, key participants in providing workforce services to clients, have tended to be supportive of WFNJ/TANF. Although some have complained about the flow of client information among CWAs, workforce agencies, and themselves, these complaints have not damaged working relationships. However, other vendor concerns--in particular, client referral and no-show issues in the context of performance-based contracting--are of much more consequence and threaten the willingness of some vendors to continue providing services.

In some instances, counties are responding to vendors' contractual concerns by using different contract arrangements or renegotiating contracts. To accommodate some of their vendors, some counties have opted to use fee-for-service contracts instead of performance-based contracts. Vendors with fee-for-service contracts tend to provide WFNJ/TANF activities that are not designed to place clients directly into employment. Some counties using performance-based contracts have had to renegotiate with vendors as the number of client referrals has declined.

Counties could also negotiate vendor contracts that include the major advantages of cost reimbursement and performance-based contracts. Under these contracts, vendors would be guaranteed cost reimbursement for services provided to a minimum number of clients; services to additional clients would be tied to clients' outcomes. Cost reimbursement contracts with performance incentives could provide vendors with funding they could rely on, while encouraging them to achieve positive outcomes, such as increased basic education, marketable employment skills, and placement and retention in jobs that keep clients employed and off cash assistance.

In response to vendors' problems with high no-show rates, counties could work to interest these clients--that is, those who failed to comply with program rules, are not employed, and are not on welfare--to participate in WFNJ/TANF. For example, some counties are contracting with community-based organizations to establish personal contact with clients whose cases were closed because of noncompliance. Workers from these organizations are determining why clients failed to participate and encouraging them to participate actively in WFNJ/TANF.

Low referrals pose a more complicated problem, to the extent that they involve local politics and interagency competition. County welfare or workforce agencies may show preferences among vendors when making referrals. When referrals are plentiful, this may not create friction; as client referrals decline, however, and if vendors are seen to be in competition with other local public agencies for referrals, tensions between county organizations can escalate. This issue can be resolved only if county officials and administrators exercise strong leadership. Agency staff responsible for client referrals need to understand that the goal of WFNJ/TANF is to move clients into activities that lead to employment. Vendors need to understand the pressures of the welfare system to help move clients quickly off welfare and into gainful employment.

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# **APPENDIX A**

## **WFNJ/TANF FUNDING**

TABLE A.1

FUNDS SUPPORTING WFNJ/TANF PROGRAM  
(Calendar Year 1999 Allocations, in Millions of Dollars)

	Atlantic	Bergen	Camden	Cumberland	Essex	Hudson	Middlesex	Monmouth	Ocean	Salem	10 Program Study Counties	New Jersey (All 21 Counties)
<b>NJDHS Allocations</b>												
TANF Administrative Funds	1,582	1,665	6,491	1,707	11,566	2,728	2,942	2,419	2,235	493	<b>33,828</b>	50,000
TANF Benefits Funds	8,978	8,118	34,084	8,934	99,970	47,871	13,954	11,210	6,721	2,246	<b>242,086</b>	322,970 <sup>a</sup>
TANF Funds Supporting Work Activities	1,659	1,431	6,523	1,990	11,150	7,005	2,631	2,206	1,571	493	<b>36,659</b>	50,888
Child Care Development Block Grant Funds <sup>b</sup>	4,092	4,499	16,326	5,253	29,237	19,483	7,783	9,031	5,464	1,925	<b>103,093</b>	133,887 <sup>c</sup>
Training-Related Expenses	324	369	1,552	417	4,809	2,563	530	585	282	88	<b>11,519</b>	14,960 <sup>c</sup>
Case Management Funds	574	584	2,374	712	4,826	3,238	953	850	589	166	<b>14,866</b>	20,291
21st Century Partnership Grants	--	--	1,000	--	1,000	1,000	1,000	--	--	--	<b>4,000</b>	5,000
<b>NJDOL Allocations</b>												
TANF Workforce Funds	314	286	719	867	3,075	1,717	469	476	285	80	<b>8,288</b>	10,740
WtW Funds	743 <sup>d</sup>	443	1,702	915 <sup>e</sup>	6,006	4,264	437	449	283	-- <sup>e</sup>	<b>15,242</b>	18,453
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,266</b>	<b>17,395</b>	<b>70,771</b>	<b>20,795</b>	<b>171,639</b>	<b>89,869</b>	<b>30,699</b>	<b>27,226</b>	<b>17,430</b>	<b>5,491</b>	<b>469,581</b>	<b>627,189</b>

SOURCE: NJDHS Division of Family Development; NJDOL.

NOTE: This table includes major WFNJ/TANF programs. It excludes funding for some programs, such as the Substance Abuse Initiative.

<sup>a</sup> Calendar year 1998 total assistant payments.

<sup>b</sup> Child Care Development Block Grant funds include funds for child care while WFNJ/TANF recipients are in activities, transitional child care when recipients leave welfare for employment, and child care for low-income families.

<sup>c</sup> Estimated based on 10 program study counties' share of the TANF caseload.

<sup>d</sup> Allocation was for the Atlantic/Cape May WIB.

<sup>e</sup> Allocation was for the Cumberland/Salem WIB.

# **APPENDIX B**

## **SELECTION OF PROGRAM STUDY COUNTIES**

**T**his report is based on the WFNJ/TANF experiences of 10 counties between July 1997 and fall 1999. In visits to these counties, program study team members interviewed people responsible for the implementation and ongoing operation of WFNJ/TANF.

Visiting roughly half of New Jersey's 21 counties provides a set of counties sufficiently diverse to document the full scope of WFNJ/TANF activities and experiences. The recommended counties were chosen purposively to best reflect the characteristics of all counties. This appendix reviews the selection process. (Appendix C provides brief summaries of each program study county.)

## **SELECTING COUNTIES**

The program study counties were selected to capture diversity on six dimensions:

1. WFNJ/TANF caseloads
2. Population
3. Percentage of minority population
4. Region of the state
5. Population density
6. Federal work participation rate

Table B.1 lists data for these variables for all 21 counties.

Recommended counties were chosen by clustering counties based on each measure, as well as by their inclusion in the evaluation's community study. Three counties (Camden, Cumberland, and Essex) were automatically included in the set of counties because they are part of the evaluation's community study. In addition, Hudson County, which currently maintains the second-largest WFNJ/TANF caseload, was included. Clustering resulted in the exclusion of two counties, Passaic and Union, from the study because two large northern, urban counties (Essex and Hudson) had already been chosen. Similar processes produced the final set of program study counties.

TABLE B.1  
KEY DIMENSIONS OF COUNTY DIVERSITY

County	TANF Caseload <sup>a</sup>		Region and County Population <sup>b</sup>	Percentage Minority <sup>b</sup>	Population Density <sup>c</sup>	Participation Rate <sup>d</sup>
	Percentage of State Caseload	Number of Cases				
<b>Northern Region<sup>e</sup></b>						
<b>Essex</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>26,654</b>	<b>750,273</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Low</b>
<b>Hudson</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>15,542</b>	<b>557,159</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Medium</b>
Passaic	7.2	7,691	485,737	47	Urban	Medium
Union	5.9	6,317	500,608	42	Urban	Medium
<b>Bergen</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2,796</b>	<b>858,529</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>Medium</b>
Morris	0.7	799	459,896	16	Suburban	Medium
Warren	0.6	629	98,600	6	Rural	Medium
Sussex	0.4	377	143,030	6	Rural	High
<b>Central Region<sup>e</sup></b>						
<b>Middlesex</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>5,490</b>	<b>716,176</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>Medium</b>
Mercer	4.5	4,874	331,629	33	Suburban	Low
<b>Monmouth</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3,967</b>	<b>603,434</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Ocean</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>3,153</b>	<b>489,819</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>Medium</b>
Somerset	0.9	933	282,900	20	Suburban	High
Hunterdon	0.2	161	122,428	7	Rural	Low
<b>Southern Region<sup>e</sup></b>						
<b>Camden</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>12,637</b>	<b>505,204</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Low</b>
<b>Cumberland</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3,747</b>	<b>140,341</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Medium</b>
<b>Atlantic</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3,387</b>	<b>238,047</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>Medium</b>
Burlington	2.9	3,113	420,323	24	Rural	Medium
Gloucester	2.4	2,581	247,897	15	Rural	Low
Cape May	1.3	1,404	98,069	11	Rural	Medium
<b>Salem</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1,033</b>	<b>64,912</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>High</b>

SOURCE: "Population Proportions for WFNJ Research Sample (TANF Caseloads from July 1997 to December 1998), Work First New Jersey Briefing Materials," Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. 1999; "Current Program Statistics for December 1998," New Jersey Department of Human Services, March 2, 1999; U.S. Census Bureau 1990.

NOTE: Bold = counties included in the program study.

<sup>a</sup>TANF data are for the number of cases handled between July 1997 and December 1998.

<sup>b</sup>Population and minority data are estimated for 1998. Minority populations include all nonwhite and white Hispanic population groups.

<sup>c</sup>The designations are based on traditional understanding of the counties' population densities.

<sup>d</sup>Federal TANF participation rates are estimated for September 1998. Low = participation rates less than 30 percent; medium = participation rates 30 to 40 percent; high = participation rates more than 40 percent.

<sup>e</sup>Regional designations are based on regions used by the Council for Affordable Housing.



# **APPENDIX C**

## **COUNTY SUMMARIES**

# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Atlantic County**

Atlantic County is a southeastern, suburban county. In 1998, the county's estimated population--238,047--was the 15th largest in New Jersey. That year, approximately 20 percent of the population was African American, and 6 percent was Hispanic. Major industries in Atlantic County are the health care, tourism, and casino industries.

Since implementation of Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), Atlantic County's caseload has declined by 60.9 percent (as of January 2000). In January 2000, the county's federal work participation rate was 28.2 percent; statewide, 30.1 of the caseload was participating. Many cash assistance recipients in Atlantic County reside in three municipalities: Atlantic City, Hammonton, and Pleasantville.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Atlantic County has developed an integrated social service delivery system to assist WFNJ participants and other residents in the county. Key agencies involved in this system are the Atlantic County Department of Family and Community Development (DFCD); the Workforce Development Center (WDC), a unit of the DFCD and the county welfare agency; the Atlantic and Cape May Workforce Investment Board (WIB); and the New Jersey Employment Service (NJES). A number of service providers located in the same building as the WDC also play a significant role in implementing WFNJ in Atlantic County.

The DFCD oversees the WDC, which administers the county's WFNJ/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and operates the One-Stop Career Center for residents searching for employment. The One-Stop Career Center integrates welfare and workforce agency functions: it offers help to applicants for cash assistance, provides job placement services, refers clients to vendors of WFNJ work activities, and offers educational counseling. The Atlantic City WDC office processes all TANF applicants. There are two categories of WDC staff: (1) income maintenance workers, who conduct the TANF intake process and make initial eligibility determinations; and (2) employment specialist workers, who perform case management and redetermine eligibility for TANF clients. Income maintenance and employment specialist workers typically function in teams to make case management, eligibility determination, and work activity assignment decisions.

Workforce agencies also have a role in implementing WFNJ in Atlantic County. The WIB works with the DFCD to help cash assistance recipients obtain employment. The WIB, which is located at the WDC's Atlantic City office, oversees workforce development in the county. The NJES, which is located at WDC's Atlantic City and Pleasantville offices, provides work registration

and job placement assistance. In addition, the New Jersey Department of Labor’s business service representative works at the Atlantic City and Pleasantville WDC offices to secure employment opportunities for WFNJ/TANF participants.

Several other agencies that offer assistance to WFNJ/TANF participants are located at WDC offices. Career Opportunities administers the Early Employment Initiative and offers supported-work and vocational rehabilitation services. Atlantic Cape Community College and Atlantic City Youth Build offer job search/job readiness classes; the former organization also provides alternative work experience program opportunities and postsecondary training, while the latter also offers occupational training. Other service providers located at the WDC include the Disabilities Resource Center, which provides supported-work and vocational rehabilitation services; the Atlantic County Housing Authority, which offers case management services; the Atlantic County Vocational Technical School, which provides adult basic education; and the Atlantic County Women’s Center, which provides child care and domestic violence counseling and referrals.

## **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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The application process for TANF in Atlantic County is similar to the process outlined by the state. The WDC also offers group orientation sessions about available programs and program rules to applicants before they are screened by income maintenance workers. The WDC usually assigns a team consisting of one income maintenance worker and one employment specialist to conduct the intake process.

After a TANF case has been certified, WDC staff send the applicant a letter informing her that she is scheduled for a group job search. The job search activity is offered by Atlantic Cape Community College and Atlantic City Youth Build, and WDC staff refer a client to one of the two providers based on the client’s needs. If a client has not found employment during the job search class, Atlantic Cape Community College or the WDC usually determines her next activity.

## **PROMISING STRATEGIES**

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Atlantic County has developed several initiatives to overcome challenges to successful implementation of WFNJ. Here, we highlight the county’s efforts to coordinate service delivery and create a positive environment at the WDC.

- # ***Service Integration.*** Atlantic County’s One-Stop Career Center provides both welfare services and workforce services to community residents. At the center, individuals can apply for cash assistance and receive job placement services, work activity referrals, educational counseling, substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment, and clothing assistance.

# ***Friendly Environment for TANF Clients.*** Clients at the WDC are treated to a friendly environment in which they are referred to as “customers.” The physical layout of the area in which customers are served is spacious, with seating that resembles a reception room in a typical downtown business office.

# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Bergen County**

Bergen County, a northern county adjacent to New York City, has the largest population of New Jersey's 21 counties, with a 1998 estimated population of 858,529. In that year, about 10.9 percent of the population was Asian, and 8.3 percent was Hispanic. Bergen County is one of the most affluent counties in the nation; its median household income in 1997 was approximately \$43,123. Major industries in Bergen are the telecommunications, health, and retail industries.

Since implementation of Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) caseload has dropped by 53.8 percent (as of January 2000), to 1,086. Bergen County's WFNJ work participation rate was 39.2 percent in January 2000; statewide, 30.1 percent of the caseload was participating.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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The three key agencies involved in implementing WFNJ in Bergen County are the Bergen County Department of Human Services (BCDHS), the Bergen County Board of Social Services (BSS), and the Bergen County Workforce Center. The BCDHS is the contract administrator for WFNJ. It contracts with the BSS to administer the TANF program. The BSS, located in Rochelle Park, did not require structural changes to implement WFNJ; it has maintained the structure that was in place under the Realizing Economic Achievement (REACH) program. The main BSS departments involved in WFNJ are the Social Services Department, which contains social workers who provide case management to WFNJ participants, and the Income Maintenance Department, which includes workers who conduct ongoing income maintenance for those participants.

The main workforce agency in the county--the Bergen County Workforce Center--is located in Hackensack, Bergen's largest city. The BCDHS contracts with the Bergen County Workforce Center to provide job search/job readiness assistance to TANF participants who are required to participate in a work activity. The Bergen County Workforce Center also serves as the county's administering agency for Job Training Partnership Act funds and is part of a One-Stop career system for residents seeking access to the job market. The site was established approximately three years ago and is under the administrative umbrella of the County Vocational Board of Education and its administration. Another workforce agency, the New Jersey Employment Service (NJES), provides job search/job readiness training under subcontract to the Bergen County Workforce Center and conducts work registration at the BSS.

Other agencies also have a role in the implementation of WFNJ in Bergen County. The Office for Children is contracted by the state to serve as Bergen's unified child care agency and coordinates child care initiatives for the county. The Workforce Investment Board oversees the One-Stop at the

Bergen County Workforce Center. Service providers include Arlene Simpson Associates, which administers the Early Employment Initiative; the Bergen Community College Philip Ciarco, Jr. Learning Center, which offers basic skills and education courses and alternate work experience program (AWEP) positions; and Teaneck Women Train and Work, Women’s Rights Information Center, the Urban League, Catholic Community Services, Bergen County Community Action Program, and Care PLUS, which provide supported work opportunities.

## **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Applicants for TANF must go through the WFNJ intake process at the BSS. After a client has completed the state-mandated intake process and is approved for TANF, a case manager sends the client a letter informing her that she is scheduled for the four-week job search program at the Bergen County Workforce Center.

The four-week job search program is offered by the Bergen County Workforce Center in conjunction with the NJES. TANF clients spend three days a week at the Bergen County Workforce Center and two days a week at the NJES. Clients begin the job search program at the Bergen County Workforce Center, where they receive an initial orientation and assessment and information on supportive services. During orientation, staff from the Office for Children interview clients and provide them with information on available child care services. At the end of the job search activity, those clients who have not been placed in employment engage in a focus group to assess what assistance they might need to move into employment. Some clients may be placed in on-the-job training or in AWEP opportunities. Other clients who are unable to move into unsubsidized jobs are referred to one of five contractors who offer supported work placements. Clients who meet the definition of “hard to serve” or are teen parents are also referred to a Job Plus coordinator, who is solely responsible for the development of an individualized service plan that leads to employment.

While the Bergen County Workforce Center and the NJES refer clients to activities, the BSS is responsible for maintaining client information in the management information systems, initiating sanctions based on Bergen County Workforce Center and NJES reports of nonparticipation, and redetermining clients’ eligibility for cash assistance. The case manager is responsible for providing ongoing case management, and the income maintenance worker conducts redetermination for TANF, as well as for other programs.

## **PROMISING STRATEGIES**

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Bergen County has developed several initiatives to address key challenges to successful implementation of WFNJ. In this section, we highlight the county’s attempt to adequately train the BSS staff on WFNJ regulations and to address the lack of transportation and postemployment supports for current and former TANF participants:

- # ***Involvement of Training Unit.*** To address the perceived inadequacies of state-sponsored WFNJ training, the BSS's internal training unit has taken an active role. This unit, which consists of two staff members, presents case studies to administrators and line staff each month. Staff have found this training to be helpful because it offers detailed explanations of how to implement particular WFNJ policies.
  
- # ***Augmenting Public Transportation.*** To increase the accessibility of public transportation, the county's Department of Planning is improving existing county services through three initiatives. First, it has developed a computer program that superimposes transit routes on populated areas and companies to help clients map routes to work. Second, the county's Special Transportation Services has received a federal grant in 1999 to purchase five vans to transport clients to and from work and their children to and from child care. Third, the county steering committee for transportation is considering installing a light rail system and creating a feeder van to transport clients to jobs in Secaucus's retail stores.
  
- # ***Creation of the Post-TANF Wrap-Around Fund.*** Since Bergen County's TANF caseloads have been lower than expected, the county is diverting funds to provide postemployment services to welfare recipients who find jobs. The BSS was offered \$160,000 to administer this initiative. The Post-TANF Wrap-Around Fund offers payments for sick child care, car repair and car insurance, transportation to employment, security deposit/moving expenses, rental assistance, and retroactive rent and utility expenses.

# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Camden County**

Camden County is a southeastern, urban county. With a 1998 estimated population of 505,204, Camden County is New Jersey's sixth most populous county. The county's minority population was estimated to be 31 percent in 1998, and African Americans represented the largest minority group. Camden County's major industries include the health and service industries.

Since implementation of Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), Camden County's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload has dropped by 51.5 percent (as of January 2000), to 5,190. In January 2000, the county's federal work participation rate was 25.6 percent; the statewide participation rate was 30.1 percent.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Many organizations play a role in implementing WFNJ in Camden County. They include the Camden County Board of Social Services (BSS); the Workforce Investment Board (WIB); and the Camden County Resource Center (RC), the county's Job Training Partnership Act administrative agency. Other organizations that play a role are the Camden County Improvement Authority (CCIA), the New Jersey Employment Service (NJES), the Camden Department of Human Services's Division of Children, and a variety of nonprofit and for-profit vendors. Because each organization is responsible for offering only a few of the total array of WFNJ services, the degree of interdependence among providers is high.

The BSS is responsible for administering the TANF program. Prior to WFNJ, all case management was provided at the RC by a unit under the BSS director's supervision; in 1998, the BSS withdrew its loaned staff from the RC and assumed direct responsibility for case management. Currently, a case manager is located at each of the RC's two offices to assist clients while they are in the group job search activity. The BSS's two primary units are (1) the income maintenance unit, which certifies eligible clients for cash assistance, conducts initial assessments, grants medical deferrals, administers sanctions, and conducts ongoing income eligibility for TANF; and (2) the case management unit, which assigns clients to job search and job coaching providers and offers clients case management.

The WIB played a leading role in planning the implementation of WFNJ in Camden County, and the organization currently provides oversight and monitoring for the county's WFNJ programs. The WIB has received some assistance in planning and proposal development from the Community Planning and Advisory Council (CPAC), Camden's Human Service Advisory Council. CPAC has convened many meetings of local leaders and service providers to help formulate Camden's WFNJ plan.



The RC and five community-based organizations (CBOs) are the primary agencies offering the group job search activity to WFNJ/TANF clients; they also provide a range of other services. The RC offers job search classes and basic education, and it recruits alternative work experience program (AWEP) providers. Five CBOs--Respond, Inc.; Hispanic Family Development Center; Camden Office of Economic Opportunity; Camden Housing Authority; and Genesis School of Business--provide outreach and job retention services to recipients facing severe employment barriers.

The CCIA and NJES share responsibility for providing job placement services to WFNJ participants. The CCIA holds job fairs, matches clients to specific jobs, and provides transportation services to some clients who obtain jobs in areas far removed from public transit lines. Because the CCIA is also responsible for the county's economic development programs, CCIA staff are able to place some clients in new or growing businesses receiving assistance from the CCIA. The NJES registers WFNJ participants for work and, like the CCIA, seeks to place them in jobs.

The Division of Children is the county's designated Unified Child Care agency. It is responsible for helping clients with child care placements, recruiting child care providers, and issuing child care vouchers. The Division of Children has an office serving TANF recipients in the same building as the BSS.

## **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Applicants for TANF in Camden County must complete the WFNJ intake process at the BSS. After clients have completed this process, income maintenance workers refer them to a screener in the case management unit, who assigns them to their first activity, at either the RC or a CBO.

The first activity for most new clients is at the RC. RC staff assess clients and offer group job search and basic education opportunities. The BSS worker at each RC office provides case management to clients during group job search and assigns clients who fail to find a job to their next work activity. When clients begin their second activity, responsibility for their case management is transferred to a case manager at the BSS.

The BSS randomly assigns hard-to-employ clients to one of the five CBOs. The BSS and CBOs conduct a group orientation for clients before they are referred to a CBO; subsequently, the CBOs provide job coaching and retention services to clients.

## **PROMISING STRATEGIES**

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Camden County has developed several strategies to strengthen implementation of WFNJ in the county. In this section, we highlight the county's efforts to link job placement, economic development, and transportation initiatives and to form partnerships with local CBOs.

- # ***Linking Job Placement, Economic Development, and Transportation Initiatives.*** By assigning TANF job placement responsibilities to the CCIA, the county has coordinated job development activities with two other key functions that the CCIA performs: economic development and transportation. The CCIA job developers work in the same location as those involved in economic development projects and thus are able to quickly obtain job leads from them. When TANF clients are referred to job interviews and obtain jobs at suburban employers that are difficult to reach by public transportation, the job placement staff can often ensure clients that the CCIA's van pools can transport them to the workplace.
  
- # ***Forming Partnerships with CBOs.*** By partnering with local CBOs, the county has enhanced its capacity to reach out to and engage some TANF recipients. The CBOs participated in a two-year planning effort to formulate the design of the county's welfare-to-work programs. Although the large drop in welfare caseloads reduced the flow of referrals and forced some CBOs to cut back their staff, the CBOs continue to perform several key functions, including outreach and job coaching.

# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Cumberland County**

Cumberland County, a southern rural county, is large but not densely populated. Most of the county's estimated 1998 population of 140,341 live in the county's three major cities--Vineland, Bridgeton, and Millville--and more than 30 percent of county residents are African American or Hispanic. In December 1999, the county's unemployment rate was 7.9 percent, nearly twice the state average. Major industries in Cumberland County are the food-processing and glass industries and agriculture.

Since implementation of Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload has dropped by 56.6 percent (as of January 2000) to 1,319. The federal work participation rate was 24.8 percent in January 2000. Statewide, 30.1 percent of cases were participating.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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There are three key agencies responsible for implementing WFNJ in Cumberland County: (1) the Board of Social Services (BSS), (2) the Cumberland County Office of Employment and Training (CCOET), and (3) the Tri-County Community Action Agency. The BSS, which administers TANF, restructured its offices and the functional responsibilities of staff to accommodate its implementation of WFNJ. Intake workers from Vineland, Millville, and Bridgeton were centralized at the Vineland office, creating one county intake unit. The county's child support workers, previously located at both the Bridgeton and Vineland offices, also were consolidated at the Vineland office. Centralizing intake has helped the county to provide more consistent services and conserve resources, but some clients may find traveling to Vineland difficult. The BSS also combined ongoing income maintenance and case management functions, which were previously performed by two positions, into one position, a generic redetermination worker. Each welfare office has its own ongoing unit.

The two other key county agencies--the CCOET and the Tri-County Community Action Agency--are located at the One-Stop career center in Vineland. The CCOET is the county's Job Training Partnership Act administrative entity. It is the primary provider of training in Cumberland County and offers clients job skills assessment, job search assistance, and job placement assistance. The agency did not undertake any significant structural changes under WFNJ. In addition to its Vineland location, the CCOET has two offices in Bridgeton. The Tri-County Community Action Agency has a contract with the state to serve as Cumberland County's Unified Child Care Agency and administers and coordinates child care initiatives for the county.

Other organizations also have a role in the implementation of WFNJ in Cumberland County. New Jersey's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provides assessment and supported work opportunities for the mentally and physically impaired and is becoming a key agency in welfare reform. The Workforce Investment Board coordinates Cumberland County's workforce programs, and the New Jersey Department of Labor's Employment Service registers clients for work and provides job placement assistance (its main office is located at the Vineland One-Stop career center). The Cumberland County Improvement Authority is coordinating plans for improving the county's transportation system.

## **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Applicants for TANF must go through the WFNJ intake process at the BSS. After a client has completed the state-mandated intake process, which includes an orientation to WFNJ, a BSS worker calls the CCOET to schedule an appointment. A client who has been assessed by workforce staff at an earlier time usually is scheduled for an appointment within the week. For a client who has not been assessed, an appointment is scheduled within two weeks for one of the agency's TANF testing days.

The CCOET offers TANF clients an introduction to the agency, assessments, information on supportive services, job search and job placement assistance, and job training. When clients arrive at the CCOET, an assessment counselor conducts an employability readiness assessment and prepares an individual service strategy. An on-site worker from the Tri-County Community Action Agency meets with each client to make child care arrangements. A client's first activity usually is job search; if she has gone through job search before, however, she probably will be assigned to a community work experience program (CWEP) position. Those who need English as a Second Language or basic-skills training are referred to a special job search program conducted by the Vineland Adult Education Center. Clients are encouraged to find employment throughout their time in the job search activity; if a client is still unemployed in the third week of job search, she meets with a staff person to determine her next assignment (for example, basic-skills class, CWEP placement, or a vocational training program).

While the CCOET refers clients to its activities, the BSS is responsible for maintaining client information in the management information systems, initiating sanctions based on CCOET reports of nonparticipation, and redetermining clients' eligibility for cash assistance. The intake worker retains responsibility for the case during the client's first month on cash assistance. The case then is transferred to the redetermination worker for ongoing income maintenance and casework functions.

## PROMISING STRATEGIES

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Cumberland County has developed several initiatives to overcome key challenges to successful implementation of WFNJ. Here, we highlight the county's attempt to address large client deferral rates for health problems and a poor public transportation system.

- # ***Collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Labor Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.*** Cumberland County has a high client deferral rate. There was some indication from caseworkers that clients and doctors may abuse the deferral policy, but caseworkers acknowledged that many clients do have legitimate health problems. To help alleviate pressure on the BSS to assess clients' ability to participate in work activities (doctors' forms often are ambiguous, and caseworkers must determine whether the client can work), the BSS has established a referral process with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.
  
- # ***County Plan to Fund a Transportation Broker to Access the County's Informal Transit System.*** All county staff mentioned transportation as a major problem in the county. There is only one major commuter bus route in Cumberland County, and it is inconvenient for many clients. The county intends to fund a transportation broker who will link clients with its existing informal transit system, which provides transportation to the elderly and disabled. The system will be funded through the county's federal empowerment zone grant and competitive federal welfare-to-work grant.

# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Essex County**

Essex County, a northern urban county, is the second most densely populated county in New Jersey. In 1998, the county had the second-largest estimated population in the state (750,273). That year, minorities represented approximately 60 percent of Essex County's total population, and African Americans were the largest minority group. Employment in the county is concentrated in the transportation, utilities, service, and manufacturing sectors.

Essex County has approximately one-third of the state's total Work First New Jersey (WFNJ)/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) population. Most cash assistance recipients reside in the county's urban core--Newark, East Orange, Orange, and Irvington. Since the implementation of WFNJ, Essex County's caseload declined by 29 percent (as of January 2000). Essex County had a federal work participation rate of 25.7 percent in January 2000. The statewide participation rate was 30.1 percent.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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The principal agencies responsible for implementing WFNJ/TANF in Essex County are (1) the Department of Citizen Services' Division of Welfare (the county welfare agency [CWA]); (2) the Department of Economic Development, Training, and Employment's (DEDTE) Division of Training and Employment (DT&E); (3) the New Jersey Department of Labor's Employment Service (NJES); and (4) Program for Parents (PPF).

Main responsibilities of the CWA include TANF eligibility determination, income maintenance, case management, referrals to emergency services, and administering of sanctions. Until April 1999, the CWA also referred clients to approved WFNJ work activities; after that date, the county executive gave DT&E responsibility for referrals to activities. The two primary units of the CWA are (1) the intake unit, which processes all new applicants; and (2) the active cases unit, which performs ongoing income maintenance and case management for clients after their cases have been approved. When implementing WFNJ, the CWA consolidated its seven field offices into two--one in downtown Newark and one in suburban East Orange. The East Orange branch of the CWA is co-located with the DT&E office.

The DT&E manages approved WFNJ work activities; authorizes sanctions; and awards contracts for child care, transportation, and other services for WFNJ participants. The DT&E has four main units: (1) assessment and referral, (2) vendor administration, (3) finance, and (4) job development. Employment specialists in the assessment and referral unit are the main staff interacting with WFNJ clients; they manage the orientation process and track ongoing cases. When DT&E began managing welfare-to-work activities, about 38 CWA case managers were transferred

to the DT&E to help the agency carry out its new mandate; all but 7 have returned to the CWA, leaving many vacant positions at the DT&E. In addition to giving the DT&E responsibility for work activities, the county executive also folded the former Job Training Partnership Act Division of Training and Employment into the DEDTE, which now oversees both the county's economic development and employment and training activities.

The NJES is co-located at the CWA's two offices, the DT&E, and at one of the key vendors (Essex County College). The NJES's main office is in Newark, near the CWA office. NJES staff register WFNJ participants for work and offer job placement services.

The PFP is Essex County's designated Unified Child Care agency. The agency contracts with DEDTE to administer TANF child care payments and make child care referrals. After PFP became the Unified Child Care agency, it rapidly expanded its staff. Most of the PFP staff are located at the DT&E office in East Orange; a few are located at the Newark branch of the CWA.

Other agencies also have a role in implementing WFNJ in Essex County. The county has contracts with approximately 21 vendors to provide a range of services to TANF clients, including job search, job placement, alternative work experience program opportunities, and supported-work activities. The vendors include Essex County College, La Casa de Don Pedro, North Ward Center, Careerworks, United Community Corporation, and New Community Corporation. In addition, New Community Corporation is the lead organization providing TANF services for the county's federal competitive welfare-to-work grant.

## **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Applicants for TANF must complete the state-mandated intake process at the CWA. After clients' TANF applications have been approved, CWA staff send the clients a letter informing them that they have been approved and that the DT&E will notify them about job search and other work activities.

The DT&E conducts WFNJ orientations, in which clients are referred to specific work activities and child care services. The New Jersey Department of Human Services sends DT&E a list of clients who are not participating in work activities; the DT&E then sends letters to these clients informing them that they are required to attend a particular orientation session. Orientation presentations focus on the implications of work requirements, sanctions, and time limits. The sessions also feature PFP representatives, who explain how clients can choose among their child care options. After the presentations, clients meet with DT&E employment specialists, who assess clients' needs and refer them to a specific vendor; clients then meet with the vendor to which they have been assigned. After a client has been referred to an activity, she meets with PFP staff to make child care arrangements.

## PROMISING STRATEGIES

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Essex County has attempted to address challenges to successful implementation of WFNJ by creating an organizational link to economic development and collaborating with some community-based organizations (CBOs):

- # ***Link to Economic Development.*** Because the DEDTE now functions as both the county's economic development agency and the coordinator of welfare-to-work programs, there may be more opportunity for clients to work in companies receiving county economic development financing. Although this source of jobs does not appear to be particularly large, it may grow in the future.
  
- # ***Partnership with CBOs.*** Essex County's WFNJ initiative has relied heavily on some of the largest local CBOs to provide services to the TANF population. The county has sought to keep CBOs engaged by responding to their concerns expeditiously and by streamlining the payment process so that CBOs are reimbursed promptly. The expanded role of CBOs may help engage clients in activities and move them into the workforce.



# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Hudson County**

Hudson County, a northern county across the Hudson River from New York City, is densely populated. The county's estimated population in 1998--557,159--was the fifth largest in the state. Hudson County has the highest percentage of minority residents and the highest proportion of Hispanic residents of any county in New Jersey. Major industries in the county are the retail and service industries.

Since the implementation of Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), Hudson County's caseload has declined by 40.8 percent (as of January 2000) to 8,612. The county's caseload is 17 percent of the state's total Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) caseload. In January 2000, the county's WFNJ work participation rate was 31.9 percent; statewide, 30.1 percent of cases were participating.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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The key agencies responsible for implementing WFNJ in Hudson are the Hudson County Department of Health and Human Services (HCDHHS) and the Department's Division of Social Services (DSS). The county's two Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) service delivery areas--the Jersey City JTPA and the Hudson County Career Center--and the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) have more limited roles in WFNJ.

Management of the WFNJ program in Hudson County is centralized at the HCDHHS. Prior to WFNJ, the DSS had primary responsibility for managing the welfare program; since then, the HCDHHS director has played a more active role in overseeing the agency's WFNJ contracts. The HCDHHS also manages Hudson's formula and competitive welfare-to-work (WtW) programs.

The DSS, which administers TANF, did not need to make major structural changes to implement WFNJ. Main components of the DSS are (1) the intake unit, which takes applications for benefits; (2) the eligibility unit, which redetermines clients' eligibility for cash assistance; and (3) the case management unit, which maintains ongoing contact with clients, monitors attendance in work activities, and initiates sanctions when necessary. The Urban League of Hudson County, the county's Unified Child Care agency, arranges child care for TANF recipients and makes all child care payments. The agency's WFNJ staff are co-located at the DSS and work directly with clients to explain their child care options.

The two JTPA agencies and the WIB have smaller roles in implementing WFNJ. The JTPA agencies contract with the HCDHHS to provide some work activities to TANF clients, including job

search and basic and occupational skills classes. The WIB works with employers to develop jobs and customized training programs for WFNJ participants.

Hudson County has expanded the number of vendors involved in providing work activities, making use of an expanding array of funding sources (including the formula and competitive WtW grants and 21st Century state grant). Some of the largest vendors, who provide job search, supported work, alternative work experience program opportunities, and occupational training, include Catholic Community Services, CET Technical Institute, Universal Communications Enterprise, Occupational Center of Hudson County, and Council for Airport Opportunities.

## **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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The applicant process for TANF in Hudson County differs slightly from the process outlined by the state. An applicant first sees a receptionist at the DSS, who determines appropriate programs for the client. Then, a child support program worker meets with the client to ensure her compliance with the Child Support Program. Next, a New Jersey Department of Labor Employment Service (NJES) worker registers the client for work. The client then returns to the receptionist and is assigned to an intake worker. After her application for TANF is taken, the client meets again with a child support worker, who conducts a more in-depth interview with the client.

Once a client's case has been granted, an appointment is made for her to attend a group orientation session and to meet with her case manager. When the client arrives at the DSS, she is offered an orientation to WFNJ; this orientation includes brief presentations by 6 or 7 of the 14 vendors (they rotate each week) who provide job search in the county. Following orientation, the client, with her case manager, selects a vendor; the client then meets with the vendor, who decides whether or not to accept her into the program. Vendors conduct open-entry job search classes so that they can engage clients right after orientation, when they are thought to be the most motivated to participate. After meeting with a vendor, the client returns to her case manager, receives a child care referral, and meets with a staff member of the Urban League to learn about her child care options.

## **PROMISING STRATEGIES**

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Hudson County has created several initiatives to overcome challenges to successful implementation of WFNJ. Here, we highlight the county's attempt to train staff on WFNJ procedures and to expand the number of work activities available to clients:

- # ***Professional Staff Training.*** The county has invested in staff skills in two ways. First, the DSS continues to maintain a training unit with professional staff. The staff deliver a seven-week training program to new workers and then observe the trainees working, review their paperwork before it is submitted to a supervisor, and meet with them to

answer questions. The staff also offer in-service workshops to current workers. Second, the director of HCDHHS retained Janus Associates, a private consultant, to deliver training to case managers.

# ***Broad Menu of Work Activities.*** The HCDHHS has expanded both the number of vendors and clients' ability to choose their work activities. Clients hear presentations from 6 or 7 of the 14 job search vendors in the county during orientation, which provides an opportunity for them to learn firsthand about the programs and make an informed choice. By offering clients more options, HCDHHS managers hope to increase the likelihood that clients will be more interested in work activities and more likely to attend classes.

# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Middlesex County**

Middlesex County, located in central New Jersey, is a large, suburban, middle-class county. The two main urban areas in the county are New Brunswick and Perth Amboy. The county's 1998 estimated population of 716,176 made the county the third largest in the state. Thirty percent of the residents are African American, Hispanic, or members of other minorities. Many county residents are employed in the health industry. Rutgers University is a major employer in the county.

The county's caseload contained 3.2 percent of the state's welfare population in January 2000. From July 1997, the caseload had fallen by 61.2 percent. In January 2000, 33.6 percent of Work First New Jersey (WFNJ)/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients were participating in WFNJ/TANF work activities; statewide, 30.1 percent of the caseload was participating.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Several agencies in Middlesex County have key roles in the WFNJ/TANF program. The Middlesex Board of Social Services (MBSS) runs the application process for WFNJ/TANF, certifies applications for cash assistance, and provides ongoing case management services. MBSS's two welfare offices--one in New Brunswick and one in Perth Amboy--are divided into three basic units: (1) intake, (2) case supervision, and (3) case management. The intake unit screens applicants for all the programs that the MBSS offers and processes applications for cash assistance. After an applicant has been certified for cash assistance, half her case goes to the case supervision unit for ongoing income maintenance, and the other half goes to the case management unit for monitoring of her participation in WFNJ/TANF.

The county Department of Employment and Training (DET) contracts with and manages the set of subcontracts for WFNJ/TANF activities. The WFNJ director, who is a DET staff member, enters into subcontracts supported with New Jersey Department of Human Services employability funds and monitors these subcontracts. The WFNJ director has subcontracts with three main vendors: (1) the New Brunswick Board of Education provides group job search, alternative work experience program (AWEP), and supported-work activities; (2) the Perth Amboy Board of Education provides AWEP activities; and (3) Middlesex County College has subcontracts for the Early Employment Initiative, AWEP, and job search.

Other DET staff are responsible for subcontracts funded by the New Jersey Department of Labor and welfare to work. DET subcontractors include the New Brunswick Adult Learning Center and Elijah's Promise, a local soup kitchen. Both provide AWEP opportunities for clients.

Several other entities are involved in WFNJ. The regional office of the New Jersey Employment Service registers WFNJ/TANF clients for work. Catholic Charities is the Unified Child Care agency that administers the WFNJ child care program. In fall 1999, the county, which had been part of a multicounty workforce investment board (WIB), began forming its own board. Thus, the role the new WIB would have in WFNJ/TANF was unclear.

## COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY

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After an MBSS screener identifies the appropriate services for the client, clients entering the welfare system follow the state-mandated intake process. After an application is certified for cash assistance, an income maintenance worker in one of the undercare units and a case manager in the case management unit assume responsibility for the client's case. The worker in the case supervision unit is responsible for the client's six-month recertifications for cash assistance, post-TANF Medicaid, and, if the client does not participate in work activities, the sanctions process. The case manager refers the client to her WFNJ activity, monitors her attendance, and initiates sanctions if the client is noncompliant.

Most new cash assistance recipients are referred to the group job search for their first activity. The group job search activity begins the first Monday of the month. Toward the end of the job search, if the client has not found employment, the job search vendor evaluates the client and recommends to the case manager an appropriate next activity for the client. Often, the next activity is an AWEF.

## PROMISING STRATEGIES

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Promising features of WFNJ/TANF in Middlesex County are described in more detail here:

- C ***Designation of Specialists to Monitor Sanctions and Deferrals.*** One case manager reviews all decisions to initiate sanctions, and another reviews all medical deferrals. The MBSS initiated this process to apply sanctions and deferrals more consistently and to better monitor clients receiving sanctions or deferrals. For example, the case manager responsible for deferrals tracks the ending date of a client's medical deferral and refers the client to an activity that will begin soon after the deferral ends.
- C ***Development of a Strong Substance Abuse Initiative.*** The MBSS has taken a strong interest in developing a solid substance abuse initiative--the state program to refer clients suspected of substance abuse for assessment and appropriate services. MBSS administrators have placed staff experienced in dealing with these issues in the intake unit to help intake workers ask the substance abuse screening questions.

# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Monmouth County**

Monmouth County, located along the Atlantic coast in central New Jersey, is a large suburban and middle-class county. Its 1998 estimated population of 603,434 made the county the fourth largest in the state. The county's unemployment rate (4.1 percent) was lower than the state's unemployment rate (5.3 percent) in December 1999. Major employers include Fort Monmouth, Lucent Technologies, and a naval base.

In January 2000, the county's caseload contained about 3.6 percent of the state's welfare population, but the county had the seventh-largest welfare population in the state. From July 1997, the caseload had fallen by 46.6 percent. Monmouth County had 41.1 percent of Work First New Jersey (WFNJ)/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients participating in activities in January 2000; 30.1 percent of cases were participating statewide.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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The Monmouth County Department of Human Services (MCDHS) is the main agency responsible for WFNJ/TANF. This department was created in 1990, and divisions responsible for welfare, employment and training, mental health, and transportation were placed under its umbrella. Two MCDHS divisions--the Division of Social Services (DSS) and the Division of Employment and Training (DET)--have major responsibility for the welfare program.

The DSS administers the welfare program. Within the DSS, the two main sections responsible for WFNJ/TANF are intake and undercare. The intake unit workers interview initial applicants and process and certify their applications. After a client has been certified for cash assistance, the case goes to the undercare section for income maintenance and case management. In four of six undercare units, integrated workers perform both functions for their clients. A social worker assigned to each of the four units helps with case management work. In the fifth unit, social workers refer clients to their first and second activities and provide ongoing case management to hard-to-serve clients. The sixth unit services the nonneedy caseload. The workers in this unit are new hires serving their three-month probationary period.

The DET oversees the work activities provided through WFNJ/TANF. Its major responsibility is to solicit proposals from vendors to provide WFNJ/TANF activities and manage the subsequent contracts. The DET also is the administering agency for Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds and manages the county Workforce Investment Board.

Other organizations involved in WFNJ/TANF are Child Care Services of Monmouth County (CCSMC), the New Jersey Department of Labor's Employment Service (NJES), MCDHS's Division

of Transportation (DOT), and various vendors. The CCSMC, a private, not-for-profit organization, has the state contract to serve as the county's Unified Child Care agency. The NJES registers WFNJ/TANF clients for work, seeks to place clients in jobs, and conducts the WFNJ/TANF group job search activity. The DOT's transportation coordinator had been responsible for coordination of clients' travel to work activities under a pilot transportation program, which has ended. The DET awarded 16 WFNJ/TANF contracts to nine vendors. These vendors, which include ARC of Monmouth, Brookdale Community College, and Water & Sims Employment Services, Inc., provide a range of services to clients.

## **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Clients entering the welfare system follow the state-mandated intake process. After being screened by an income maintenance specialist at the DSS, the applicant meets with a child support worker to comply with child support program rules and with the NJES worker to register for employment. After the applicant has completed these interviews, the application for TANF is taken. The worker who took the application certifies or denies it for cash assistance.

Cases certified for cash assistance are transferred to the central control unit (CCU) in the DSS's undercare section for case management and to one of the other undercare units for income maintenance. A social worker in the CCU refers the client to her first activity (typically a group job search) by mail. At the beginning of the group job search activity, the supervisor and a social worker from the CCU give participating clients an orientation to WFNJ/TANF. Toward the end of the four-week group job search, clients who have not found employment are interviewed by one of the social workers, who refers the client to her next activity.

After the applicant has left the group job search, the case management for the case is transferred to one of the integrated units in undercare. There the client receives ongoing income maintenance and case management. The client's worker handles all referrals to subsequent activities, which may include JTPA services through the DET, an alternative work experience program position at Brookdale Community College, and other available services.

## **PROMISING STRATEGIES**

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Promising features of WFNJ/TANF implementation in Monmouth County are described in more detail below:

- # ***Structure of Undercare Units.*** The integration of income maintenance and case management functions into one position has posed difficulties for many county welfare agencies, including the Monmouth County DSS. However, the model used in Monmouth County provides the integrated workers, who mostly performed income

maintenance tasks before integration, with support to perform their case management functions. A social worker is assigned to each unit to provide training and ongoing assistance to the integrated workers. Social workers also provide ongoing case management to the county's hard-to-serve WFNJ/TANF population.

# ***Gradual Implementation of WFNJ/TANF.*** Monmouth County has had consistently high work participation rates. Administrators credit the high rates to their careful introduction of WFNJ/TANF to their pre-TANF caseload. Half the clients who had been receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children were introduced to WFNJ/TANF during their first income eligibility redeterminations for cash assistance after the program began. The other half were brought into WFNJ/TANF at their next redetermination.



# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Ocean County**

Ocean County, located along the Atlantic seaboard in central New Jersey, is one of the state's largest counties, as measured in square miles, and has the eighth-largest population. About one-quarter of the county's 1998 estimated population of 489,819 was elderly. Most county residents were white; only nine percent were nonwhite. Ocean County has a growing economy. The number of jobs in the county is projected to grow by almost 17 percent during the period from 1996 to 2006. Expansion in the health and tourism industries is fueling job growth.

Ocean County's welfare caseload has declined by 60.8 percent (from 2,498 in July 1997 to 980 in January 2000). The county's Work First New Jersey (WFNJ)/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) federal work participation rate was 26.1 percent in January 2000; statewide, 30.1 percent of cases were participating.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Key WFNJ/TANF organizations in Ocean County are the Board of Social Services (BSS); the Ocean County P.I.C. (which is the county's administering agency for the Job Training Partnership Act [JTPA]); and the Ocean County Department of Human Services (OCDHS). The BSS handles the income eligibility of incoming and ongoing WFNJ/TANF clients and refers clients to their initial work activity. The P.I.C. handles referrals to subsequent activities for clients who were not successful in the job search. The P.I.C. also monitors all WFNJ/TANF contracts (including New Jersey Department of Human Services [NJ DHS] and New Jersey Department of Labor [NJ DOL] WFNJ funds and NJ DOL welfare-to-work funds). The director of the OCDHS, who also is the director of the Human Services Advisory Committee and the workforce investment board, oversees WFNJ/TANF in the county. One of her main responsibilities is to convene the county collaborative meetings.

The BSS changed its structure to accommodate WFNJ/TANF. Before WFNJ, welfare was administered by intake and income maintenance units in the income maintenance division, and case management was administered by social workers in the social services division. To address administrative funding cuts and other changes, the BSS integrated the units that performed intake, ongoing eligibility determinations, and case management functions. Workers in WFNJ/TANF income maintenance units now perform all these functions. These units are in each of the BSS's three offices (in Toms River, Lakewood, and Manahawkin). The income maintenance division also has a special unit that handles quality control, fair hearing, deferrals, interactions with the P.I.C., and special projects. The social services division has maintained its unit of social workers who do case management for the hardest-to-serve WFNJ/TANF clients. Clients referred to the social workers in this unit are those who have substance abuse or domestic violence issues, are homeless, are

teenagers not in school, or are long-term cash assistance recipients. Clients whom the income maintenance worker feels incapable of handling are also referred to the social workers in this unit.

In addition to the BSS, P.I.C., and OCDHS, key county organizations include the Children's Home Society; the county's Unified Child Care agency; NJDOL's Employment Service (NJES), which registers WFNJ/TANF clients for work and runs the group job search activity; and various providers, including Lakewood Community Schools and Waters and Sims Employment Services, Inc.

## **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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An applicant entering the welfare system follows the state-mandated intake process for WFNJ/TANF. After her case has been certified for cash assistance, the client remains with the unit that took her application for ongoing income maintenance.

Case management is performed by one of two units. If the case is identified as hard to serve, a referral is made to the social services unit for intensive case management; otherwise, an integrated worker within the initial income maintenance unit performs both income maintenance and case management functions. Either the social worker in the social services unit or a worker in the integrated unit refers the client to her first activity, which typically is group job search provided by the NJES.

Clients who are not successful in the group job search are sent to the P.I.C. for assessments and JTPA certification. P.I.C. staff analyze clients' assessments and recommend the clients' next activities. Although the P.I.C. recommendations for subsequent activities are usually followed, the hard-to-serve clients' welfare case managers have more input into their clients' activities. After a client has found employment, either through group job search or subsequent activities, Waters and Sims provides job retention support and tracking.

## **PROMISING STRATEGIES**

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Promising features of WFNJ/TANF in Ocean County are described in more detail below:

- # ***Provision of Intensive Case Management.*** Ocean County has maintained a unit of social workers to provide intensive case management to its hardest-to-serve WFNJ/TANF caseload. When a social worker first meets with a client, the social worker conducts a psychosocial assessment of the client to learn about her past experiences and her barriers to employment. The social worker tries to link the client with community supports to help her overcome her barriers. The case management the

social workers provide is in contrast to that provided by the integrated workers, who know less about the WFNJ/TANF and community services available to their clients.

# ***Effective Collaborations.*** The county's collaborative for WFNJ/TANF has grown under WFNJ/TANF. This may be due in part to a WFNJ/TANF coordinator who is involved in both the county's welfare and workforce agencies. The monthly collaborative meetings include all those involved in providing services to WFNJ/TANF clients. Collaborative members brainstorm to solve problems, such as the clients' high no-show rate and an uneven flow of services to clients.

# **WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY COUNTY SUMMARY**

## **Salem County**

Salem County, a southern rural county, is the least populated county in the state. Most of the county's 64,912 residents (estimated 1998 population) live in the county's major towns--Salem and Penns Grove. Most residents are white; African Americans are the dominant minority group in the county (about 15 percent of the total population). Some of the largest employers of county residents are E.I. du Pont, Public Service Electric & Gas, and Salem Memorial Hospital.

Since implementation of Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload has dropped by 65.3 percent (as of January 2000), to 264. The federal work participation rate for TANF families was 36.5 percent in January 2000; statewide, the rate was 30.1 percent.

### **COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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The Salem County Board of Social Services (BSS) has primary responsibility for WFNJ. The agency determines clients' eligibility, refers clients to their work-related activities, monitors clients' participation in these activities, and initiates sanctions for noncompliance or nonparticipation. Community providers, under subcontract to the BSS, supply most of the work activities. The service providers include Salem Community College, PRAC, and the Adult Rehabilitation Center. The Salem County Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) administrative agency provides vocational training programs to some WFNJ clients and assessments of the TANF population. The BSS itself conducts additional supported-work activities, as well as the Early Employment Initiative (the state's formal diversion program) and the supported work program.

Other local agencies supply specialized services to TANF clients. For example, the NJDOL Employment Service provides job referrals and the Tri-County Community Action Agency arranges for child care during work activities, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides assessment and training programs for medically restricted clients.

### **COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY**

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Applicants for TANF must go through the WFNJ intake process at the BSS. At intake, the applicant is assigned to individual job search. Once the client is certified for cash assistance, the BSS intake worker assigns the client to her first activity (usually a group job search) and assessment. The intake worker monitors the client's participation until she leaves WFNJ/TANF or until 60 days

from the date of certification. A case manager is assigned to the intake unit to help the intake workers with their case management responsibilities.

After 60 days, the case is transferred to an ongoing unit, where an income maintenance worker and a case manager jointly maintain the case. The income maintenance worker's responsibilities are similar to those she had before WFNJ; she is responsible for monitoring the client's ongoing eligibility. The case manager is responsible for clients' participation in WFNJ. As a client completes one activity, the case manager refers her to other activities, such as supported-work, or assigns her to an alternative work experience program (AWEP) or a community work experience program (CWEP) position. She also decides whether and when to impose sanctions for nonparticipation based on the client's cooperation and attendance.

## **PROMISING STRATEGIES**

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Salem County has initiated efforts to reduce the number of its medical deferrals, and the BSS has developed a staffing structure that combines income maintenance and case management functions into one unit:

- # *System to Involve the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.* The BSS has systematically sought to refer clients with deferrals to the DVR, so that their medical or developmental disabilities can be identified and addressed. Staff claim that this relationship has helped to bring down the number of deferrals on their caseload.
  
- # *Pairing of WFNJ/TANF Case Managers with Income Maintenance Workers.* After administrators decided that their implementation of an integrated model for income maintenance and case management functions was not working, the BSS implemented a system in which a WFNJ case manager is assigned to each ongoing income maintenance unit. The unit's case manager works with the income maintenance workers on WFNJ policies and work activities. This system allows workers to have separate functions but continues to integrate income maintenance workers in WFNJ issues.