

THE ROLE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES IN WELFARE REFORM

By

Michael Peterson

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Dr. Robert Peters
Investigation Advisor

The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
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The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751

Abstract

Peterson	Michael	S
(Last Name)	(First)	(Initial)

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This literature review provides a comprehensive review of professional journals, web-based sites, and other related materials, (i.e. longitudinal studies, etc.), to determine what role Rehabilitation Services has played to date in the provision of services to welfare recipients who have disabilities and have been affected by The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

A comprehensive exploration of a variety of literature has determined that many people within the roles of the welfare systems have disabilities which adversely affect their abilities to obtain or maintain work. Many of these individuals have document able

physical and/or mental disabilities yet the welfare system lacks the expertise to effectively serve the population.

Print and electronic literature will be examined and analyzed to determine the role Rehabilitation Services Administration has played in providing the required leadership, monies, and technical assistance necessary for helping this population gain self-sufficiency, retain welfare benefits, or obtain the necessary federal/state subsidy(ies) in order to sustain their quality of life.

The literature evaluated provided evidence that Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has initiated the appropriate leadership, monies, and technical assistance to meet the needs of the population. RSA has allocated funds for Research and Demonstration Projects to aide States in developing state-of-the-art programs that will in turn provide best practices on a national level for serving welfare recipients who have disabilities.

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I have attended the University of Wisconsin-Stout off and on since 1982. In that

time, I managed to earn a Bachelor of Science Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation and almost a Master of Science Degree in Rehabilitation Facility Administration and Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. I failed to complete the thesis in 1990 for the first M.S. degree and this project is the result of another attempt at completing the requirements for at least the Counseling degree.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The complicated and uncoordinated service delivery systems of the past can no longer meet the challenging needs of the changing face of the workforce, population, economy, and

public opinion without collaborating with other providers (Lunz, Hobbins, Peterson, & Whelan, 2000). Multiple governmental entities are examining the systems barriers which need to be eliminated in order for consumers to receive streamlined and practical employment services in pursuit of getting and keeping a job (Martin, 2002).

A prime example of the complicated array of systems is the existence of more than 90 separate agencies which provide for employment related services to a myriad of sects within the general population (Lunz, et al., 2000). For the general population, it is not only a problem of finding and keeping a job anymore. Other problems (such as where to go, what rules apply where, who does what), provide for system barriers which make the whole process of receiving help to reenter the workforce an extremely complicated process (Lunz, et al., 2000).

Welfare Reform

The Social Security Act of 1935 provided the country with its first welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). AFDC provided cash assistance to poor, primarily female-headed families with children (Albert & King, 2001). AFDC was a federal and State partnership of sorts with complex eligibility guidelines and an abundant amount of rules and regulations however, States were allotted flexibility in setting levels for financial support (Albert & King, 2001).

The first changes in welfare law happened with the passing of the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA). FSA required each State to develop a Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program (JOBS) whereby expanding welfare services to include employment related options. Then in 1992, the federal waiver expansion process provided more program participation requirements for consumers which could be seen as the beginning of the end of AFDC (LaCheen, 2001).

On August 22, 1996, The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation

Act or PRWORA (P. L. 104-193) was signed by President Bill Clinton which dramatically changed the nation's welfare system. PRWORA legislation repealed AFDC and replaced it with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF came in the form of block grants to States. The feds provided the regulatory guidelines and States were allowed the flexibility to establish their own regulations within the constructs of any Human Rights or other applicable laws (Johnson, 1997). In return for this type of block grant, States have a Maintenance of Effort (MOE) obligation to spend a specified amount of money on low-income families (LaCheen, 2001).

Any State receiving TANF funds was still subject to the rules established by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (LaCheen, 2001).

This comprehensive bipartisan welfare reform plan required recipients of welfare to work in exchange for time-limited assistance. Moving people from Welfare-to-Work (WtW) was now one of the primary goals of the federal welfare policy.

Workforce Centers

On August 7, 1998, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Workforce Investment Act (P.L. 105-220) as produced by the U.S. Department of Labor; Employment and Training Administration. This Act provides a framework for a comprehensive national workforce preparation and employment system designed to meet the needs of the nation's job seekers and employers. Many subparts exist within the Workforce Investment Act of which Title IV is important to this researcher, the re authorization of the Rehabilitation Act. This Title not only amends the Act but links State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs to State and local workforce development systems.

Rehabilitation Services

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided for a myriad of services for people with disabilities to include State run Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Since its inception, the Act has seen many changes of which one appeared in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). The amendments to the Act via the WIA simplified access to vocational rehabilitation services, streamlined administrative processes, improved discretionary programs (Choice, Systems Change, Projects with Industries), and provided greater access to information technology. Even though the Act was amended by WIA, it remains a freestanding statute.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

PRWORA reforms include work requirements, time limitations, and rules of eligibility for TANF recipients. The feds provided the regulatory guidelines and States were allowed the flexibility to establish their own regulations (Johnson, 1997).

TANF delegated welfare program responsibilities to States and localities and increased the role of community based and faith based organizations (Reisch & Sommerfeld, 2002). Per federal policy, each State, territory, and tribe was allowed to determine each component of their welfare programs. However, even with this flexibility, federal rules still applied to all States receiving TANF funds (LaCheen, 2001).

Welfare Consumers

After approximately six decades of welfare, most Americans believed in helping those in need, however, most Americans also believed that poverty was due to a lack of motivation and a result of being lazy (MacLeod, Montero, & Speer, 1999).

So in order to provide a better understanding of the characteristics of welfare beneficiaries, Larrison, Nackerud and Risler (2001) conducted a study to identify the typical consumer and found four distinct groups of welfare consumers.

Group 1 was comprised predominantly of single young women who had children prior to age eighteen.

Group 2 contained adults between their late twenties and late forties. These parents took care of school age children.

Group 3 was comprised of middle aged adults who either had a health problem or had a child with a health problem.

Group 4 was made up of families who were headed by a grandparent, elderly or retired person. There was a one-generation removed child cared for in the family (Larrison, et al., 2001).

One serious flaw of the new TANF regulations is that the policy makers identified only two groups of consumers; children and families (Larrison, et al., 2001). The first group is composed of children under the age of 18. The other group is comprised of families which policy makers viewed as single mothers with limited job experiences, low educational attainments and a high resistance to work (Seccombe, Walters, & James, 1999). This group is subject to a 60-month time limit for receiving TANF cash assistance. Other work related requirements also are attached to this group thereby allowing States freedom to determine sanctioning and/or the elimination of benefits should recipients not comply with the rules (Larrison, et al., 2001). The good news is that many States have exempted people with disabilities from the time requirements and the work requirements established by TANF (Seccombe, et al., 1999).

Even though many States have exempted people with disabilities, a serious problem occurs when consumers and the welfare service providers are unaware of the existence of such a

disability and those consumers are whereby sanctioned due to disability related circumstances (Lunz, et al., 2000).

Regardless of how the federal or state government conceptualizes and develops its welfare programming, it is quite apparent that welfare consumers of the past, now have a personal responsibility to actively pursue support for their families. Without this activity, they may be penalized by reduction in subsidies received and/or even a complete elimination of their benefits (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 1997). Another important consideration for public policy makers is whether or not the reformed welfare system has been able to meet the comprehensive needs of not only the easy-to-place but also the hard-to-place consumer (Beckerman & Fontana, 2001).

The role of a healthy economy is pivotal to whether or not the welfare roles increase or decrease (Albert & King, 2001). However, regardless of the size of the welfare roles, it is the caseworker who stands as the primary player in providing and/or coordinating the services required to aid the consumer in their pursuit of self-sufficiency (Ritter, 1997).

Caseworkers

Welfare office caseworkers have traditionally been employees who are more suited toward clerical work such as determining eligibility and cutting checks (Ritter, 1997). Due to the severe changes in welfare reform, those workers must now be professional generalists in helping people to become self-sufficient. The caseworker is not just a paper pusher anymore but rather a multi-needs specialist wrapped into one (Ritter, 1997). The caseworker needs to be knowledgeable in day care, substance abuse, domestic violence, illiteracy issues, employment practices, education and family supports, mental health and other disability related issues, public transportation and a myriad of other issues in order to perform their jobs efficiently (Ritter, 1997). The caseworker also requires cultural competence in order to effectively serve the variety

of consumers on their caseloads (Edens, 2000).

Some of the more complicated competencies necessary for effective case management are a basic understanding of a variety of disabilities, a working knowledge of disability related issues, and an understanding of how to assess the probability of a consumer having such disability. This knowledge is critical to effectively integrate disability related services into an employment plan. Without the appropriate services, the TANF rules and regulations may actually hinder the consumer in reaching his or her highest level of self-sufficiency. With the utilization of appropriate disability related services, the consumer may also be kept from being sanctioned and losing any of the nominal benefits they require for sustaining an already hard lifestyle (Lunz, et al., 2000).

Statement of the Problem

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) dramatically changed the nation's welfare system. This welfare reform not only established work requirements and time-limits for consumers but also required governmental programs to create new partnerships and strengthened existing ones between government, community based agencies and businesses utilizing best practices for collaboration among all three (Delage, Roles, & Walchuk, 2002).

Not only did PRWORA re-affirm the 30 year old government and non-profit collaboration, it also made a range of services provided by non-profits more critical for consumer success and more complicated to access (Reisch & Sommerfeld, 2002). In addition, there are multiple community-based and other such agencies that provide training and employment services. Consumers who rely on governmentally sponsored services can reap incredible benefits from the services they receive. However, navigating the multitude of

agencies, policies, procedures and processes can be an incredible barrier for consumers striving toward self-sufficiency (Lunz, et al., 2000).

The Office of Special Education/Rehabilitation Services Administration (OSERS/RSA) is the overseer of the State's Vocational Rehabilitation Programs. Since RSA is challenged with providing leadership to the nation's States in serving people with disabilities with employment related services, what is their role in providing such services to consumers who receive public support? Are they doing what is needed to further the field of vocational rehabilitation when serving welfare consumers with disabilities. This literature review will attempt to determine RSA's role in providing the leadership to the country through a thorough review of current literature.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

This research project is a literature review which will utilize available print and electronic media to determine the federal government Rehabilitation Services Administration's involvement in enhancing available services for people with disabilities who receive public support.

Professional journals will be reviewed to locate suitable literature to define welfare reform, consumers of welfare and the trends or lack thereof in the field of vocational rehabilitation. Vocational Rehabilitation journals will be examined via the worldwide web and also through the various search techniques within the walls of the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Library.

The time frame for literature to be reviewed will be post August 22, 1996; the day President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Any literature on vocational rehabilitation and welfare reform available before that date would be mute (with the exception of a historical welfare review).

Various search engines will be utilized to find information on the World Wide Web pertaining to welfare reform and vocational rehabilitation. Searches will include the following matches for terms: vocational rehabilitation/welfare reform, rehabilitation/welfare, TANF/rehabilitation services, TANF/OSERS, TANF/RSA, and TANF/OSERS/RSA.

Subjects:

There will be no subjects involved with this literature review.

Instruments:

There will be no instruments utilized in the collection of information for this literature review.

Unknowns:

All information to be collected for this literature review will be archival information found either in print, on electronic media, or garnered through personal interviews with professionals within their respective fields. This research is relying on the validity and reliability of the written materials and other information exchange media to be accurate to the fullest extent

possible. However, the reliability and validity of all authors is not known yet peer reviewed journals were primary sources of information reviewed.

Limitation:

The limitations of this study will be due to the constructs associated with search engines and other search formats in determining the scope of the current situation in relation to vocational rehabilitation and welfare programs. Not all welfare programs in collaboration with rehabilitation services have documented their programming and/or outcomes. This study is also limited to the amount of information this researcher was able to compress and analyze in the time period available.

Data Analysis:

This literature review will utilize materials provided via critical thinking techniques for determining the current relationship between TANF and RSA.

CHAPTER 3

Review of the Literature

Welfare Reform

The Social Security Act of 1935 provided the country with its first welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). AFDC provided cash assistance to poor, primarily female-headed families with children (Albert & King, 2001). AFDC was a federal and State partnership of sorts with complex eligibility guidelines and an abundant amount of rules

and regulations however States were allotted flexibility in setting income levels. This Federal/State partnership managed to exist for over 60 years as the country's principal income support for families with little or no other income (LaCheen, 2001).

The first changes in welfare law happened with the passing of the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA). FSA required each State to develop a Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program (JOBS) thereby expanding welfare services to include employment related options. Then in 1992, the federal waiver expansion process provided more program participation requirements for consumers which could be seen as the beginning of the end of AFDC (LaCheen, 2001). However, welfare consumers were classified as either exempt or non-exempt from the work requirements. If the person was exempt, there could be no reduction in cash payments. Even if the consumer wished to participate in employment related services, they were discouraged primarily due to lack of funding (LaCheen, 2001). If a person was non-exempt from such programming, they could face a cash reduction in benefits similar to the current TANF regulations for sanctions (LaCheen, 2001).

On August 22, 1996, The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act or PRWORA (P. L. 104-193) was signed by President Bill Clinton which dramatically changed the nation's welfare system (systems change). PRWORA legislation repealed AFDC and replaced it with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF came in the form of block grants to States. In return for this type of block grant, States have a Maintenance of Effort (MOE) obligation to spend a specified amount of money on low-income families (LaCheen, 2001). PRWORA reforms include work requirements, time limitations, and rules of eligibility for TANF recipients. However, the guidelines provided are federal regulations and

States are allowed the flexibility to establish their own regulations within the constructs of any Human Rights or other applicable laws (Johnson, 1997).

TANF block grants allowed States tremendous flexibility when designing their new and improved welfare programs. PRWORA also shifted the responsibility of public assistance from the federal government to the States (Anderson, et al., 2002). However, Federal regulatory and policy development/implementation for this initiative has been delegated to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Although States are granted flexibility, they are still under the regulations established by DHHS. Also any State receiving TANF funds was still subject to the rules established by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (LaCheen, 2001).

This comprehensive bipartisan welfare reform plan required recipients of welfare to work in exchange for time-limited assistance. Moving people from Welfare-to-Work (WtW) was now one of the primary goals of the federal welfare policy.

Workforce Centers

As developed by the U.S. Department of Labor; Employment and Training Administration, on August 7, 1998, President Clinton signed into law the Workforce Investment Act (P.L. 105-220). This Act provides a framework for a comprehensive national workforce preparation and employment system designed to meet the needs of the nation's job seekers and employers. Many subparts exist within the Workforce Investment Act of which Title IV is extremely important to this researcher, the re authorization of the Rehabilitation Act. This Title not only amends the Act but also links the programs (State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs) to State and local workforce development systems.

Rehabilitation Services

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided a myriad of services for people with disabilities to include State run Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Since its inception, the Act has seen many changes of which the most recent appeared in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). The amendments to the Act via the WIA simplified access to vocational rehabilitation services, streamlined administrative processes, improved discretionary programs (Choice, Systems Change, Projects with Industries), and provided greater access to information technology. Even though WIA amended the Act, it remains a freestanding statute.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF block grants and TANF programs are sometimes referred to by advocates and administrators alike as being the same thing, however, they are not (LaCheen, 2001). However, TANF cash assistance programs for needy families are only one program where TANF block grant monies can be spent (LaCheen, 2001).

TANF not only devolved responsibility for welfare services to States and localities but increased the role of faith and community based organizations (Reisch & Sommerfeld, 2002). Each State, territory, and tribe was allowed to determine each component of their programming including: eligibility requirements, benefit levels, and types of services to be provided to needy families. However, in the basic cash assistance programs, certain rules pertaining to time-limits, work requirements and services, and sanctions applied to all States receiving TANF funds (LaCheen, 2001).

TANF blocks grants have a fairly complicated funding formula for a variety of services that State's can provide under the TANF umbrella. However, for purposes of this study it is not necessary to define those structures and formulas.

The purpose of TANF is four fold: 1) provide needy families assistance so that their children can be cared for in their home or the home of a relative; 2) end the dependence on

government of needy parent by providing employment services and promoting marriage; 3) reduce and prevent pregnancies out of wedlock; and 4) encourage two parent families (LaCheen, 2001).

Welfare Consumers

There has been a long held stereotype that consumers of welfare are typically young mothers who have children out of wedlock or are abandoned by divorce or separation (Larrison, et al., 2001). However, in 1935 when welfare first began, this stereotype did not exist.

The first federally funded cash welfare program (AFDC) was established to help care for families without a working father due to death in the workplace (Dobelstein, 1992). It was the perception of policy makers that mothers could not care for their children and earn a living wage simultaneously and the most humane solution to the problem was to provide cash assistance hence the birth of welfare (Joseph, 1999).

Over a 57-year period of time, most Americans believe America needed to take care of those in need (MacLeod, et al., 1999). However during the same period of time, poll data indicated that those same Americans believe poverty to be the result of laziness, and lack of motivation (MacLeod, et al, 1999). It took years of growth and change to bring about the stereotyping of welfare recipients brought about by a shift in societal judging due to single parenting, increases in welfare expenditures, and the notion that what intended to be a stop-gap program (welfare) was now a permanent part of federal programming (Larrison, et al., 2001).

In order to provide a better understanding of the characteristics of welfare beneficiaries, Larrison, et al., (2001) conducted a study to identify the typical consumer and found four distinct groups or groupings defining who the consumers of welfare were and why are they in need of assistance.

Group 1 was comprised predominantly of single young women who had children prior to age eighteen. These women had minimal job histories and low levels of education.

Group 2 contained adults between their late twenties and late forties. These parents took care of school age children. They typically were repeat users of welfare yet had more education, work experience, and had better access to transportation and childcare than Group 1.

Group 3 was comprised of middle aged adults who either had a health problem or had a child with a health problem. The mental and physical health problems present among these consumers either precluded them from work or made work possible only with an understanding employer. Over 25 percent (25.9) of the welfare recipients surveyed in this study were in this group. Per Larrison, et al., (2001) “the disabilities identified and the issues associated with them were stated to be clearly beyond the scope of most welfare offices and present day welfare to work programs” (pg. 62). Typically over 50% of the consumers in Group 3 received some other cash assistance other than welfare. Of further significance was that nearly 80% of all the adults in this group reported health problems that interfered with their work ability and the remaining 21.2% were disabled per Social Security definitions. The research also provided that despite these numbers, 48.1% of the adults in this group are subject to the work and time requirements established by TANF. Also a significant number of these consumers are likely to lose their welfare benefits due to either their or their children’s health problems (Larrison, et al, 2001).

Group 4 was made up of families who were headed by a grandparent, elderly or retired person. There was a one-generation removed child cared for in the family. The person or spouse of the person usually had a solid work history with some form of assets (house or car) and welfare benefits typically represented only a small portion of the family’s monthly income (Larrison, et al., 2001).

As previously stated, a serious flaw of the new TANF regulations is that the policy makers identified only two groups of consumers; children and families (Larrison, et. al, 2001). The first group is composed of children under the age of 18 who have no work requirement or time limits for receiving welfare assistance (much like the old AFDC program). The other group is comprised of families which policy makers still viewed as single mothers with limited job experiences, low educational attainments and a high resistance to work (Seccombe et al, 1999). This group is subject to a 60-month time limit for receiving TANF cash assistance. Other work related requirements also are attached to this group thereby allowing States freedom to determine sanctioning vehicle and/or the elimination of benefits should recipients fail to follow the rules (Larrison, et al., 2001).

In an article submitted by Joy Johnson to the Journal of Rehabilitation, Ms. Johnson references that PRWORA abolishes AFDC and establishes block grant State-sponsored assistance to poor children and their families (Johnson, 1997). The author also states that while available data support the finding that 31% of these children and/or parents have serious or multiple disabilities, the States in general have not addressed ways in which obstacles will be overcome in facilitating self-sufficiency for this population (Johnson, 1997, pg. 137).

However, many States have exempted people with disabilities from the time requirements and the work requirements established by TANF (Seccombe, et al., 1999). In Joy Johnson's article in the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, she states that she had asked two TANF caseworkers what would happen if someone (specifically a woman with a disability who was exempt from the work requirement) requested job training and placement assistance. She states the responses were that of surprise yet both caseworkers eventually replied that any TANF consumer who asked for employment related assistance would be provided such services

(Johnson, 1997). However, Ms. Johnson also provides that there is nothing within the federal law which prevents any State from requiring that any TANF recipient, even those with a disability, be required to work (Johnson, 1997).

As previously stated TANF policy makers identified only two groups of consumers; children and families (Larrison, et al, 2001). The problem at hand is that through viable research already discussed, there exists four groups of consumers of welfare and all four of the groups identified fall within the second group which faces the 60 month limit and has a work requirement.

Between 1997 and 1999, and since the enactment of PRWORA, the nation's welfare roles have dropped drastically from 5.0 to 3.1 million cases leaving States with large amounts of unspent federal dollars (Albert & King, 2001). However, the same resource sites that welfare roles were dropping prior to PRWORA due primarily to economic recovery and not necessarily governmental legislation. However, Albert and King also established via their review of many studies, that welfare policy changes has also contributed to the decline in welfare recipients (Albert & King, 2001). Overall, the Albert and King study suggests that there is a strong correlation between economic strength and whether or not families enter the roles of welfare. They therefore conclude that States and the Federal government should re-evaluate the overall purpose and design of the federally imposed 60-month time limits for welfare consumers. The researcher's suggest that it may be favorable for policy makers to increase the time limits during times of recession as what has been done with Unemployment Insurance during similar situations (Albert & King, 2001).

Regardless of how the federal government or a State conceptualizes and develops its welfare reform, it is quite apparent that welfare consumers of the past, now have a personal

responsibility to actively pursue support for their families or they are penalized by reduction in subsidies received and/or even a complete elimination of their benefits (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 1997). The new welfare system imposes a 60-month time limit on the availability of cash and/or other public assistance. The consumer is expected to quickly prepare themselves for work within the time frame allotted and it is the case manager who provides motivation and positive encouragement (Beckerman & Fontana, 2001).

Caseworkers

Although the role of a healthy economy is pivotal to whether or not the welfare roles increase or decrease (Albert & King, 2001), regardless of the size of the welfare roles, it is the caseworker who stands as the primary player (along with the consumer) in providing and/or coordinating the services required to aid the consumer in their pursuit of self-sufficiency (Ritter, 1997). In a Florida study conducted by Beckerman and Fontana, the role of the case manager for some was clear and consistent with organizational goals and objectives assigned to them. However, at the same time, role ambiguity and frustration imposed by large caseloads, a varied clientele, and the pressures of time were also evident (Beckerman & Fontana, 2001).

Another important consideration for public policy makers is whether or not the reformed welfare system has been able to meet the comprehensive needs of not only the easy-to-place but also the hard-to-place (Beckerman & Fontana, 2001). Beckerman and Fontana focused their investigation on the coordination of inter-agency networks and the role of the case manager in implementing the redesigned welfare system in Florida (Beckerman & Fontana, 2001).

Welfare office caseworkers have traditionally been employees who are more suited toward clerical work such as determining eligibility and cutting checks (Ritter, 1997). Due to the severe changes in welfare reform, those workers must now be able to assess consumer needs, determine what is required for the people on the caseloads to become self-sufficient, and help

them in this effort. The caseworker is not just a paper pusher anymore but rather an employment specialist, and education specialist and a family support specialist all wrapped into one (Ritter, 1997). The caseworker needs to be knowledgeable in day care, substance abuse, domestic violence, illiteracy issues, mental health and other disability related issues, public transportation and a myriad of other issues which are present in many of those they are required to assistance in getting off welfare and becoming self-sufficient (Ritter, 1997).

Welfare caseworkers also need cultural competence in order to effectively serve consumers who come from all corners of the world. It is critical to understand basic concepts of family dynamics and the social protocols of the variety of consumers in order to effectively promote a positive approach to becoming self-sufficient (Edens, 2000).

Welfare practitioners require a basic understanding of disability related issues along with an understanding of how to assess the probability of a consumer having such disability in order to effectively integrate required services into an employment plan. An effective employment plan with disability related services will not only aide the consumer in reaching their highest level of self-sufficiency but will also keep them from being sanctioned and losing any of the nominal benefits they require for sustaining an already hard lifestyle (Lunz, et al., 2000).

CHAPTER 4

Results

This literature review focused on the federal government's role in ensuring that States have the necessary leadership and resources for serving individuals with disabilities who receive public support post TANF. The rules were written by policy makers who viewed the consumers to be representative of two groups, children and adults (Larrison, et al., 2001). However, further investigation found that consumers of welfare were actually comprised of four groups. Of those four groupings, one quarter of those identified were people with issues related to a disability(ies). Therefore it is determined that over 25% of people receiving welfare have a

disability or care for a person with a disability. They are therefore affected by the federal welfare changes of 1996 (Larrison, et al., 2001).

The Office of Special Education Rehabilitation Services/Rehabilitation Services Administration (OSERS/RSA) was contacted to determine what role it has taken help States serve welfare consumers with disabilities. Pamela Martin, Director for RSA Special Projects and Demonstrations was contacted and she provided this researcher with the following information (Martin, 2002).

RSA is currently supporting eleven projects through it's Special Projects and Demonstrations program titled *System Change Projects to Expand Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Mental or Physical Disabilities, or both, who Receive Public Support*. Six projects were funded in fiscal year 1998, and an additional 5 received funding in fiscal year 2001. Eleven States have projects underway which address the need for systems change and serving this special population.

In New Mexico, the project *Leveraged Integrated Networks of Customer Support (LINCS)* is an interagency collaboration that addresses the needs of consumers with disabilities who are receiving public support. The project is establishing a coordinated service delivery system by integrating its Department of Vocational Rehabilitation into New Mexico Welfare Reform and Welfare to Work programs. The project is heavily focused on consumer choice and empowerment (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H2358010002).

In Delaware, the project *CLIMB to Employment* is proposed to evaluate the impact of public supports on employment and independence. CLIMB is the acronym for Consortium Leadership and Independence through Managing Benefits. This project is a collaboration between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Division of Employment and

Training, the Division of Social Services, and the Department of Education. The project proposes to provide informed choice to consumers of public assistance who want to become self-sufficient by identifying and reducing systemic and individual barriers to employment (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H2358010002).

In Missouri, *SUCCESS (Strategies Utilizing Collaboration and Competitive Employment and Self-Sufficiency)* is underway. This project is building upon an already successful consortium comprised of representative from: the Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Division of Adult and Vocational Education; the Department of Social Services Division of Family Services and Medical Services; the Department of Economic Development Division of Workforce Development; the Department of Mental Health; and a community rehabilitation program (Advent Enterprises, Inc.). There are over 20 private and public partners involved with this project. The overall purpose of this project is to identify system flaws, eliminate system-related barriers, and facilitate the necessary system changes required to assist consumers of welfare with disabilities become self-sufficient (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H2358010013).

In Maryland, there is a systems change project underway led by the State's Division of Rehabilitation Services, a partner in Maryland's Workforce System. The goals of this project are: to identify and reduce system barriers, develop and implement a model case management system, develop and enhance employment network, and cross train personnel (OSERS/RSA, H2358010001).

In Vermont, the *Bridges to Self-Sufficiency* project's intent is to serve youth with disabilities while in transition for school to work. The project design is to provide young people with disabilities options for self-sufficiency before they become dependent on social systems.

Also built into the structure are processes for promoting system change, eliminating system barriers, and increasing system capacity (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H2358010006).

In Iowa, a *Systems Change Project* is designed to assist welfare consumers with disabilities or potential welfare consumers with disabilities move into the workforce. The goals of the project are to, identify and reduce system barriers, identify and improve system processes, and engage employers in the hiring of people with disabilities (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H989A980009).

In Colorado, *Work Incentives (WIN)* is a collaborative project addressing disincentives for competitive employment. The project develops a creative partnership between consumer groups, agencies, administrators, and policy makers which addresses the employment needs of the individuals with disabilities who are consumers of welfare (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H989A980018).

In Arkansas, the *Arkansas Consortium for Employment Success for People with Disabilities (ACES)* consists of a collaboration between Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Arkansas Department of Human Services (Welfare and Medicaid), Arkansas Department of Workforce Education, and Employment Security Department. The project is designed to remove system barriers and promote the self-sufficiency of welfare consumers with disabilities (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H989A980015).

In Oregon, the *Oregon Employment Initiative* is a collaboration between the Oregon Department of Human Resources, Workforce center partners, people with disabilities, advocates and employers. The project provides coordinated employment related services and supports to employers and welfare consumers with disabilities addressing system barriers as they are identified (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H989A980001).

In Alaska, *Alaska Works* is a project that integrates a variety of existing system change activities into a program that addresses the barriers to employment for people with disabilities who receive public support. Specific barriers being address encompass system barriers, loss of financial and health benefits, limited employment opportunities, and a lack of understanding or utilization of current work incentive programs (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H989A900019).

In Utah, the *Choose to Work Utah* project is designed to increase competitive employment outcomes for consumers of public support with disabilities. There are three strategies which pave the way for the Utah project to meet it's goals: provide for identifying and removing system barriers (systems change), develop and implement an innovative service delivery model, and replicate the successful program components (OSERS/RSA, Abstract H989A980006).

All funded projects had strong elements of collaboration between State government and social service agencies. They had subtle differences (some included Department of Education, Social Security Administration, Human Resources, etc.), however, every program relied heavily on having a strong collaboration. Agency linkages were also important (9 of 11) streamlining referral processes and establishing strong data sharing/collection strategies.

Each project funded discussed the importance of identifying system barriers and then addressing the barriers by promoting change. Colorado and Vermont went as far as having a Policy Advisory Team/Forum that addressed system changes from a State policy level. Although not stated concretely, the other projects did address that weaknesses in systems or other system barriers would be addressed. The ways they would provide for the changes was not clear.

Four of the project abstracts provided comments as to the importance of consumer choice (New Mexico, Missouri, Oregon, Delaware) in their service delivery models.

New Mexico and Colorado utilized consumer Focus Groups. A Consumer Advisory Board had an important role in identifying system problems and were actively involved throughout the full project (New Mexico, Delaware, Missouri, Colorado and Utah).

All of the projects serve people with disabilities who are consumers of public support. Vermont's project focuses on serving youth from the same groups. Iowa is focusing half of its effort on youth; Oregon is predominantly servicing young adults aged 17-26.

The only project with a minority focus was New Mexico and their project is especially interested in women with minority status. However, Colorado did mention serving consumers from a minority background.

All projects referenced the importance of having streamlined employment services for the population. Nine of the eleven provided that strong agency linkages were a key component to their projects. Electronic data collection is seen as a key component to strengthening service delivery in Missouri, Delaware, Iowa, and Arkansas.

Benefits counseling is also key to addressing system barriers in New Mexico, Delaware, Missouri, Vermont, and Utah.

Common themes within most of these project are predominantly focused on improving referral systems, improving data collection systems, streamlining services, improving collaborations, and improving systems already in place to meet the needs of people with disabilities who are consumers of public support. These Special Projects and Demonstration programs will provide the field valuable information to support and implement systems change across the country provided the information garnered reaches the masses.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter will include a discussion of the results and conclusions of this study along with recommendations for future research.

Federal initiatives have paved the way for monumental changes for people with disabilities who are on public assistance. With the passage of PRWORA, WIA and the Rehab Act, States are challenged to meet the needs of its consumers while complying with federal rules and regulations. AFDC, JOBS, and General Assistance no longer exist. They are replaced by TANF and the threat for sanctions and/or losing ones cash benefits if rules are not adhered to regardless of disability status. So, pieces of the puzzle are missing and many consumers are

falling through the cracks. However, there are federally funded initiatives providing technical assistance and monetary support for the development and implementation of best practices and innovations for servicing this fairly welfare dependent sect of our population.

The Office of Special Education/Rehabilitation Services (OSERS/RSA) listed in the Federal Register a request for proposals (RFP) in November of 1997. The request was submitted through Special Projects and Demonstrations and titled *System Change Projects to Expand Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Mental or Physical Disabilities, or Both, who Receive Public Support*. This initiative was not only designed to meet the needs of consumers with disabilities who receive welfare and are in danger of losing some or all of those supports, but to change the systems that work with them and to further the field of vocational rehabilitation.

RSA's Director of Special Projects and Demonstrations (Pamela Martin) informed this researcher that RSA is currently supporting eleven projects through Systems Change. Six projects were funded in fiscal year 1998, and an additional 5 received funding in fiscal year 2001. The States receiving funding from RSA are: New Mexico, Delaware, Missouri, Maryland, Vermont, Iowa, Colorado, Arkansas, Oregon, Alaska, and Utah.

This research has determined that RSA is providing leadership, monies and technical support for projects to serve people with disabilities on public support. Eleven projects are currently in progress. These Research and Demonstration Projects will provide valuable information to the nation on effective strategies to promote systems change and also on effective strategies to service welfare recipients with disabilities.

Future research may choose to evaluate the effectiveness of these projects and determine how positive outcomes can be applied to the country as a whole. It may be highly useful for OSERS/RSA to resubmit the RFP and solicit applications from other States depending on the

outcomes achieved by this project round. If the system changes that occur, as a result of these projects are positive, RSA may wish to create a new division within itself to improve vocational rehabilitation systems nationwide.

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