

The Journey from Public Assistance to Economic Self-Sufficiency
Jan Wefler

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JOURNEY TO SELF SUFFICIENCY

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by

Jan Wefler

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Abstract

Self-sufficiency is a common goal when moving public assistance recipients from Federally-funded (i.e., TANF) programs that are administered at the state-level into gainful employment; and thereby lowering participation. However, measuring self-sufficiency is not universally standard and program recidivism continues to occur. The discussion includes decades of research studies that include programs utilizing safety-net benefits that provide i.e., food and childcare as well as short term training and education treatments/interventions. A closer examination of the State of Wisconsin's Self-Sufficiency Standard for each county along with career planning tools that workforce development and human service professionals can use to inform and guide participants toward self-sufficiency are recommended best practices.

Keywords: Public Assistance Programs, Self-Sufficiency, Employment and Training Programs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Based on decades of studies of public assistance programs, success has been measured by reducing the number of participants receiving government-funded aid along with the explicit or implicit goal of attaining self-sufficiency. (Melkote, 2009-2010 et al). Unfortunately, the term self-sufficiency is rarely defined and has varying methods of measurement. (Hetling et.al, 2016; and Rossi & Curtis, 2013). In addition, leaving public assistance programs to become part of the working poor does not lead to self-sufficiency; nor the ability to adequately support a family long term. (Cheng, 2010 et al).

Program strategies and interventions used to reduce reliance on public assistance generally include time-limited supportive services such as child care, healthcare, employment services, case management, and basic adult education; along with some short-term vocational training. The end result often times means individuals return to public assistance rolls by as much as 30% (Cheng, 2010). Other studies report more dire results indicating more than 70% of past public assistance recipients are not able to support their families or “make ends meet” (Livermore, M., Powers, R., Creel Davis, B. and Lim, Y, 2010). Research findings indicate long term shortfalls due to the expenses associated with child care and transportation; as well lack of health insurance benefits, and low-wage job earnings. (Cheng, 2010, Fullwiler & Meyeraan, 2010, and London, 2007).

This paper takes a closer look at the level of poverty in the state of Wisconsin; and will add value to the conversation by providing career-planning tools that professionals can use when working with unemployed or underemployed individuals seeking to attain long term self-sustaining employment.

Statement of the Problem

The following facts and data comes from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP), Wisconsin Poverty Report's most recent findings from 2014:

“Although employment rose by almost 60,000 jobs in Wisconsin from 2013 to 2014, there was no reduction in the poverty measurement by the Wisconsin Poverty Measure; in fact, the overall poverty rate remained flat at 10.8 percent.” (Smeeding, S. & Thornton, K., 2016).

The Wisconsin Poverty Measure (WPM) is recommended by researchers as being a more accurate representation of the poverty level in Wisconsin because it includes both cash and noncash benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP--which is called FoodShare in Wisconsin); housing programs, energy assistance, child tax credits, Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), and Medicaid/State Children's health insurance program). The WPM also takes into account expenditures that continue to impact the level of poverty such as childcare, transportation to work and medical costs. Further WPM findings in the report indicate that between 2008 to 2014 despite the increase in employment (and a decrease in program benefits) the child poverty rate in Wisconsin remained flat at 11.8 percent. This differs from the official Wisconsin child poverty rate of 17.6 percent because the WPM includes total household income which may include income contributions from unmarried partners. It should also be noted that the safety net benefits (SNAP, housing, tax credits, Medicaid) are being credited with keeping the poverty rate lower because they enable families to have more disposable income. Report author Timothy Smeeding stated that the long-term solution to poverty for able-bodied non-elderly individuals is to obtain employment that pays well enough without utilizing safety-net program contributions. He further states, “However, much employment is on a low-wage

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part-time basis, and does not provide enough income for low-educated parents to stay out of poverty.” (Smeeding 2014).

In addition, the total number of participants receiving cash assistance through the Wisconsin Works (W2) program (funded by TANF) in December of 2014 was 57,372. In December 2015 the total number was 42,712; and in December 2016 the total number of participants receiving cash assistance was 32,698 (Department of Children and Families, 2017). Further, the number of work placements for the same reporting period show 19, 511 (2014); 14,439 (2015); and 11,039 (2016). (Department of Children and Families 2014-2016). While the number of program participants has gone down, based on the number of people living at the poverty level (as reported by the IRP), it does not reflect self-sufficiency or the ability to support a family without additional safety-net benefits.

The problem is a gap that needs to be bridged between the cost of living and the specific occupations that provide a living wage based on an individual’s level of educational attainment and family size; along with the labor market trend for suitable employment.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to gather and assess findings relevant to individuals living below the poverty level who seek economic self-sufficiency. Further the intent is to identify areas of ongoing financial shortfalls that hinder long term success. And additionally, to strongly enable workforce development professionals (including education and career advisors, career counselors, case managers, career coaches, and human services workers) to provide well-informed guidance in strategic career planning direction for unemployed and underemployed individuals.

Significance of the Study

Based on three years of data from Wisconsin's FSET program, living wage-levels have been attained individually, however, the program focus is on able-bodied adults without dependents. (Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services, 2017). This study reviews the resource data at the state and county-level for families with dependents living in poverty who need self-sustaining wages.

Definition of Terms

Public Assistance work-related programs: Programs put into place utilizing federal guidelines and funding that are administered and designed at the state-level to encourage employment with either the explicit or implied goal to reach economic self-sufficiency. (Melkote, 2009-2010).

Economic Self-Sufficiency - the ability of individuals and families to routinely satisfy their basic lifestyle expenses including: food, clothing, housing, utilities, health care, transportation, and dependent child care without monetary assistance or subsidies from either privately-held and/or public organizations. (Human Services Council 2012).

SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: A federally-funded food program that provides cash assistance earmarked for food purchases only. (Food and Nutrition Service, USDA 2016, 2017).

FSET – FoodShare and Employment Training: A program component of the state of Wisconsin's SNAP program that provides short term job readiness workshops, work experience, and vocational trainings to able-bodied adults (primarily between the ages of 18-49). (Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 2016, 2017).

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TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families – Block grant-funded program that replaced AFDC within the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). (Ahn, 2015).

Delimitations of Research

The research did not take into consideration self-sufficiency attainment for individuals with multiple barriers to employment including disabilities (physical/mental) or program participants who had retired. These special populations are most generally served by disability or retirement programs funded by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and are *expected to require* long-term support from federally-funded agencies.

The recommended career tools in this paper do not address cognitive and attitudinal/behavioral traits which can significantly impact individuals' ability to attain and retain long-term self-sufficiency. (Hall & Farkas, 2011).

Three topic-related studies were published outside the defined eight-year literature review time period including: London, (2006), Alfred & Martin, (2007), and Plesca & Smith (2007).

In addition, the most recent Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) Best Practices Study of (1994) informed this research project. Ten pilot SNAP E&T projects are currently being evaluated, however the findings are not expected until 2019. (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016).

Any other longitudinal studies that began in 2009 (at the start of the defined research dates for this project) would not be available until 2019 at the earliest.

Research was conducted utilizing the following search terms: public assistance programs, economic self-sufficiency, from poverty to self-sufficiency, government funded training and education programs, TANF studies, and welfare to work.

Two studies were cited from outside the United States: Canada.

Method of Approach

A review of the literature focused mainly on public assistance programs operating in the United States (except as noted in the delimitations section) during the past eight years based on peer-reviewed studies/articles found in the ABI/INFORM collection (UW System Shared), JSTOR Arts and Sciences, EBSCOHost, and ProQuest Business Premium Collection (UW System Shared). Additional Inter-Library loan services were utilized through UW-Platteville's Karrmann Library system.

Because the topic of discussion relied on historical government rulings and regulations, additional research was conducted utilizing the *Federal Register* database which houses all government documents since 1994. Data was also acquired from the U.S. Census Bureau and the State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD).

Chapter Two: Related Literature Review

Historical timeline of work-related public assistance programs

The historical timeline focused on the progression of landmark rulings which funded government assistance programs designed to assist individuals attain employment and reach economic self-sufficiency:

1935: One of the earliest programs that provided assistance to U.S. citizens occurred in 1935 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law. (Brands, p. 417). Title IV of the Act included Aid to Children (ADC), the Work Incentive Program (WIN), Community Work Experience Program (CWEP), the Work Supplementation Program and the Work Search program. (Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1995).

It is important to include this historical legislature because it acknowledged the initial need to provide low-income jobseekers with a path toward self-sufficiency during the Great Depression.

1988: Family Support Act included the Jobs Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) training program to increase employment opportunities for welfare participants and assist them in becoming self-sufficient. Under this ruling, states were required to implement JOBS programs by October 1, 1990. Some states were early adopters and implemented the program immediately. Two years later as new white house administration took office the act was repealed in October of 1990. (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995).

1996: Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) changed what was considered a long-standing (60-year) entitlement program—Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) formerly known as Aid For Children (ADC), to the block-grant-funded programs known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Tribal

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TANF and Native Employment Works (NEW). These programs required recipients to actively participate in work and work-related activities. (Ahn, 2015).

1998: U.S. Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA): Described as the largest federal initiative to increase human capital of the disadvantaged, introduced the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). (Plesca & Smith, 2007).

2008: Reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008).

2008: The Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) defined employment and training (E & T) requirements for participants of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and continued to further refine with amendments (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2017).

2015: The Department of Labor (DOL) and the Department of Education (ED) jointly proposed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), previously WIA to improve work-credentials and skills with the goal to raise the U. S. workforce's productivity and competitiveness; as well as lower reliance on public assistance programs. (U.S. Department of Education. 2015).

Review of Literature: Economic Self-Sufficiency Measurements

There was a general consensus that the central objective of work-related public assistance programs was to lower the number of participants /caseloads. This was achieved by utilizing supportive services such as case management, assistance with job search; and skills trainings intended to lead participants to self-sufficiency. (Hetling, A., Hoge, G.L., & Postmus, J., 2015; Ahn, H. 2015; MacLeavy, J. 2015; and Breitzkreuz, R., & Williamson, D., 2012). In addition, the historical relevance documented by Macleavy, stated that the intent of Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) was to reduce public assistance participation to lower caseloads that had increased over time because of programs included in the 1935 Social Security Act. (McLeavy, 2015).

Unfortunately reaching the end goal of leaving public assistance without a clear definition or measurement of self-sufficiency is well documented. (Hetling, et al, 2015). The Hetling-study validated an economic self-sufficiency scale developed in 1993 by Gowdy and Pearlmutter along with financial strain variables developed by Aldana & Liljenquist in 1998; as well as included the perceived difficulty of living on earned wages. It should be noted that the measurement scale used by Gowdy was a 15-item scale that included factors described as autonomy and self-determination, financial security and responsibility, family and individual well- being, and basic resources available in the community. Since that time other tools to measure poverty and economic self-sufficiency have been developed including the Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard instrument described below, but no standard has been universally adopted. (Hetling, et al. 2015).

According to Diana M. Pearce, Director, Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington, for the past 20 years they have provided self-sufficiency standards (SSS) for

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agencies in 38 states. The Standard provides the amount of earnings necessary for families (of various sizes) to meet their basic needs each month. The components within the tool are established for each state and appeared more pragmatic than Gowdy's scale. Factors included geographically-based cost of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, miscellaneous, taxes, tax credits adjustments, and emergency savings factors. (Pearce, 2015). Each state's current report can be accessed through the Center's Website. As stated in the 2016 Self-Sufficiency Standard report generated for the State of Wisconsin, the Center worked in cooperation with the Division of Employment and Training within the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (Pearce, 2016). Itemized results are shown below for a randomly selected county in the state of Wisconsin. (Pearce, 2016). Further data was compiled utilizing U.S. Census Bureau reports for Wisconsin counties with the highest level of poverty along with the 2016 Self-Sufficiency Standard for the State of Wisconsin at the county-level. The table (see Appendix A.) reports the hourly wage required to attain self-sufficiency by size of family in a single-parent household in the ten counties with the highest level of poverty. The full breakdown by expense item for all Wisconsin counties are included in the full 2016 Self-Sufficiency Standard report that can be found on the Center's Website. (Pearson, 2016).

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TABLE 1. The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Select Family Types*
Dane County, WI 2016

	1 ADULT	1 ADULT 1 PRESCHOOLER	1 ADULT 1 PRESCHOOLER 1 SCHOOL-AGE	2 ADULTS 1 PRESCHOOLER 1 SCHOOL-AGE
MONTHLY COSTS				
Housing	\$780	\$936	\$936	\$936
Child Care	\$0	\$1,115	\$1,660	\$1,660
Food	\$253	\$383	\$579	\$795
Transportation	\$227	\$235	\$235	\$446
Health Care	\$162	\$377	\$400	\$462
Miscellaneous	\$142	\$305	\$381	\$430
Taxes	\$243	\$823	\$1,051	\$1,007
Earned Income Tax Credit (-)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Child Care Tax Credit (-)	\$0	(\$50)	(\$100)	(\$100)
Child Tax Credit (-)	\$0	(\$83)	(\$167)	(\$167)
SELF-SUFFICIENCY WAGE				
Hourly**	\$10.27	\$22.95	\$28.26	\$15.54 per adult
Monthly	\$1,808	\$4,040	\$4,975	\$5,469
Annual	\$21,694	\$48,480	\$59,696	\$65,629

* The Standard is calculated by adding expenses and taxes and subtracting tax credits. The "Taxes" row includes payroll, federal and state income taxes.
 ** The hourly wage is calculated by dividing the monthly wage by 176 hours (8 hours per day times 22 days per month). The hourly wage for families with two adults represents the hourly wage that each adult would need to earn, while the monthly and annual wages represent both parents' wages combined.
 Note: Totals may not add exactly due to rounding.

It also merits noting that within Hetling’s discussion covering the attainment goal of self-sufficiency, a psychological self-sufficiency scale is outlined that included additional components when working with low-income jobseekers. Identified as the Employment Hope Scale, (EHS) it addressed the importance of psychological well-being as a factor when economic self-sufficiency was achieved. (Hong, P.Y.P., Polanin, J. & Pigott, D. 2012).

The Employment Hope Scale (EHS) laid out empowerment-strategies when working with participants who went through a job training program in Chicago between 2009-2010 and included a motivational interviewing methodology implemented to engage jobseekers in self-motivation, goal-setting and utilization of skills and resources. (Hong et al, 2012).

Taking a slightly different viewpoint about self-sufficiency was a study conducted by Rossi & Curtis that focused on living wage standards. Although they too noted the importance of the Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) developed by Pearce, they also advocate the use of other

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instruments including the Basic Needs Budget Calculator (BNBC) and the Basic Family Budget Calculator, developed in 2012 by the National Center for Children in Poverty and the Economic Policy Institute respectively. (Rossi, M. & Curtis, K., 2013). Also included in their study were 2010 U.S. Census Bureau statistics about poverty thresholds and a discussion about the need to replace the current poverty designations utilized to set policies with a living wage standard as a benchmark to achieve “at least minimal self-sufficiency.” (Rossi & Curtis, 2013). To further the discussion about utilization of different measurement approaches, the U.S. Census Bureau is piloting a “Supplemental Poverty Measure” in response to President Obama’s 2011 budget request. This instrument included factors for households with non-program members, out-of-pocket medical expenses, as well as geographic differences. The new tool was being piloted in the state of New York. (Rossi & Curtis, 2013). No further study findings or results were found for this tool at the present time.

To summarize the literature review about self-sufficiency it can be concluded that measurements vary greatly based on the factors included within different instruments, (Hetling et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2012; Rossi & Curtis, 2013; and Pearce, 2015); and are applied in a non-uniform manner within public assistance programs. (Hetling et al., 2016).

Review of Literature: Exploration of employment and training (E & T) interventions

While perhaps stating the obvious, according to London, (2006), wages increase when given the opportunity to participate in and obtain postsecondary education. The study provided statistics that indicated a 30% annual increase in earnings after obtaining an Associate's Degree; and a 51% increase in wages earned with a Bachelor's Degree. In 1988, the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program included the ability for welfare recipients to attend college while receiving cash assistance. Since then London revealed that public assistance programs such as AFDC and TANF were later designed to hinder participants from considering higher education as a path to attain self-sufficiency based on the perception of tax-payer dollars providing an unfair advantage vs. considering the socio-economic impact of program recidivism and the cost of safety-net benefits. Instead she stated, as do many other research studies, that current programs offer quicker treatments including job search, less than a one-year of vocational training, and subsidized or unsubsidized jobs. (Plesca & Smith, Greenburg & Robins, Alfred & Martin, and Zabel, Schwartz & Donald). The following studies further explored the opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency.

Plesca & Smith analyzed a multi-treatment study (designed to increase human capital), that included a subsidized employment benefit. On-the-Job-Training (OJT) was the clear treatment winner when compared to the group of individuals who received classroom training of occupational skills only—which *may* have included job search assistance (CT-OS); and a group defined as “Other” who were not referred to either of the treatments. The “other” group did receive job search assistance for rapid re-employment. The study did not examine the hourly wages attained for purposes of self-sufficiency rating. (Plesca & Smith, 2007).

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Similarly, in a separate study Greenburg & Robins assessed 21 randomly chosen welfare-to-work programs to determine which treatments were more effective in obtaining employment for participants. As described in the study, the treatments included job search assistance, basic education (interpreted to mean GED, HSED and ABE), non-specified vocational training, and work experience. What Greenburg & Robins concluded was that participants who did not participate in the treatments netted out similar job attainment results. Like the study conducted by Plesca, this study did not examine the hourly wages attained to evaluate a self-sufficiency measurement. (Greenburg & Robins, 2008). The next study delves a little further into the effectiveness of public assistance programs that included training programs.

In a study conducted by Alfred & Martin (2007) they re-emphasized the purpose of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) as the federal funding source stressing economic self-sufficiency through personal effort. Included in this progressive Wisconsin-based study was a discussion to identify potential barriers of TANF program participants to reach this goal. The barrier with the highest Likert-scale score was education and learning which included the absence of academic and work-related skills, as well as work related experiences. The study also identified treatments and services that best stimulated the development of self-sufficiency through job retention and advancement. The highest Likert-scale scoring component was support services (identified as a group of services that included food stamps, child care, health care/Medicaid, transportation and placement services). Wisconsin also credited the addition of the Workforce Attachment and Advancement (WAA) program that provided job-specific skills training matched to employer's needs. This study published lessons learned in greater detail which will be included in the recommendations

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section of this research project. (Alfred & Martin, 2006). Looking outside the U.S. also informed the discussion by examining the impact of Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project.

The Canadian Self-Sufficiency study was conducted in two provinces over a three-year period; and included a recurring earnings supplement when participants successfully obtained employment within the first 12 months of program participation. An "incentivized" group was compared to a "non-incentivized" group of participants who did not receive the wage-supplement. The study was based on a 54-month survey to best evaluate the impact to potential wage growth during the 36-month treatment along with the 12-month period after the wage-incentive ended. While the study was based on a welfare-to-work experiment in Canada, it briefly included data from the Florida Family Transition program (FTP) that also offered financial incentives for working. The Florida-based program showed 4-6% wage growth per year for full time workers during the first 10 years of employment. Likewise, Canada's Self-Sufficiency Program results showed a 3% per year increase in wages for the "incentivized" group during the 3-year study. The "unincentivized" group showed mixed results with one province showing 3% wage growth; and the other province showing no wage growth whatsoever. The overall effect was minimal with a 2.5% wage growth in one province and 1.9% wage growth in the other. (Zabel, J., Schwartz, S. & Donald, S., 2010). As indicated below, another type of intervention was designed to specifically address the labor market demand.

The State of Iowa implemented the *Barnabas Uplift Project* designed to reduce poverty by addressing the labor market demand for healthcare workers with the potential for wage growth and upward mobility. This guaranteed job program utilized federal funding and partnered with various organizations, healthcare employers, and community colleges to provide a CNA Training Program with the explicit goal of building self-sufficiency at individual, family-

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unit, and community levels. (Fullwiler, S. & Meyeraan, S., 2010). As outlined in the study, in addition to the free occupational training and guaranteed job after successful completion, the program also included the following components targeted to assist individuals falling within the poverty threshold: a) professionally trained tax preparers to ensure proper filing of earned income tax benefits, b) assistance with primary health care and prescription drug costs, and c) matched savings toward buying a home. Deemed a success, Fullwiler & Meyeraan stated that the program continued to be expanded across the state of Iowa with additional plans to develop similar programs in the construction and agricultural sectors. The Barnabas project study was executed as a single-treatment that combined multiple components. Other treatments are more varied and deliver multiple streams of treatments within the same program but are also focused on human capital development as described in the following study.

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) provided funding for a variety of treatments for participants living at or below poverty level that included occupational skill-based classroom training, subsidized on-the-job training, basic adult education, and job search assistance. Historically, these interventions were grouped together for analysis purposes. (Plesca, M. & Smith, J., 2007). In their study, Plesca and Smith pulled apart various treatment streams to assess the effectiveness of each in a highly complex manner. The outcome variables considered the sum of earnings 18 months after employment and during the sixth quarter after random assignment. Plesca & Smith concluded that while they added to the conversation, their approach aligned with previous aggregated study results. Utilizing their findings, it appeared that on-the-job training received the best outcomes when looked at on an individual treatment basis. While this study indicated positive outcomes, other studies have taken market conditions and the economy into consideration with different results.

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A longitudinal study of women who left public assistance found that 30% returned to the rolls. (Cheng, T., 2010). Cheng provided findings that indicated success factors were marred by high unemployment rates, low-wage service sector jobs, lack of education, welfare policies surrounding the ability to receive Medicaid and food stamp benefits; and ethnicity biases. (Cheng, T., 2010). Cheng stressed the need for human capital investment and development beyond employment to attain financial self-sufficiency for those who moved from public assistance into the working poor category. Cheng drew conclusions from his study that indicated success factors included college education, full-time employment and “operative skills” that were required to earn wages to support a family above the poverty level. Cheng also noted that changes in the economy were beyond the control of program participants. (Cheng, T., 2010). A separate study during the same time period echoed similar findings.

In fact, a 2010 Louisiana-study of former welfare-to-work program participants, concludes that less than 30% could sustain employment that enabled them to “make ends meet”. (Livermore, M., Powers, R., Creel Davis, B. and Lim, Y, 2010). Reasons for failure included the lack of human capital, economic downturns, and labor market instability; along with balancing work-family demands with successful employment. They further echo other studies like Cheng (2010), Fullwiler & Meyeraan (2010), and London (2007) document the challenges faced by former welfare recipients include the expenses associated with child care and transportation; as well lack of health insurance benefits, and low-wage job earnings.

While the interventions varied in the studies found during the review of literature many cause and effect scenarios repeatedly pointed out how the role of human capital development resulted in the attainment of low-wage jobs; along with common situational barriers (such as child care, healthcare and transportation) impacted public assistance program participants’ ability

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to successfully leave the programs by reaching self-sufficiency. (London, 2007; Plesca & Smith, 2007; Greenburg & Robins, 2011; Cheng, 2010; Alfred & Martin, 2007; and Zabel, Schwartz & Donald, 2010; and Ahn, 2015).

The research would not be complete without addressing the importance that both cognitive abilities (hard skills) and attitudes/behavior traits (soft skills) have on attaining employment and wage growth. Using multiple sets of national longitudinal data along with the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Exam, Hall and Farkas report the impact of these two categories by gender and ethnicity. (Hall & Farkas, 2011). Throughout the study they share multiple perspectives about which of the two categories is more important. While the attitudinal/behavioral traits are needed to attain employment, they conclude that over the long term workers with higher cognitive skills demonstrate higher productivity, job mobility and higher wage attainment. (Hall & Farkas, 2011).

A deeper dive into the shortcomings of work first type welfare programs designed to encourage TANF participants to accept immediate employment rather than be sanctioned (reduction of cash benefits) is discussed in a 2010 study that analyzed employment and wage outcomes for TANF recipients. (Underwood, Axelsen & Friesner, 2010). Their findings show that women are over-represented in low wage industry jobs as well as being subject to cultural filtering. “We find gender-based cultural filtering impacts welfare dependence because many cultural filters (including, but not limited to gender and ethnicity) impact whether and where one gains employment an outcome shaping wages and tenure.” This has a direct impact on the ability to escape poverty as stated in the study. The findings also acknowledge that cultural filtering varies by county and can be best addressed at the local level. (Underwood, 2010).

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In summary, the public assistance programs included in this review were designed to include supportive services such as case management and assistance with job searching; and sometimes included short term training programs. The main objective was to lower participation levels by encouraging employment as quickly as possible which resulted in varying outcomes.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

In keeping with the findings in the review of literature, following are some of the conclusions that are relevant to this research project.

It can be concluded that self-sufficiency measurements varied greatly based on the measurement factors included within different instruments, (Hetling et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2012; Rossi & Curtis, 2013; and Pearce, 2015). Measurements are not standardized and are applied in a non-uniform manner within public assistance programs. (Hetling et al., 2016). While this conclusion is accurate, it does indicate the utilization of methods for reporting purposes that align with government policies. In Hetling's final conclusions she stated that in addition to continued validation and research, both national and international programs and policies would benefit greatly from a "consistent and widely used measure." (Hetling, et al. 2016, p. 232). The State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development has a published report for each county based on The Self-Sufficiency Standard (Pearson, 2016) that can be used by workforce development and human service professionals to inform TANF (Wisconsin Works / W2) participants of the hourly wage required to attain self-sufficiency. Each county has a detailed breakdown of expenses for housing, child care, food, transportation, healthcare, miscellaneous, and taxes; as well as estimates for earned income tax credits, child care tax credit and the child tax credit. (Pearson, 2016).

The research showed how vital the development of human capital is in the attainment of self-sufficiency. While no single intervention stood out as the winner many programs were successful in reducing program participation when they utilized short-term trainings and on-the-job-training interventions. (London, 2007; Plesca & Smith, 2007; Greenburg & Robins, 2011; Cheng, 2010; Alfred & Martin, 2007; and Zabel, Schwartz & Donald, 2010; and Ahn, 2015).

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After reviewing the research, it highlighted the need to focus on and identify effective treatments / interventions that play a significant role in achieving self-sufficiency to improve the lives of public assistance participants that include both the development of cognitive / hard skills and attitudinal/behavioral traits / soft skills through case management, career planning, short and long term training and education goals. The State of Wisconsin has additional career tools accessible at the WORKNet: WisConomy and Job Center of Wisconsin Websites that can be utilized to guide public assistance participants toward self-sustaining careers based on labor market information (LMI) that can be filtered by education attainment level (see Appendix B.). Wage comparisons by job title can also be generated (see Appendix C.). There are multiple ways of viewing employment and wage data utilizing the U.S. Department of Labor-Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Handbook including level of education attained and by State (see Appendix D.).

It was further stated in many studies that barriers to successfully leaving the program hinged on continued supportive services such as case management, child care, healthcare, transportation and food assistance. (London, 2007; Plesca & Smith, 2007; Greenburg & Robins, 2011; Cheng, 2010; Alfred & Martin,2007; and Zabel, Schwartz & Donald, 2010; and Ahn, 2015). The 2016 Self-Sufficiency Report for the State of Wisconsin supports these findings by examining the financial requirements to support a family at the county level throughout the State. The self-sufficiency standard hourly wage is much higher for families with infants and preschool-age children; and then declines when children no longer require child care--see Appendix A. (Pearson, 2016).

Further, the following recommendations were noted to address the continuing challenges of public assistance program participants who found themselves in low-wage jobs; and to

JOURNEY TO SELF SUFFICIENCY

increase skills and potential earnings: 1) A need for more education and training programs that could be replicable and scalable (Ahn, 2015; Melkote, 2009-2010; and Fullwiler & Meyeraan, 2010). 2) Partnering with colleges and employers to develop training programs that meet employers' needs; as well as workplace socialization through mentoring and coaching (London, 2007; and Alfred & Martin, 2007). Currently the technical schools in the State of Wisconsin are partnering with employers to prepare students for the high-tech manufacturing industry by designing curricula in mechatronics, robotics and industry-specific computer skills that will provide self-sustaining wages.

Finally, the development of human capital in the form of cognitive and attitudinal/behavioral traits need to be considered when looking at wage attainment and long term growth. (Hall & Farkas, 2011). Additional strategies need to be considered at the local level to address cultural-filtering when it directly impacts public assistance participants ability to achieve self-sufficiency. (Underwood, Axelsen & Friesner, 2010).

In conclusion, the historical journey of public assistance programs, which are designed to achieve self-sufficiency for participants has been long. Research shows that outcomes vary depending on the intervention or treatment implemented and executed. This begs the question how can we do a better job to reduce recidivism? If accomplished, tax-payer dollars will be reduced, participants can afford to support their families; and continue to grow their income level.

While this paper adds to the discussion by providing career tools that can be utilized in the State of Wisconsin (and may be available in other States) to take a tactical approach toward moving unemployed or underemployed individuals into jobs that can provide self-sufficient wages it does not wish to ignore the importance of building human capital through higher

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education and training programs (London, 2006; Cheng 2010). Further research is also suggested focusing on the impact of cultural-filtering by employers at the local level and how it impacts program recidivism. The socio-economic impact of these specific areas on long-term self-sufficiency is vital so that government decision-making agencies can have a broader understanding when they continue to re-design and reform welfare programs.

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Appendix A.

U.S. Census Bureau: State of Wisconsin Highest Poverty Rate by County

State of Wisconsin Self-Sufficiency Standard: Hourly Wage Required by County

County		Poverty % Rate	Hourly Self-Sufficiency-Wage				
			1 Adult	Adult + Preschooler	Adult + Infant + Preschooler	Adult + Preschooler + School Age	Adult + School Age Teenager
1.	Menominee	27.2%	\$7.64	\$13.62	\$18.97	\$15.90	\$11.54
2.	Milwaukee	19.8	\$9.46	\$22.30	\$32.95	\$26.94	\$16.61
3.	Grant	16.7	\$7.87	\$15.07	\$21.24	\$18.14	\$12.54
4.	Vernon	16.5	\$8.07	\$16.32	\$22.90	\$19.75	\$13.35
5.	Forest	15.9	\$7.98	\$15.5	\$22.13	\$18.71	\$12.98
	Forest: Potawatomi Indian Community		\$8.24	\$16.09	\$22.48	\$19.25	\$13.38
6.	Sawyer	15.2	\$8.21	\$15.02	\$20.76	\$17.79	\$13.41
7.	Ashland	14.5	\$7.94	\$15.25	\$21.54	\$18.44	\$13.02
8.	Iron	14.4	\$8.10	\$16.84	\$23.55	\$20.89	\$13.88
9.	Waushara	14.3	\$8.14	\$16.14	\$22.31	\$19.42	\$13.43
10.	Langlade	14.2	\$8.09	\$15.90	\$22.16	\$19.25	\$13.46

The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin 2016 - Prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

JOURNEY TO SELF SUFFICIENCY

Appendix B.

State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Hot Jobs: Projected Employment through 2024
Occupations requiring High School Diploma or Some College (no degree)

Job Title	Median Salary	Hourly Rate Based on 40 hours per week (2080 hours)**	Percentage of Job Increase
Billing and Posting Clerks	\$35,390	\$17.01	8.61%
Loan Interviewers and Clerks	\$35,570	\$17.10	13.55%
Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Clerks	\$35,950	\$17.28	6.36%
Maintenance and Repair Workers General	\$37,920	\$18.23	6.13%
Computer Controlled Machine Tool Operators Metal and Plastic	\$38,300	\$18.41	21.34%
Dispatchers Except Police, Fire and Ambulance	\$39,080	\$18.78	8.32%
Machinists	\$41,250	\$19.83	8.20%
Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists	\$43,480	\$20.90	14.88%
Food Service Managers	\$43,820	\$21.06	7.84%
Carpenters	\$44,350	\$21.32	7.45%
Computer User Support	\$45,690	\$21.96	9.49%
Industrial Machine Mechanics	\$48,880	\$23.50	23.67%
First Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	\$49,670	\$23.88	7.32%
Operating Engineers and other construction equipment operators	\$53,150	\$25.55	9.97%
Insurance Sales Agents	\$55,070	\$26.47	10.44%
Sales Representatives: wholesale and manufacturing Except Technical and Scientific Products	\$57,370	\$27.58	11.69%
Electricians	\$58,160	\$27.96	10.72%
First Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction workers	\$62,950	\$30.26	9.79%
Plumbers, Pipefitters and Steamfitters	\$68,230	\$32.80	8.82%
First Line Supervisors of non-retail sales workers	\$74,100	\$35.62	7.43%

<https://www.jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/hotjobs> - - ** Note: Hourly Wage calculation added (manually) for this paper

Appendix C.

State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. WorkNet: Wage Comparison by Job

Occupation: Office and Administrative Support Occupations

Detail Occupation: Customer Service Representatives

Entry Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Vernon	\$13.51	\$28,110	Ψ	Ψ
Milwaukee	\$12.66	\$26,330	\$12.29	\$25,560
Waushara	\$12.09	\$25,150	Ψ	Ψ
Sawyer	\$11.50	\$23,920	Ψ	Ψ
Grant	\$11.47	\$23,860	Ψ	Ψ
Langlade	\$10.10	\$21,010	Ψ	Ψ
Ashland	\$9.86	\$20,510	Ψ	Ψ
Forest	\$9.25	\$19,240	Ψ	Ψ
Menominee	S	S	Ψ	Ψ
Iron	S	S	Ψ	Ψ
Statewide =			\$11.58	\$24,080

Average Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Milwaukee	\$19.02	\$39,560	\$18.79	\$39,090
Vernon	\$16.98	\$35,310	Ψ	Ψ
Grant	\$16.16	\$33,620	Ψ	Ψ
Langlade	\$15.35	\$31,930	Ψ	Ψ
Ashland	\$15.13	\$31,480	Ψ	Ψ
Waushara	\$14.85	\$30,880	Ψ	Ψ
Forest	\$14.80	\$30,780	Ψ	Ψ
Sawyer	\$13.53	\$28,150	Ψ	Ψ
Menominee	S	S	Ψ	Ψ
Iron	S	S	Ψ	Ψ
Statewide =			\$17.44	\$36,280

Experienced Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Milwaukee	\$22.20	\$46,180	\$22.04	\$45,850
Vernon	\$18.71	\$38,920	Ψ	Ψ
Grant	\$18.51	\$38,500	Ψ	Ψ
Langlade	\$17.98	\$37,400	Ψ	Ψ
Ashland	\$17.77	\$36,960	Ψ	Ψ
Forest	\$17.57	\$36,540	Ψ	Ψ
Waushara	\$16.22	\$33,740	Ψ	Ψ
Sawyer	\$14.55	\$30,270	Ψ	Ψ
Menominee	S	S	Ψ	Ψ
Iron	S	S	Ψ	Ψ
Statewide =			\$20.37	\$42,370

Wage Information for Customer Service Representatives, 2016

[View Occupation Profile](#)

Ψ = No Estimate

S = Suppressed

Metro* = [Metropolitan Statistical Area](#)

B.O.S.** = [Balance of State](#)

JOURNEY TO SELF SUFFICIENCY

Occupation: **Healthcare Support Occupations**

Detail Occupation: **Nursing Assistants**

Entry Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Milwaukee	\$10.68	\$22,220	\$10.56	\$21,970
Grant	\$10.61	\$22,080	ψ	ψ
Vernon	\$10.46	\$21,750	ψ	ψ
Ashland	S	S	ψ	ψ
Forest	S	S	ψ	ψ
Iron	S	S	ψ	ψ
Langlade	S	S	ψ	ψ
Menominee	S	S	ψ	ψ
Sawyer	S	S	ψ	ψ
Waushara	S	S	ψ	ψ
Statewide =			\$10.63	\$22,110

Average Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Milwaukee	\$13.71	\$28,510	\$13.33	\$27,720
Grant	\$12.88	\$26,800	ψ	ψ
Vernon	\$12.57	\$26,150	ψ	ψ
Ashland	S	S	ψ	ψ
Forest	S	S	ψ	ψ
Iron	S	S	ψ	ψ
Langlade	S	S	ψ	ψ
Menominee	S	S	ψ	ψ
Sawyer	S	S	ψ	ψ
Waushara	S	S	ψ	ψ
Statewide =			\$13.45	\$27,980

Experienced Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Milwaukee	\$15.22	\$31,650	\$14.71	\$30,600
Grant	\$14.02	\$29,160	ψ	ψ
Vernon	\$13.63	\$28,350	ψ	ψ
Ashland	S	S	ψ	ψ
Forest	S	S	ψ	ψ
Iron	S	S	ψ	ψ
Langlade	S	S	ψ	ψ
Menominee	S	S	ψ	ψ
Sawyer	S	S	ψ	ψ
Waushara	S	S	ψ	ψ
Statewide =			\$14.86	\$30,920

Wage Information for Nursing Assistants, 2016

[View Occupation Profile](#)

ψ = No Estimate

S = Suppressed

Metro* = [Metropolitan Statistical Area](#)

B.O.S.** = [Balance of State](#)

JOURNEY TO SELF SUFFICIENCY

Occupation: **Education, Training, and Library Occupations**

Detail Occupation: **Teacher Assistants**

Entry Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Ashland	\$.00	\$19,240	ψ	ψ
Forest	S	S	ψ	ψ
Iron	S	S	ψ	ψ
Langlade	\$.00	\$19,550	ψ	ψ
Menominee	\$.00	\$21,940	ψ	ψ
Milwaukee	\$.00	\$19,280	\$.00	\$19,160
Sawyer	\$.00	\$17,780	ψ	ψ
Vernon	\$.00	\$23,040	ψ	ψ
Waushara	ψ	ψ	ψ	ψ
Grant	\$.00	\$16,900	ψ	ψ
Statewide =			\$.00	\$19,470

Average Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Ashland	\$.00	\$24,020	ψ	ψ
Forest	S	S	ψ	ψ
Iron	S	S	ψ	ψ
Langlade	\$.00	\$24,130	ψ	ψ
Menominee	\$.00	\$27,340	ψ	ψ
Milwaukee	\$.00	\$28,710	\$.00	\$28,890
Sawyer	\$.00	\$25,050	ψ	ψ
Vernon	\$.00	\$27,660	ψ	ψ
Waushara	ψ	ψ	ψ	ψ
Grant	\$.00	\$22,930	ψ	ψ
Statewide =			\$.00	\$27,540

Experienced Wage Level	County		Metro*/B.O.S.**	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Ashland	\$.00	\$26,410	ψ	ψ
Forest	S	S	ψ	ψ
Iron	S	S	ψ	ψ
Langlade	\$.00	\$26,420	ψ	ψ
Menominee	\$.00	\$30,040	ψ	ψ
Milwaukee	\$.00	\$33,420	\$.00	\$33,760
Sawyer	\$.00	\$28,680	ψ	ψ
Vernon	\$.00	\$29,960	ψ	ψ
Waushara	ψ	ψ	ψ	ψ
Grant	\$.00	\$25,940	ψ	ψ
Statewide =			\$.00	\$31,580

Wage Information for Teacher Assistants, 2016

[View Occupation Profile](#)

ψ = No Estimate

S = Suppressed

Metro* = [Metropolitan Statistical Area](#)

B.O.S.** = [Balance of State](#)

Appendix D.

U.S. Department of Labor – Bureau of Labor Statistics – Occupational Outlook Handbook by Education Attainment level

OOH HOME | OCCUPATION FINDER | OOH FAQ | OOH GLOSSARY | A-Z INDEX | OOH SITE MAP | EN ESPAÑOL

OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK

Occupational Outlook Handbook > EN ESPAÑOL

Occupation Finder

Search: Use the drop-down menu in one or more columns to narrow your search.
Sort: Use the arrows at the top of each column to sort alphabetically or numerically.

Showing 1 to 25 of 340 entries (filtered from 818 total entries)

Show entries

OCCUPATION	ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION	ON-THE-JOB TRAINING	PROJECTED NUMBER OF NEW JOBS	PROJECTED GROWTH RATE	2016 MEDIAN PAY
	High school diploma				
Adhesive bonding machine operators and tenders	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term on-the-job training	Declining	Decline	\$25,000 to \$34,999
Advertising sales agents	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term on-the-job training	Declining	Decline	\$35,000 to \$54,999
Aircraft cargo handling supervisors	High school diploma or equivalent	None	0 to 999	As fast as average	\$35,000 to \$54,999
Aircraft structure, surfaces, rigging, and systems assemblers	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term on-the-job training	Declining	Decline	\$35,000 to \$54,999
Airfield operations specialists	High school diploma or equivalent	Long-term on-the-job training	0 to 999	As fast as average	\$35,000 to \$54,999
Ambulance drivers and attendants, except emergency medical technicians	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term on-the-job training	1,000 to 4,999	Much faster than average	Less than \$25,000
Animal breeders	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term on-the-job training	0 to 999	Slower than average	\$35,000 to \$54,999
Animal control workers	High school diploma or	Moderate-term on-the-	1,000 to 4,999	As fast as average	\$25,000 to \$34,999

State of Wisconsin Occupation Employment and Wage Estimates – May 2016

Examples shown utilized general industry job titles

