

**WORKGROUP TO REDUCE RELIANCE  
ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

**REPORT TO GOVERNOR JOHN R. KASICH  
AND THE OHIO GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**APRIL 15, 2015**

## Table of Contents

LETTER FROM THE WORKGROUP .....	2
BACKGROUND.....	3
MEMBERSHIP .....	3
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES SUPPORT .....	3
SCHEDULE .....	3
RESOURCES .....	4
DEFINITIONS.....	4
PROCESS.....	6
KEY FINDINGS.....	6
COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES DIRECTOR SURVEY .....	12
STAKEHOLDER SURVEY .....	15
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY .....	17
FURTHER STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	18
PRIORITY AREAS .....	19
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	19
Priority 1: PERSON-CENTERED CASE MANAGEMENT: A STRATEGY TO BEGIN REDUCING RELIANCE ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE .....	20
Priority 2: STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION: A STARTING POINT .....	22
Priority 3: RESOURCES NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION .....	24
Priority 4: PERFORMANCE MEASURES.....	26
Priority 5: COMPETING PERFORMANCE METRICS AND LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY.....	29
Priority 6: PUBLIC MESSAGING: POVERTY IS A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION .....	32
CONCLUSION.....	35
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	36
APPENDICES	

## LETTER FROM THE WORKGROUP

Governor Kasich,

Thank you for the opportunity to work on behalf of you and the citizens of Ohio on this critical topic. Your leadership on this issue is much needed and greatly appreciated.

The workgroup recognizes the unique challenges facing many Ohioans who are not yet thriving in our recovering economy. However, we also recognize that even in the best times, citizens throughout the state may struggle to escape the grips of poverty and dependence on public assistance. This sad reality lies at the heart of this report and serves as the foundation for the recommendations of this workgroup.

The workgroup has a keen understanding that people do not “leap out of poverty.” Instead, with the proper assistance, support, and sometimes push, people can take incremental steps out of a life reliant on public assistance toward a life of work, personal responsibility and productivity.

When individuals are impacted by infrastructure limitations, such as jobs that do not pay a sustainable wage in their community or the inability to access reliable transportation to and from work, we need to collectively work to eliminate those barriers. If they face something more insidious, like substance abuse, mental health issues, or lack of the will or hope to thrive, we need to provide guidance to get them on the path to productivity and prosperity. This help needs to come from the combined effort of county departments of job and family services, our many community partners, businesses, the General Assembly and you.

To begin to put the pieces in place, we must ensure that opportunities exist in all parts of Ohio. The workgroup feels a need to make significant investments to improve transportation availability, enhance economic vitality, and address substance abuse issues. At the same time, we must support efforts to address the educational and work experience gaps that plague many across the state.

Additionally, to ensure that individuals receive the guidance and support they need regardless of where they live, the workgroup strongly endorses a much more personalized system of case management for citizens who need and want it.

None of this will come easily, quickly, or without additional resources. It is our sincere hope that this report will assist you and the Ohio lawmakers in taking the difficult but necessary steps needed to address this complex issue and change many of the circumstances that currently contribute to public assistance reliance. While the workgroup officially ceases to exist with the issuance of this report, each member is committed to continuing to assist the administration in tackling this difficult but worthwhile task.

Sincerely,

Members of the Workgroup  
to Reduce Reliance on Public Assistance

## **BACKGROUND**

Section 751.37 of House Bill 483 of the 130<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly established the Workgroup to Reduce Reliance on Public Assistance. The language instructed the governor-appointed workgroup to develop proposals to help individuals to cease relying on public assistance programs administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and county departments of job and family services. The workgroup consisted of representatives serving the three most populous counties, three rural counties and three additional counties. Section 751.37 also instructed the workgroup to issue a report of its proposals to the governor and General Assembly.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Tim McCartney (Chair), Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services  
Kate Offenberger, Carroll County Department of Job and Family Services  
David Dombrosky, Clark County Department of Job and Family Services  
Eileen Dray-Bardon, Columbiana County Department of Job and Family Services  
David Merriman, Cuyahoga County Department of Job and Family Services  
Shancie Jenkins, Delaware County Department of Job and Family Services  
Anthony Trotman, Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services  
Beth Rubin, Greene County Department of Job and Family Services  
Jody Walker, South Central Ohio Job and Family Services (Hocking, Ross, Vinton)

## **OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES SUPPORT**

Cynthia C. Dungey, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services  
Douglas Lumpkin, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

## **SCHEDULE**

The Workgroup to Reduce Reliance on Public Assistance met on the following dates:

December 18, 2014  
January 8, 2015  
February 5, 2015  
February 26, 2015  
March 11, 2015  
March 30, 2015

The workgroup's agendas and meeting minutes can be found in Appendix A.

## RESOURCES

The workgroup relied on earlier research, reports and recommendations as the context and foundation for its discussions on the topic of public assistance reliance. The following list is not exhaustive but includes background material the workgroup identified as important and informative:

### Youth Data Review Findings, ODJFS (Appendix B)

- American Community Survey, 5-year estimate, 2008 - 2015
- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Annual Report, SFY 2013
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities FFY 2014, ages 14 - 25
- Mental Health and Addiction Services, via Ohio Medicaid, FFY 2013
- US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Situation, Household Data, Table A, October 2014
- Current Population Survey estimates, historical tables, October 2014
- US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Atlas of Rural and Small Town America, December 2014
- Ohio Department of Health, Live Birth Data, Custom Report, November 2014
- McKernan and Ratcliffe, The Urban Institute, Brief 14, June 2010 Childhood Poverty Persistence: Facts and Consequences
- Ohio Criminal Justice Service, OCJ Statistics, 2012
- Coalition on Homelessness and Housing, March 2014
- National Center for Education Statistics, Public High School Graduation tables, 2011 – 2012

### Resource Bibliography (Appendix C)

County Department of Job and Family Services Director Survey (Appendix D)

Stakeholder Survey (Appendix E)

Focus Group Summary (Appendix F)

Workgroup Guiding Topics (Appendix G)

## DEFINITIONS

The following are a few of the key programs highlighted or mentioned in this report:

**Food Assistance Employment and Training (FAET) Program** – The Food Assistance Employment and Training program provides work experience, training, education or a job search program, as described in the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, for required Food Assistance participants. FAET services are designed to help participants move promptly into unsubsidized employment. The program is administered locally at county departments of job and family services.<sup>1</sup>

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program** – The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program is designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. States receive block grants to design and operate programs that accomplish one of the purposes of the TANF program. The four purposes of the TANF program are to:

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<sup>1</sup> ODJFS: FACH 5101:4-1-03

- Provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes;
- Reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies;
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.<sup>2</sup>

**Ohio Works First (OWF) Program** – Ohio Works First is the financial assistance portion of the Ohio’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. It provides time-limited cash benefits to eligible low-income families. Eligibility is contingent upon household composition, household income, and (for work-required adults) participation in prescribed activities designed to improve the recipient’s self-sufficiency.

**Prevention Retention and Contingency (PRC) Program** – Ohio’s Prevention, Retention and Contingency program provides work supports and other services to help low-income parents overcome immediate barriers to employment. It is funded through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. PRC services vary between counties based on community needs and local resources. PRC provides non-cash benefits and services that individuals need to overcome immediate barriers to achieving or maintaining self-sufficiency and personal responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

**Work Activity Program** – Work-required recipients of OWF cash benefits are required to actively participate in a work activity program to gain job skills, training and experience designed to improve their employability and self-sufficiency, with a goal of employment and improved household income before time-limited benefits are exhausted.

**Workforce Investment Act (WIA)** – The Workforce Investment Act was passed in 1998 to reform federal job training programs and create a new, comprehensive workforce investment system that is customer-focused and helps Americans access the tools they need to manage their careers through information and high-quality services. It also is intended to help U.S. companies find skilled workers.

The following are the seven principles of the Workforce Investment Act:

1. Strong Role for Boards and Private Sector
2. State and Local Flexibility
3. Streamlined One-Stop Services
4. Universal Access
5. Empowering Individuals
6. Increased Accountability
7. Connections Between School and Work.

In Ohio, WIA local control and decision-making are maximized through effective state and local partnerships that foster continuous improvement of the workforce development system. WIA services are offered through OhioMeansJobs Centers. WIA provides the framework for a workforce development system that is designed to meet the needs of employers, job seekers and current workers who want to advance their careers. The goal of WIA is to increase participant employment, job retention, earnings and occupational skill attainment. In Ohio, the WIA program is administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> HHS: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/tanf/about>

<sup>3</sup> ODJFS: <http://jfs.ohio.gov/factsheets/PRC.pdf> and CAM 5101:1-1-01

<sup>4</sup> ODJFS: <http://jfs.ohio.gov/owd/wia/index.stm>

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA)** – The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act was signed into law in 2014. It supersedes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. The enactment of WIOA provides opportunity for reforms to ensure that the national employment system is job-driven, responds to the needs of employers, and prepares workers for jobs that are available now and in the future.<sup>5</sup> WIOA affirms Ohio’s coordination of workforce and TANF programs.

## PROCESS

ODJFS provided youth data review findings to help inform the workgroup’s discussion on target populations and barriers. The agency’s findings can be found in Appendix B. The workgroup further researched and reviewed numerous reports and studies on welfare reform history, strategies and outcomes. This background material can be found in the resource bibliography in Appendix C. The workgroup also reached out to all 88 county departments of job and family services to solicit their experience and expertise on the barriers to economic independence that are most prevalent in their counties. The county director survey results can be found in Appendix D. A stakeholder survey was conducted to solicit the experience and expertise of community partners. These results can be found in Appendix E. In addition, two focus groups were conducted with OWF cash assistance recipients. A summary of the focus group results can be found in Appendix F. The workgroup’s report initially began with several key topics to guide the development of priority areas for the report’s recommendations. A compilation of these topics and the workgroup’s responses can be found in Appendix G.

## KEY FINDINGS

The following is a description of key findings resulting from a variety of studies, reports, and research over the past twenty years on the topic of reducing reliance on public assistance. These key findings provide support for person-centered case management and evaluations of strategies. However, they also highlight that success in reducing reliance on public assistance is **modest** and **incremental**.

### 1. ***National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies***

This study, conducted in the mid-1990s and finalized in 2001 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, was subtitled *Evaluating Two Approaches to Case Management: Implementation, Participation Patterns, Costs, and Three Year Impacts of the Columbus Welfare to Work Program*. It looked at two types of case management: traditional and integrated. The findings revealed the following:

- A. Integrated case managers provided more personalized attention than traditional case managers and more closely monitored participation in program activities.

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<sup>5</sup> DOL: [www.doleta.gov/wioa/](http://www.doleta.gov/wioa/)

- B. The integrated program (providing both eligibility and work participation) engaged more people in welfare-to-work activities than the traditional program.
- C. Sanction rates in the programs were similar and very high.
- D. The integrated program had somewhat higher two-year costs for employment-related services than the traditional program.
- E. The Columbus programs increased earnings.
- F. Both programs reduced welfare receipt and payments, but the effects of the integrated program were somewhat larger.
- G. Neither program increased sample members' average combined income from earnings, cash assistance and food stamps.
- H. For sample members who did not have a high school diploma or GED when they entered the study, the integrated program produced larger earnings gains and welfare reductions than the traditional program.

It is important to note that Columbus had sufficient program services and an uncommon degree of administrative and clerical support. Integrated case managers found balancing employment services with income maintenance to be demanding even with these supports; without them, they may have found the work to be overwhelming.<sup>6</sup>

**2. *Increasing Employment Stability and Earnings for Low-Wage Workers***  
*Lessons from the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) Project*

This study was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and conducted in 16 program areas across eight states, including Ohio. The purpose of the ERA project was to identify and determine the effectiveness of different program strategies designed to promote employment stability and earnings growth among current or former welfare recipients and other low-income individuals.

The report highlighted the following results:

- A. Supporting employment stability – in which participants stay employed in the same job – is likely to be a more effective strategy than encouraging job stability.
- B. Earnings supplements – tied to job retention and ideally coupled with job coaching – can promote sustained employment and advancement.
- C. By themselves, counseling and referrals to services to help people stay employed do not appear to increase employment retention and advancement.

The majority of the programs tested did not improve participants' retention and advancement, and most sample members remained poor or near-poor at the end of the study.<sup>7</sup>

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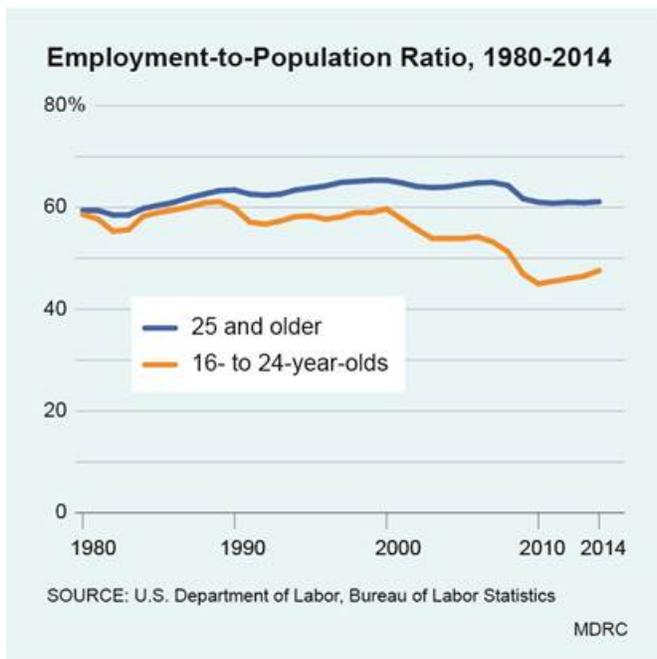
<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/evaluating-two-approaches-case-management>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/increasing-employment-stability-and-earnings-low-wage-workers>

### 3. *Increasing Employment Opportunities for Disadvantaged Young Adults*

This study, conducted by the nonprofit research organization MDRC, looked at the issues affecting work opportunities for 16- to 24-year-olds. According to the study, only about half of young people ages 16 to 24 held jobs in 2014, and about one in five people in this age group were neither working nor in school. The problem was most severe for disadvantaged groups, including less educated, low-income and minority young people, especially young men of color.

The following graph highlights the disparity in the 16-to-24-year-old workforce over the last 34 years.



Key findings of the study were as follows:

- A. Employers are a heterogeneous group with diverse needs, goals and preferences.
- B. Employers may respond to financial incentives, but incentives are not likely to be the only force motivating their decisions. Furthermore, wage subsidies have been shown to stigmatize groups of workers.
- C. Employers are more likely to engage in youth employment efforts if it is easy for them to do so and if they believe it is a positive opportunity for their businesses.
- D. Employers' growing use of third parties to recruit and screen new employees has significant implications for efforts to increase the hiring of disadvantaged young adults.
- E. Widespread adoption of computerized applicant tracking systems also has changed the way employers interact with job seekers.

- F. In the face of these changing practices, disadvantaged young workers need assistance communicating their skills and experience. Credentialing mechanisms could help.
- G. Simple forms of support in entry-level jobs can put young adults on the path to success.
- H. To address the issue of youth unemployment on a transformative scale, demand-driven approaches can take on whole geographic areas or whole industries.

The findings support the importance of integrating programs that connect job seekers with employment opportunities and emphasize the significance of strong business relationships within communities.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4. *Improving Employment and Earnings for TANF Recipients***

This study, released by the Urban Institute in 2012, highlights successful strategies for improving employment and earnings for TANF recipients. Ohio was part of the study.

The report suggested several areas for further exploration:

- A. *Adopting a career pathways framework.* Programs using this framework generally offer academic, occupational and life-skills training valued by employers, as well as financial and supportive services and defined links to employment opportunities, with a goal of moving individuals along career pathways.
- B. *Combining into a single program several features already shown to be effective.* Such a program might include financial incentives (to promote work, as well as skill-building), sector-focused training and strong connections to employers in specific industry sectors.
- C. *Providing longer-term subsidized employment, combined with sector-focused skills training.* Testing would indicate whether lengthened subsidized employment paired with skills training could better position individuals to transition into unsubsidized employment and retain such employment longer. Financial incentives and strong employer connections might be helpful. Apprentice programs would benefit from rigorous evaluation, as well.
- D. *Providing services to TANF recipients through different institutions.* While difficult to mount, evaluations assessing the effectiveness of service providers — TANF agencies, workforce development agencies, community colleges, community-based organizations, for-profit groups and others — could shed light on operational issues.<sup>9</sup>

#### **5. *Alternative Employment Strategies for Hard-to-Employ TANF recipients***

*Final Results from a Test of Transitional Jobs and Pre-employment Services in Philadelphia*

This study looked at two approaches to working with hard-to-employ TANF recipients in the Philadelphia area.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/increasing-employment-opportunities-disadvantaged-young-adults>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/improving-employment-and-earnings-tanf-recipients>

The first approach tested was a transitional jobs model operated by the Transitional Work Corporation (TWC). TWC quickly placed recipients who were referred by the welfare agency into temporary, subsidized jobs, provided work-related supports and then helped participants look for permanent jobs. The second model, called “Success Through Employment Preparation” (STEP), assessed and addressed participants’ barriers to employment — such as health problems or inadequate skills — before they went to work.

Key findings of the study were as follows:

- A. Early in the follow-up period, the TWC participants had significantly higher employment rates than the control group members. Beyond the first year, however, the difference faded, and the groups had similar outcomes. The TWC participants also received significantly less welfare assistance in the first year and a half of follow-up, but these impacts did not last.
- B. Recipients who were assigned to the STEP program did not work or earn more, or receive less welfare, than the control group. The results may have been affected by the fact that many people who were assigned to STEP did not participate in the program for long periods.

The STEP program was an intensive case management model, and it faced some implementation challenges. Some of those challenges may have been typical start-up issues; others may have been related to features of the program model. STEP offered an array of services, including barrier assessments, life skills classes, basic education classes, counseling services and job-readiness activities. The program lacked a clear structure, however, and staff said they struggled to assign sample members to enough activities to meet the weekly 30-hour participation requirement. A large proportion of sample members participated in activities at some point during their time in the program, but the average number of hours was relatively low. The program was intended to begin with assessments to identify employment barriers so that appropriate services could be offered. Some participants took a long time to complete the assessments, however, both because they failed to report to the program consistently and because the team designated to analyze the results was small and unable to keep pace. In the end, many clients participated in other activities at STEP without completing barrier assessments.<sup>10</sup>

## **6. *Serving TANF and Low-Income Populations through WIA One-Stop Centers***

This U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) study, conducted by an outside firm, looked at TANF and WIA mandates and how they connect and work in different states. The report highlighted some issues that affect the goal of reducing reliance on public assistance.

In all of the study sites except the Edgcombe-Nash Job Link Career Center, it was found that many TANF clients required intensive, relatively long-term educational and vocational skills training even to qualify for many entry-level positions.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full\\_18.pdf](http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_18.pdf)

The study found that the following factors promoted WIA/TANF coordination:

- A. When management oversight for the WIA and TANF programs was combined in the same local agency, there was a greater potential for effective cross-program coordination.
- B. In general, WIA and TANF program communication and coordination were enhanced when eligibility and employment workers shared the same caseloads, when both types of workers were employed by the same agency, and/or when both types of workers shared the same facility.
- C. At some of the study sites, regularly scheduled meetings of WIA and TANF supervisors and line workers to discuss cases and policies promoted cross-program coordination.
- D. One of the study sites established an employment and career services liaison position to improve communication and coordination between programs.

The study found that the following factors inhibited WIA/TANF coordination:

- A. Employment services agencies and welfare agencies can have bureaucratic cultures that undermine WIA/TANF coordination and performance. Agencies that have a longer history of collaboration are more likely to have overcome these differences and to have devised effective ways of working together.
- B. In many states, legislation has shifted primary responsibility for employment services for TANF clients to state and local employment agencies, including WIBs. In this study, the sites in which the responsibility for TANF employment services was removed from the TANF agency experienced initial resentment and mistrust across agencies.
- C. Effective cross-program coordination and communication may be compromised when WIA and TANF administrative data systems do not interact, or when workers at one agency do not have convenient access to the other agency's data systems.
- D. Changes in TANF caseloads and resource constraints on state agencies can undermine effective case management and cross-program coordination.

The HHS study found that local WIA agencies had varying philosophies regarding the use of WIA training resources for TANF clients. For example, at one study site, managers committed nearly all WIA training funds to TANF clients to maximize resources aimed at reducing dependence. Another study site took the opposite approach, limiting TANF clients' access to WIA training because they had other (TANF-funded) training resources. The following factors were found to promote WIA participation among TANF clients and other low-income populations:

- A. One study site imposed income eligibility limits for WIA intensive and training services to ensure priority service to TANF clients and other low-income populations.
- B. Ongoing client participation was greatly enhanced at study sites where education and training services were delivered on site at employment centers.

- C. Some of the study sites used labor market surveys to link training services to local needs for low-income, entry-level workers.

Factors inhibiting WIA participation among TANF clients and other low-income populations included the following:

- A. Most of the study sites assigned non-exempt TANF clients to an initial job search, indicating a general work-first policy approach. At sites where the work-first orientation was particularly strong, employment service workers tended to stress immediate job placement over education and training services.
- B. Some aspects of WIA performance standards and TANF work participation rules may affect decisions to enroll TANF clients in WIA training. Specifically, WIA standards for post-program employment and job retention and federal restrictions on the percentage of a state's TANF non-exempt caseload that may be engaged in education and training are thought to limit TANF client access to WIA-funded or other training.
- C. Many of the study sites developed employment services designed specifically for TANF clients that may have diverted them from WIA intensive and training services.<sup>11</sup>

## COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES DIRECTOR SURVEY

The workgroup surveyed the directors of Ohio's 88 county departments of job and family services to solicit their experience and expertise on the barriers to economic independence that are most prevalent in their counties, as well as the most effective methods to help public assistance recipients overcome those barriers. The survey focused on OWF cash assistance recipients. Along with requesting basic demographic information about their counties, the survey asked the directors to do four things:

- Rank a list of barriers commonly associated with public assistance recipients;
- Identify the job-readiness status of their OWF work-required population by percentage;
- Identify the most effective method of working with OWF work-required recipients;
- Provide any other instructive thoughts or comments for working with this population.

Ninety-five percent (95%) of the counties responded to the survey. Results were compiled collectively, as well as by county size (small, medium, large, small metropolitan, medium metropolitan and metropolitan) and county type (rural, semi-metropolitan and metropolitan). Complete comparative data can be found in Appendix D, along with numerous respondent comments.

Among all counties, the following were the top five barriers:

1. Substance abuse issues or inability to pass a drug test;
2. Lack of transportation;
3. Lack of high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED);
4. Lack of client motivation and commitment to success;
5. Lack of available jobs and/or lack of jobs of the appropriate skill level.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/WIA-centers-site-visits04/report.pdf>

The survey indicated that substance abuse issues and inability to pass a drug test were significant barriers to reducing reliance on public assistance, particularly in rural counties and those with populations below 200,000. This was illustrated by a comment from a director at a large, semi-metropolitan county outside Columbus: “We believe the major item is substance abuse . . . Many folks can ‘adjust’ to pass a test but cannot maintain being drug-free and maintain long-term employment.”

Lack of transportation was cited as a significant barrier in counties of all sizes and types *except* large metropolitan counties. Lack of available jobs and/or lack of jobs of the appropriate skill levels were noted to be significant barriers in counties of all sizes and types. This barrier ranked no lower than sixth in all county- type categories. Both of these issues were reflected in a comment from a director at a small, rural county in southeast Ohio: “Our county is very small and has limited work placements and no public transportation. Also the few placements we have are not stepping stones to better employment.”

Lack of a high school diploma or GED tended to rank higher as the size of a county increased; it was the number-one barrier in large metro counties. In addition, many expressed the concern that working toward a GED should be a countable activity for the receipt of OWF cash benefits: “We would like to see changes in the federal regulations which would allow all GED classes as a countable work activity. This helps a person be employable when they achieve their GED.”

Lack of client motivation and commitment to success ranked high in all county sizes and types *except* in the three large counties surveyed. One county representative lamented, “I see a great need for 'motivational techniques' to get the OWF population to recognize, and truly understand, their current situation and how it can be improved by becoming self-sufficient. A 'light at the end of the tunnel,' if you will. But this effort is often clouded by the multiple barriers they possess. The life of an OWF client, and public assistance clients in general, is always in a state of chaos.”

Lack of child care, domestic violence issues, lack of stable housing and limited English proficiency were ranked as less prevalent barriers in counties of all sizes and types. None of these barriers ranked higher than 12<sup>th</sup> in any county size or type. Being a product of generational poverty ranked highest in small, rural counties and large metropolitan counties. It tended to rank as the least significant barrier, or at least out of the top ten, in counties of other sizes and types. Mental health issues ranked in the top ten in counties of all sizes and types *except* large metro counties. Chronic physical health challenges that do not yet qualify for a disability were consistently in the top ten regardless of county size or type; however, they typically ranked toward the bottom of the top ten. Legal issues did not rank in the top ten in counties of any size or type *except* large metropolitan counties.

Lack of vocational or other post-secondary education was cited more often as county size increased; it ranked third in large metro counties. Lack of work experience ranked in the top ten barriers in counties of all types and sizes. Lack of a personal support system tended to rank at the lower end of the top ten in counties of all sizes and types, except in metropolitan counties, where it ranked 11<sup>th</sup>.

In addition to ranking barriers, county directors were asked to estimate the percentage of their OWF work-required clients who fell into the following categories:

- **Job Ready** – Clients have a few minor barriers to employment. They will likely become self-sufficient with little intervention.
- **Nearly Job Ready** – Clients have several or significant barrier(s) to employment but will likely overcome them with assistance within 12 months.

- **Not Job Ready** – Clients have multiple or significant barrier(s) to employment that they will be unlikely to overcome within 12 months. However, long-term assistance in barrier removal may lead to eventual employment.
- **Unemployable** – Clients have significant barriers, possibly including medical issues, that make it extremely unlikely that they will ever be capable of full- or part-time employment, regardless of the amount or length of assistance in barrier removal.

All counties, regardless of their size or type, indicated that the highest percentage of their OWF work-required clients fell into the **Not Job Ready** status. Percentages ranged from 30.57 percent in large counties to 43.33 percent in medium metro counties. All counties, with one exception, indicated that the second highest percentage of their OWF work-required recipients fell into the **Nearly Job Ready** status. Percentages ranged from 25.71 percent in large and small metro counties to 33.33 percent in large metro counties. The exception was small metro counties, which ranked the **Unemployable** category as second highest. **Job Ready** and **Unemployable** percentages varied according to county size. **Unemployable** percentages were higher in six of the 10 county sizes and types. Percentages ranged from 11.67 percent in medium metro counties to 26.70 percent in small counties. **Job Ready** percentages ranged from just 10.50 percent in small counties to 18.33 percent in both medium and large metro counties.

County directors were asked to select what they felt was the best method to engage OWF work-required recipients. The four choices were as follows:

- **Immediate labor force attachment** – This method focuses on job search assistance, volunteer work experience and/or short-term education or training.
- **Human capital development** – This method allows work-required clients to engage in skill-building and/or education and training activities prior to actively seeking employment.
- **A hybrid of both models above** – This method directs work-required clients to one of the above models based on the individual’s circumstances (education, skills etc.).
- **Sanctioning** – This method removes benefits for failure to comply with program requirements.
- **A hybrid of all** – This method uses all of the above strategies – immediate labor force attachment, human capital development and sanctioning – based upon the individual’s circumstances.

All county directors, regardless of their county size or type, selected “A hybrid of all” as their top choice. This supports the view that person-centered case management should be used to assess and direct individuals in appropriate ways. A respondent from a large metropolitan county expressed views shared by many: “A structured plan, consistent guidance and a positive support system are needed to help our consumers to become self-sufficient. An in-depth assessment is needed when the individual walks in the door. This would provide the type of information needed to develop a structured and meaningful plan. Goals should be well-defined, broken down into small manageable steps and build upon one another. Achieving and experiencing incremental successes creates hope and momentum. A case manager who has the time needed to guide, push or drive the consumer towards meeting these steps is equally important. Our consumers get lost in the process and overwhelmed when life events occur; they can get a job but struggle to keep it; and they can get into training programs or college but struggle to complete the goal. Consequences are discovered and continue to be a barrier long after the fact and make it that much harder to move forward. Intensive case management can help our consumers to address challenges that arise, stay focused on their goals and stay on track. A positive role model, mentor or support system to cheer the individual along the way and act as a sounding board helps to make it personal. The individual owns the goals.”

All county directors, regardless of their county size and type, selected “A hybrid of both methods above” as their second choice. “Immediate labor force attachment” ranked third in three of the 10 county types. “Human capital development” ranked third in two of the 10 county types. “Sanctioning” tied for last in all county types and sizes. It received zero selections in more than half the counties.

The survey found that county size and type play a significant role in how county directors view client barriers. County size and county type do not play a significant role in how county directors view the job readiness status of their OWF work-required clients. County size and type do not play a significant role in what county directors believe are the most effective methods of working with OWF work-required clients.

## STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

The workgroup surveyed community stakeholders to solicit their experience and expertise in the barriers to economic independence that are most prevalent in their communities, as well as the most effective methods to help public assistance recipients overcome those barriers. The survey focused on OWF cash assistance recipients. Along with asking basic demographic information about their communities, the survey requested that the stakeholders do four things:

- Rank a list of barriers commonly associated with public assistance recipients in their areas;
- Identify the job readiness status of their county’s OWF work-required population by percentage;
- Identify the most effective method of working with OWF work-required recipients;
- Provide any other instructive thoughts or comments for working with this population.

The workgroup received 250 responses to the survey. Results were compiled collectively, as well as by county size (small, medium, large, small metropolitan, medium metropolitan and metropolitan) and county type (rural, semi-metropolitan and metropolitan). Complete comparative data from the stakeholder survey can be found in Appendix E, along with numerous respondent comments.

Respondents ranked the following as the top five barriers to employment:

1. Lack of available jobs and/or lack of jobs of the appropriate skill level;
2. Lack of transportation;
3. Lack of child care;
4. Lack of high school diploma or GED;
5. Substance abuse issues or inability to pass a drug test.

Lack of available jobs and/or lack of jobs of the appropriate skill level and lack of transportation were ranked highest; stakeholders in counties of all sizes and types ranked them as either first or second. Describing the lack of available jobs, one stakeholder commented: “No question, the biggest barrier facing our hungry neighbors is the lack of a sustainable wage. The majority of the folks receiving assistance cobble together 2 or 3 jobs and still can't make ends meet due to low per hour wages. Additionally when they are allowed part-time hours only, it prevents them from receiving life-critical benefits like healthcare.”

Stakeholders also cited lack of child care as a more significant barrier than county directors did. Lack of child care ranked fourth in stakeholder responses but 13<sup>th</sup> in county director responses. This difference in perception should be evaluated.

Substance abuse issues or inability to pass a drug test ranked in the top ten of stakeholder responses regardless of county type or size. Lack of a high school diploma or GED ranked in the top five of stakeholder responses regardless of county type or size. Stakeholders ranked lack of stable housing significantly higher as a barrier than county directors did. Lack of stable housing ranked eighth among all stakeholders and 14<sup>th</sup> among county directors. This difference in perception should be further evaluated.

Stakeholders ranked domestic violence issues and limited English proficiency” as the least significant barriers regardless of county type or size. This mirrored the responses of the county directors, who also consistently ranked them at the bottom of the list.

Being a product of generational poverty ranked as the 10<sup>th</sup> most significant barrier among stakeholders and county directors alike. Lack of a high school diploma ranked as the third most significant barrier among both stakeholders and county directors. Lack of client motivation and commitment to success ranked significantly higher as a barrier on county responses (fourth) than in stakeholder responses (12<sup>th</sup>). This also is an area that may need analysis to determine reasons for differences in perception.

Lack of work experience ranked seventh in county responses and ninth in stakeholder responses. County directors ranked chronic physical health challenges that do not yet qualify as a disability as a significantly higher barrier (eighth) than stakeholders (14<sup>th</sup>). Stakeholders ranked lack of vocational or post-secondary training as a greater barrier (sixth) than county directors did (11<sup>th</sup>).

Both groups ranked mental health issues similarly: sixth for county directors and seventh for stakeholders. They ranked legal issues similarly: 12<sup>th</sup> for county directors and 13<sup>th</sup> for stakeholders. And they ranked lack of a personal support system similarly: ninth for county directors and 11<sup>th</sup> for stakeholders.

In addition to ranking barriers, stakeholders also were asked to estimate the percentage of their OWF work-required clients who fell into the following basic categories:

- **Job Ready** – Clients have a few minor barriers to employment. They will likely become self-sufficient with little intervention.
- **Nearly Job Ready** – Clients have several or significant barrier(s) to employment but will likely overcome them with assistance within 12 months.
- **Not Job Ready** – Clients have multiple or significant barrier(s) to employment that they will be unlikely to overcome within 12 months. However, long-term assistance in barrier removal may lead to eventual employment.
- **Unemployable** – Clients have significant barriers, possibly including medical issues, that make it extremely unlikely that they will ever be capable of full- or part-time employment, regardless of the amount or length of assistance in barrier removal.

Overall, there was little difference in perception of job readiness of OWF work-required clients between stakeholder and county respondents. Both groups ranked the largest percentage of clients as **Not Job Ready**, with all stakeholders identifying 33.90 percent in this category and all county respondents 36.05 percent. **Nearly Job Ready** percentages varied even less, with stakeholders identifying 26.09 percent in this category and county respondents identifying 27.39 percent. The **Unemployable** percentages were also quite close (20.13 percent among county respondents, 20.04 percent among stakeholders). **Job Ready** percentages were slightly farther apart, with stakeholders identifying 19.97 percent in this category and counties identifying 16.43 percent.

Stakeholders were given the choice of selecting what they feel is the best method to engage OWF work-required recipients. The four choices were as follows:

- **Immediate labor force attachment** – This method focuses on job search assistance, volunteer work experience and/or short-term education or training.
- **Human capital development** – This method allows work-required clients to engage in skill-building and/or education and training activities prior to actively seeking employment.
- **A hybrid of both models above** – This method directs work-required clients to one of the above models based on the individual’s circumstances (education, skills etc.).
- **Sanctioning** – This method removes benefits for failure to comply with program requirements.
- **A hybrid of all** – This method uses all of the above strategies – immediate labor force attachment, human capital development and sanctioning – based upon the individual’s circumstances.

Overall, stakeholders, like counties, identified the preferred method as “A hybrid of all,” but at a significantly lower overall percentage (36.10 percent for stakeholders, 52.44 percent for all counties). Overall, both groups ranked “A hybrid of both models above” similarly, with stakeholders choosing it 38.17 percent of the time and counties 31.71 percent of the time. “Human capital development” alone ranked higher among stakeholders (16.18 percent) than counties (6.10 percent). “Immediate labor force attachment” alone and “Sanctioning” alone each scored similarly among both groups.

## **FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY**

On March 23, 2015, and March 25, 2015, the workgroup conducted two focus groups with OWF recipients. All were participating in a work activity as a condition of receiving benefits. The full summary can be found in Appendix F.

The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain recipients’ perspectives on the challenges that lead people to apply for assistance, their individual plans to become self-sufficient, challenges to attaining their goals, and ways they think the current system could be modified to help them meet their goals.

All participants stated that a “one-size-fits-all” program does not work. They indicated that they need personalized attention and that the system should work with people differently depending on “where they are in their life.” Most could not articulate a clear path off assistance, and most stated that they simply needed employment. The priority of caring for one’s children was a common theme regarding the choice to apply for public assistance benefits. As one participant expressed, “I am doing what I have to do to take care of my children. They are the most important thing.”

Participants were mixed in their views of the system in its current state. Some expressed that the system is designed to keep people in poverty. Others felt that people need to follow the rules and be personally responsible for their lives. Collectively, the group reserved their strongest comments for public housing clusters. They believe that the public housing environment traps people into generational poverty without teaching them to be independent. One frustrated participant commented: “Public housing has too many people living in one square . . . If you plant a flower and it grows...you can’t put ten more seeds on top of it and expect them to grow too.”

Most agreed that there should be time limits for people to receive public assistance. Additionally, most agreed that during the time they receive assistance, they should be engaged in real efforts (education, training, life skills) to move off public assistance.

Many participants expressed frustration with other recipients who appear not to suffer consequences for inaction or lack of personal responsibility. Some expressed frustration with the current service delivery system because it does not give individuals the personal attention they need. Most felt that people must be “pushed” to strive harder to get the things they want.

Most participants expressed that employment opportunities should be created and that those opportunities must be in jobs that pay a living wage. Virtually all expressed significant frustration with life in poverty. They indicated a desire for more effective programs, such as therapy sessions for public assistance recipients, information about programs and services in neighborhoods, life skills classes in middle school and high school, and help with criminal records.

The focus groups also expressed a desire for intensive case management. They said caseworkers should spend more time getting to know those served while providing help with goal setting, structured steps to obtain goals and support. The group stated that people want to work and be successful. They felt that the system should do a better job of informing individuals about available services and how to access them. Participants also indicated the need for more immediate and robust help in finding a job, as well as more time to find a job. They cited the work participation requirements as an obstacle to finding a job.

The groups emphasized the need for life-skills training for adults on assistance and for students throughout their school years. One participant vocalized strongly: “IF A PERSON WAS DROPPED IN A FOREST AFTER HIGH SCHOOL, THEY WOULD DIE. THEY DO NOT KNOW LIFE SKILLS. BASIC SKILLS NEED TO BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOL.” In general, the groups indicated that people are not opposed to participating in activities to get assistance, but they feel that the system needs to do a better job helping them move toward self-sufficiency.

## **FURTHER STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The workgroup conducted focus groups of current, participating clients. However, it is critical that the voices of those who are *not* actively participating are heard to learn *why* they are not engaged. It is recommended that the ODJFS Office of Human Services Innovation conduct focus groups and/or surveys of the following groups:

- OWF work-required individuals serving sanctions;
- Individuals who exceeded their 36-month OWF time limit and received hardship extensions to continue receiving benefits;
- Individuals who exceeded their 36-month OWF time limit and were not given hardship extensions but still receive other forms of assistance;
- Individuals who declined OWF cash benefits (though they may be otherwise eligible) because they did not want to comply with child support requirements and/or did not want to participate in a work activity;
- Families receiving child-only OWF cash benefits to identify the circumstances that led to the child-only cases (typically, these are cases in which grandparents or other relatives are caring for children);

- Families who live in concentrated areas of poverty (public housing) to learn what they believe they need to successfully move out of poverty.

## PRIORITY AREAS

In compiling and refining their recommendations, the workgroup identified the following six high-priority areas:

1. **Person-Centered Case Management: A Strategy to Begin Reducing Reliance on Public Assistance**
  - *Defining person-centered case management*
  - *Standardized tools, flexible delivery*
  - *Utilizing existing research and demonstrated best practices*
2. **Strategy Implementation: A Starting Point**
  - *Defining targeted populations*
  - *Acknowledging demographic differences*
  - *Expanding on demonstrated success*
3. **Resources Needed for Implementation**
  - *Financial resources and funding stream complications*
  - *Human resources*
  - *Technology and data-sharing*
  - *Local social service network infrastructure*
4. **Performance Measures**
  - *Individualized goals for individualized case management*
  - *Success: A long and complicated path*
  - *Piloting the strategy for future standards*
5. **Competing Performance Metrics and Legislative Advocacy**
  - *Existing compliance requirements*
  - *Funding implications*
  - *Opportunities to impact rule change*
6. **Public Messaging: Poverty is a Community Conversation**
  - *Partners in improving the lives of all Ohioans*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are intended to be used as a starting point for developing initial strategies, analyzing progress and refining future projects based on demonstrated outcomes, with the goal of addressing long-term reliance on public assistance programs in Ohio.

## **Priority 1: PERSON-CENTERED CASE MANAGEMENT: A STRATEGY TO BEGIN REDUCING RELIANCE ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

Research shows, and evidence confirms, that a good-paying job is the surest way to reduce reliance on public assistance. Hand-in-hand with this is the fact that each public assistance recipient is unique. Some individuals may have very temporary barriers to gaining economic independence; others may have more serious barriers. A strategy to reduce reliance on public assistance and support one's path toward economic independence should be based on a person-centered case management model.

Person-centered case management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation, and advocacy for options and services that lead to reduced reliance on public assistance and greater economic independence. It must involve a robust assessment of the skills, abilities, mental health, work experience, goals and barriers of program participants using a proven, comprehensive assessment tool. The assessment should result in the development of a comprehensive case plan, which can be an Individualized Employment Plan (IEP), Self-Sufficiency Plan (SSP) or Independence from Public Assistance Plan (IPAP).

### **Steps out of Poverty**

The public assistance recipient's unique plan should set forth a variety of steps and activities designed to lead to independence through barrier removal, work experience and stability achievement. Steps in the individualized plan may involve engagement in supportive services that address the participant's needs. General Educational Development (GED) attainment, soft- and hard-skill employment training, and specific job search activities may be appropriate activities. Many other activities designed to meet the individual's needs and goals are possible and should be recognized and valued as important components of a comprehensive, long-term plan to eliminate reliance on public assistance.

Proactive steps caseworkers can take to help participants resolve issues and secure services may include scheduling and attending appointments, arranging transportation, conducting home visits, and other intensive interventions. Along this continuum of progress, supports must be provided to work through the barriers to employment while teaching problem-solving skills and strategies for long-term, sustainable economic independence.

Person-centered case management should employ a common assessment tool utilized by all 88 counties to consistently capture data on the many variables that affect public assistance recipients, regardless of where they reside. For effective and efficient service delivery, this standardized assessment tool should be available electronically in a statewide system that can facilitate reporting, monitoring, performance measurement and data collection. The ongoing assessment process should include direct recipient input so caseworkers can learn first-hand the impact and perceived value of services. Mobile applications for this would be forward-thinking and helpful for maintaining engagement with clients.

To be effective, person-centered case management should give all those addressing the recipients' barriers and circumstances the ability to share information and coordinate services, including community partners. This will necessitate the development of a universal release of information form that can be signed by the individual and readily accepted across systems. In collaborating with internal programs and community partners, the person-centered case manager should aim to create a culture of resolution.

Ohio's 88 counties cover several diverse communities and regions. Flexibility is needed to adapt to the needs, conditions and resources of our communities. While there are common themes to the employment barriers most often faced by people in poverty, the ways in which those barriers are expressed or resolved differ greatly in different parts of the state. Transportation is one example – a bus token is irrelevant in some counties, as no bus systems exist in many areas of the state. A standardized assessment must be followed by a flexible, individualized and comprehensive case management plan that addresses the needs and goals of the public assistance recipient in their local community.

### **Key Considerations**

Because of the life experiences of many recipients, person-centered case management may often be a long-term commitment involving multiple steps over time to address the barriers discovered during the assessment and plan development process. Incentives and short-term rewards will likely enhance compliance with the process, reinforce the concept of a strong work ethic, and lead to success. According to the OWF recipient focus groups, most public assistance recipients would like person-centered case management. Members of one focus group universally indicated that the "system" needs more case management, more connection to jobs, more job placement and more personal contact.

The workgroup recognizes that the full-scale implementation of such a program will be an arduous task. However, the workgroup strongly recommends that entities involved in administering a person-centered, comprehensive case management program be required to serve **all** who are ultimately required to participate. Current proposed legislation identifies 16- to 24-year-old OWF cash assistance and WIOA recipients, and later all OWF cash assistance work-required recipients. Since the implementation of the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) training program in 1988, and later the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the world of workforce development has seen more than its share of programs and providers who wish to serve only those who are likely to be successful. Many restrict participation in their programs to individuals who can pass a drug test and who have no significant criminal history. As noted in the surveys of counties and stakeholders, both of these issues are significant barriers to economic independence and affect a large number of those individuals who are determined to be "Not Job Ready." If we are serious about our desire to move the needle to reduce reliance on public assistance, we must focus a significant effort on those who have the most significant barriers to employment so that we do not condemn them, and perhaps their children, to a life in poverty.

Rather than work to create a new, untested case management design, existing case management models that are evidence-based with proven strategies and positive outcomes should be identified by the state for utilization by counties. The services of a university could be procured by the state to research effective models already in use throughout the nation.

Numerous evaluations of welfare-to-work models and case management strategies designed to increase personal responsibility and earnings of public assistance recipients have been conducted over the past several years. These should be consulted before any model or strategy is adopted.

Lastly, while the workgroup recommends a person-centered case management approach for those actively receiving public assistance, it also recommends that additional resources be dedicated to programs that successfully **prevent** people from needing public assistance initially. The workgroup recommends that the ODJFS Office of Human Services Innovation engage in a review of programs (current or historical) that have successfully helped people avoid the need for public assistance.

## **Priority 2: STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION: A STARTING POINT**

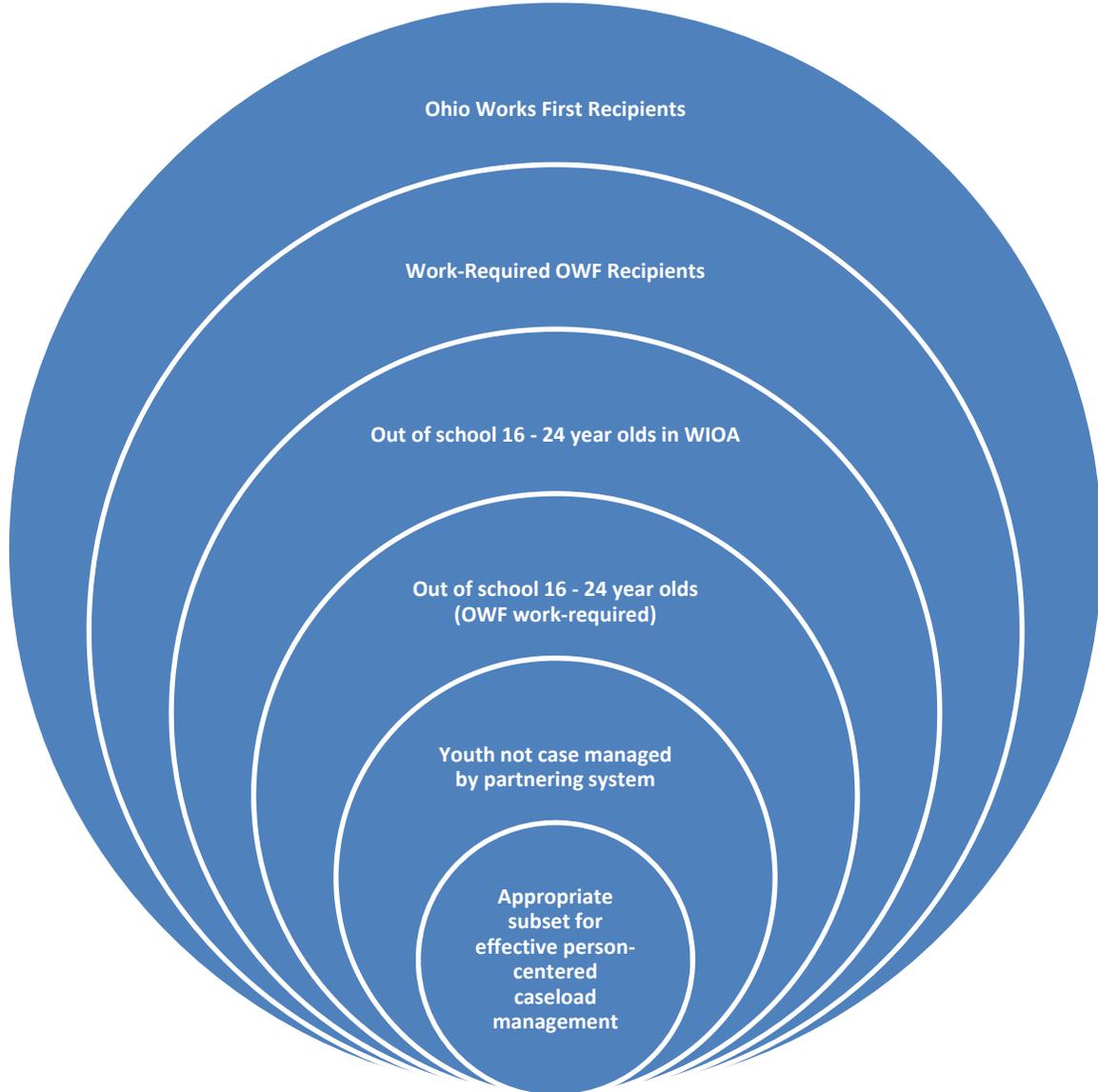
Aside from the identification and development of an appropriate common assessment tool and a comprehensive, evidence-based case management design, the strategy for initial implementation requires a specified population to be served. This strategy must be informed, targeted, and considerate of demographic differences. To create a long-term culture shift and support the sustained economic independence of the next generation of Ohioans, the person-centered case management strategy should focus on young adult recipients of public assistance. The goal is to connect with individuals who are on the path to a more economically-independent adulthood earlier in their journey, to reinforce the value of a work ethic and emphasize the positive experience of work.

The workgroup recommends targeting a subset of 16- to 24-year-old work-required OWF recipients: namely, those who no longer attend high school and who do not have diplomas or GEDs. Some of these individuals may be enrolled in the WIOA youth program. This would make it easier for them to access services and programs that could address their barriers.

The workgroup also recommends that individuals in this subset who are already receiving specialized case management in order to receive other services – such as behavioral health services, development disability services, housing, treatment for chronic health conditions or assistance for youth transitioning from foster care – maintain that case management to avoid duplication of effort. In these instances, the county department of job and family services case manager should coordinate assessments and employability plans in concert with the primary case manager from the partnering system.

The workgroup recommends that county departments of job and family services work in partnership with ODJFS to develop and refine system reports and tools for easy identification of the eligible target population. Figure 1 (next page) shows the recommended process for targeting the initial population.

**Figure 1. Subset for Initial Implementation**



The necessity of identifying and accounting for regional demographic differences cannot be emphasized strongly enough. Large metropolitan counties generally have more concentrated poverty and also serve more refugees and those with limited English proficiency (LEP). For example, Franklin County’s interpretation contractor can provide interpretation services in 187 different languages. Small, rural counties have no bus systems and few (if any) child care centers. All regions of the state have distinctive employment opportunities and economic climates. Although public assistance recipients may share similar barriers no matter where they live, the context in which those barriers arise and resolve varies, often because of regional demographic differences. ***Issues are similar; solutions are custom-built.***

After person-centered case management has been implemented with this subset population, and after outcomes have been measured, processes refined and resources identified, expansion of the strategy to additional individuals may be considered. Demonstrated success would justify the request of additional resources for an expansion to other populations.

### **Priority 3: RESOURCES NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

The success of any comprehensive case management model will be dependent upon communities having the resources and infrastructure in place to fully support the movement of public assistance recipients to full-time employment at a wage that will eliminate dependence on public assistance programs. Such resources include accessible jobs, an information technology (IT) system that supports cross-system coordination, fully trained staff, a comprehensive local social service network with the capacity to provide the needed continuum of services, funding to accomplish this work, and maximum local flexibility. The full development and implementation of the comprehensive case management program requires significant up-front investments to fully realize the intended outcomes. These investments include accessible jobs, staff development, local social services system capacity-building, and an IT system that allows for effective coordination and data analysis. These investments further the work of county and state partners who aim to break down silos and provide person-centered, comprehensive services. Such investments are expensive, time-consuming and worthwhile.

The most basic requirement for successful economic independence is the availability of jobs paying wages sufficient enough to allow people to leave public assistance. It is estimated that a family of one adult and two children would need an annual income of \$27,644 (\$13.30 per hour) to achieve independence from OWF, Food Assistance and Medicaid. This same family would need to earn \$60,320 annually (\$29 per hour) to transition to full independence from the subsidized child care program (at the proposed exit criteria of 300 percent of the federal poverty guidelines).

#### **Employment Pipelines**

Communities should focus their economic development efforts on attracting and supporting employers with good-paying jobs. Additionally, analyses should be conducted to determine gaps between employers' workforce needs and the skill sets of work-required individuals receiving public assistance. This will help public assistance and workforce development systems develop training and employment pipelines for recipients with barriers.

To create employment pipelines, county agencies should develop and maximize partnerships with local community colleges and other vocational education programs to create short-term education and career pathways that lead to employment in high-wage, high-growth industries. Engagement also will be needed from both business leaders and from state policymakers to maximize the flexibility of TANF and WIOA funds. It should be noted that several trade industries (construction, electrical, welding, etc.) report they are struggling to find workers to fill critical occupations. Ohio should consider providing incentives to programs that produce viable candidates for employment in these fields and also better market these occupations to younger generations.

Once an employment pipeline is in place, it can be continued with the following strategies:

- Utilizing industry-specific core training with local community colleges and other providers;
- Providing hands-on work experience, co-ops and internships with local employers;
- Offering On-the-Job Training opportunities that lead to increased wages as recipients gain skills and experience;
- Working with local employers to guarantee the hiring of public assistance recipients at the completion of core training.

### **Intensive Case Management**

Person-centered case management relies on the time, resources and expertise of county staff to complete many activities: effectively assess each recipient whose goal is long-term employment, employ proven initial engagement strategies (and re-engagement strategies when necessary), wrap appropriate services around the entire family, and monitor participation in necessary initiatives/steps to overcome barriers. Accomplishing this work will require a much higher level of social work than is generally available in the eligibility-determination-driven public assistance program that has been emphasized over the last several years in Ohio. It also will require a large-scale culture shift, with extensive training and appropriate compensation. Funding and training resources must be available to counties to effect this change.

It has been estimated that a reasonable person-centered case management caseload would consist of approximately 12 to 15 cases, similar to child welfare. Existing public assistance caseloads far exceed that number, and staffing levels are inadequate to reduce caseload sizes. Additional staff, whether hired by the county or contracted, will be needed. Implementation schedules must include adequate time to on-board and train staff. Altering duties and position qualifications may be impacted by collective bargaining agreements, as well. Great care must be taken in the implementation of such a program. Up-front planning and resource/infrastructure development will be critical for a consistent implementation and streamlined, effective delivery system statewide.

### **Local Flexibility**

Local demographic and resource differences must be considered when identifying county networks of social service providers. Many communities do not have broad networks in place. The workgroup recommends that, during the planning stage, communities identify any needed investments in local service capacity. These may include, but are not limited to, the following: transportation to employment; mental health services, trauma-informed care, substance abuse programs and rehabilitation services; educational programs to address adult basic literacy needs; housing programs; and other various supportive programs for barrier removal and skill enhancement. After service gaps are identified, resources should be allocated to build local capacity. Although this analysis and capacity-building may be time-consuming, they are key to this effort and should be allotted sufficient time in the planning schedules.

Additional financial resources should be allocated strategically and in a manner that allows for maximum local flexibility. Local agencies must be able to align and realign funding in the manner deemed most cost-effective and appropriate based on local capacity-building efforts. Currently, flexible TANF, PRC and WIOA funding is available, within state guidelines. Any loss of this flexibility would be counterintuitive and detrimental to the goals of a person-centered case management program.

WIOA funds are allocated in three streams: for dislocated workers, adults and youth. Local areas may redistribute funds between the dislocated worker and adult funding streams, if needed. Although some may advocate for combining WIOA youth and adult funds with TANF funds, in fact doing so would restrict local flexibility. It would compromise counties' ability to redistribute WIOA adult and dislocated worker funds and pose potentially significant problems to local service delivery and economic development opportunities. As a result, the workgroup does not recommend combining WIOA youth and adult and TANF funds.

## Data-Sharing

Once accessible jobs, human resources and a comprehensive social services network are in place, a robust, coordinated and comprehensive data system will be needed to manage and evaluate the daily work of a person-centered case management program. Current IT policies and statewide systems do not allow for the transfer of information between programs. County agencies use all of the following to administer public assistance, child welfare, child support and workforce services:

- Client Registry Information System–Enhanced (**CRIS-E**) – Used for eligibility determination and case documentation for OWF, PRC, Food Assistance and Medicaid;
- Ohio Benefits, or Ohio Benefits Worker Portal (**OBWP**) – Used for eligibility determination and case documentation for some Ohio Medicaid programs; future iterations are planned to include additional Medicaid programs for the Aged, Blind and Disabled, OWF and Food Assistance;
- Medicaid Information Technology System (**MIT**) – Used for Medicaid eligibility verification and provider claims billing for all Ohio Medicaid programs, regardless of which system the eligibility determination originated from;
- Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (**SACWIS**) – Used for comprehensive case management for county child welfare caseloads;
- Support Enforcement Tracking System (**SETS**) – Used for child support case management and for the collection and distribution of child support funds;
- Ohio Workforce Case Management System (**OWCMS**) - Used by workforce professionals to link job seekers and employers and to gather data for workforce development programs.

Modifications and enhancements are necessary to support data-sharing across these systems. This would include the following:

- Permission for caseworkers and other designated county staff to access CRIS-E, Ohio Benefits, MIT, SACWIS, SETS and OWCMS;
- Development of a statewide case management data system, ideally as a component of Ohio Benefits. This system would track assignments, goals and case management activities; facilitate robust reporting for data management and outcome measurement; transfer data to eligibility systems if participation affects ongoing eligibility; and allow for statewide information sharing to accommodate family mobility and case transferring. The workgroup recommends that non-JFS service providers be allowed to enter data without county staff intervention, both for contracted providers and partnering systems.

## Priority 4: PERFORMANCE MEASURES

For public assistance recipients, the process of moving out of poverty and into economic independence is a marathon, not a sprint, which often takes many years. Even the most engaged individuals will have setbacks. As a result, it can be difficult to measure the success of long-term goals. At the same time, the performance of both individuals and the system as a whole must be measured in order to gauge progress and make necessary adjustments. A successful performance management strategy will value the achievement of incremental steps on the way to reaching long-term goals.

Thoughtful consideration must be given in developing performance measures for a person-centered case management program. Each required public assistance recipient must participate in a standardized and comprehensive assessment of their strengths and barriers, and it is critical that they be engaged in defining their own goals and objectives. Timely assessments are the basis for individualized plans that take into consideration the available services and jobs in each county. Each custom-built employment plan should be designed to meet the unique needs of the recipient and should contain measurable activities that are mutually agreed upon, with reasonable timeframes. Recipients' input will improve their perceptions of their successes and motivate them during difficult times. "Cookie-cutter" plans with activities that the individual does not value will result in frustration and unmet goals.

As detailed in the survey results in Appendix D and Appendix E, many public assistance recipients have significant barriers that prevent them from successfully achieving and maintaining long-term employment. Lack of education, unstable housing, unreliable transportation, limited access to child care, drug and alcohol dependence, prior criminal history, mental health issues, the lasting impact of trauma, and poor physical health are some of the most commonly documented barriers. Evidenced-based practices for working with "hard-to-serve" individuals should be researched and implemented in a community-wide effort to achieve successful outcomes with proven strategies.

Strategies will require long-term case management that is coordinated with a variety of community partners who will help move recipients along a continuum toward economic independence, or an "incremental ladder" (see Figure 2). Along this path, recipients will experience a variety of successes that may include avoiding benefit sanctions, applying for permanent disability benefits, securing housing, joining the military or obtaining safe housing. Each success should be valued and highlighted as a step toward a more promising future.



In their survey responses, multiple stakeholders noted that Ohio should do more to help recipients avoid “cliff issues,” when they abruptly lose benefits when their incomes rise. As one stakeholder wrote, “There should be a gradual decrease in benefits to those who finally find stable employment. Many get discouraged when food stamp benefits or other benefits stop within a month of working and some say they were better off not working.”

Once implementation is achieved and the necessary resources are in place, county agencies should be held accountable to their own performance metrics that evaluate the performance of the agency, rather than the performance of the recipient, as ***personal responsibility is at the core of success***. Public assistance recipients must be engaged in the process of assessment and goal-setting, and they must be committed to meeting those goals by working to reduce the various barriers they may have. Person-centered case management implementation should include an evidenced-based evaluation of the success of the program. The workgroup members have expressed interest in continuing to provide input and assistance in developing a more detailed program design with specific performance measurements.

## **Priority 5: COMPETING PERFORMANCE METRICS AND LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY**

Many public programs – such as TANF, WIOA and FAET – include workforce development activities as core services (WIOA) or as requirements to receive benefits (TANF, FAET). These three programs have existing performance measures in place. Program goals differ and many times conflict with each other.

Figure 3 (next page) provides examples of program requirements and performance metrics for TANF, WIOA and FAET.

**Figure 3. Program Requirements and Performance Metrics**

<b>TANF Program</b>	<b>WIOA Program</b>	<b>FAET Program</b>
Job search/job readiness activities - restricted to 6 to 12 weeks per year	Job search/job readiness activities - available to all job seekers without time limits	Job search/job readiness activities - available to all job seekers without time limits
Vocational education training activities - restricted to a 12-month lifetime limit and must be directly related to preparation for employment	Provides occupational, basic, and soft skills training as well as counseling, individual employment plans, and career planning for all customers without restriction	No restriction on using vocational education or any other training
GED programs - not considered a core activity in meeting work participation requirements (lack of GED or high school diploma is a common barrier to employment)	Obtaining a GED or high school diploma is considered a valid and successful performance measure	Preparing to obtain a GED or high school diploma is considered a valid activity
ESOL - not a core activity in meeting work participation requirements (creating a barrier to employment for Limited English Proficiency customers)	There is no restriction - ESOL can be used as skill attainment	ESOL classes can be used as a valid activity
Mandatory federal work participation requirement for recipients who are at least 18 years of age with a child under the age of 18	Voluntary program with performance measures that are focused on workforce preparation and placement for both youth and adults	Mandatory measure for work-required recipients to participate in the employment and training program in order to receive nutrition assistance

TANF’s main performance measure is the work participation rate. Federal guidelines dictate the activities customers must perform. Unless exempted, both TANF and FAET customers must comply with work requirements to receive assistance. Although there are similarities between the TANF, FAET and WIOA programs, WIOA is a voluntary program that focuses exclusively on workforce preparation and placement for a broader population of job seekers. This population includes adults, out-of-school youth (ages 16 to 24) and in-school youth (ages 14 to 21). WIOA performance measures track employment, earnings and credential outcomes.

Failure to meet performance goals for these programs could result in financial penalties to the state. These penalties likely would be shared with counties and would affect the delivery of services to customers.

## **Need for Alignment**

Many public assistance recipients are also involved with other public systems, such as child support enforcement and child welfare. These systems focus on family supports, stability and unification, and they often require strong ties to the workforce to achieve success. Obligor who have jobs are better able to meet child support payment responsibilities. Child welfare families are often required to participate in soft skills development such as parenting and counseling in order to succeed in their case plans, which can compete with public assistance work requirements. Foster youth transitioning from the child welfare system are more successful when they gain employment or further their education. It is imperative that alignment and coordination of activities expand to include other key systems that interact with and affect participants.

Fatherhood and re-entry-focused services are also valuable programs for coordination and alignment, as they can support full family engagement and reunification. Interagency initiatives such as fugitive safe surrender, expungement clinics and drivers' license reinstatement encourage families to move into documented employment and formal career pathways, as well as address transportation barriers.

A person-centered case management initiative creates an opportunity to improve customer service and long-term outcomes by aligning program requirements and outcome measures among the programs that impact public assistance recipients. Through individualized goal-setting and barrier removal, participants stand to gain valuable tools and opportunities for life-long earning and community contribution. Person-centered case management is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Yet, currently, the programs discussed above measure performance as if all agencies and recipients are alike.

Person-centered case management relies upon continuums of self-sufficiency and economic independence. Individualized Employment Plans (IEPs) are developed that set goals for the best and highest level that public assistance recipients can achieve along the continuum. Both the agency and the recipient have the responsibility to use their resources to reach the goals outlined in the IEP. This approach recognizes that some individuals have too many barriers to attain complete economic independence and that the local community may not have the resources to help some individuals beyond a certain point. Program performance measures should gauge whether and how both parties meet their responsibilities. They must be developed in a manner that separates the accountability of the agency to meet objective performance standards from the personal accountability and responsibility of the recipient to meet their performance goals.

Developing a person-centered case management system across these programs will be difficult if programmatic performance measures and compliance requirements are not aligned. While acknowledging the dual responsibilities of the agency and the recipient, overall programmatic success should be evaluated on outcomes. These outcomes should be tied to measures of self-sufficiency along the continuum of economic independence and must be defined in a way that individualized plans are accommodated.

Opportunities to align programmatic definitions, requirements and performance expectations should be explored at the state level. However, the workgroup recognizes that most of this alignment will need to be pursued through waiver requests and sustained lobbying efforts at the federal level. Advocacy efforts should inform state and federal policy makers about current and proposed system structures and reiterate Ohio's desire for a plan that emphasizes education, training and work to effectively and efficiently help public assistance recipients become economically independent.

## **Priority 6: PUBLIC MESSAGING: POVERTY IS A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION**

Public messaging is integral to any community-wide effort to effect change and progress. Key components of a public message in Ohio's effort to reduce reliance on public assistance should include an emphasis on a comprehensive community partnership of citizens and systems, a strong connection between education and employers, and strategically coordinated economic and workforce development activities. Poverty is a community conversation, worth the time and involvement of the entire community.

In order to make a difference in helping individuals move out of poverty, the messaging must emphasize a comprehensive community partnership. No single entity can provide the full array of needed resources for individuals in poverty to progress toward economic independence. This is a community-wide effort, which requires strong partnerships between the recipient, government initiatives, faith-based programs and community resources.

As noted previously, the availability of a job is the key to moving individuals out of poverty. Emphasizing an enhanced linkage between employers and public assistance recipients is paramount. Some communities do this very well, and it is recognized that a successful partnership between employers and job seekers is contingent upon the skills needed to meet employer's needs. Exploring career options, identifying the level of education or advanced skills required for specific vocations, and setting realistic goals are basic requirements of any individualized employment plan and employer relationship. To strengthen this linkage, community partners must provide the necessary skills training. An emphasis on trade work would be beneficial for 16- to 24-year-old recipients. Coordination with the K-12 system, vocational education providers and post-secondary educational institutions to improve academic success and access to sufficient wages will be critical to obtaining employment that creates economic independence and ends – or even prevents – reliance on public assistance.

Coordination with city and county economic development and planning departments to improve employment opportunities also is vital. Promotional activities can include subsidized employment so recipients can gain hands-on experience while earning income and provides incentives for employers to hire public assistance recipients. County departments of job and family services may offer pre-screening, interviewing and training opportunities; local government may offer tax abatement, incentives and infrastructure grants. The message must be loud and clear: Ohio is looking for employers that offer jobs to help residents attain economic independence.

It takes a community and its resources to chip away at barriers to economic independence. Poverty is a community conversation, ripe with opportunities for support and partnership that can lead to community solutions. Figure 4 provides a sample list of community partners in the mission to enhance economic independence and reduce reliance on public assistance.

**Figure 4. Community Partners in Reducing Poverty**



A core statewide message must be positive and strong, highlighting personal responsibility and opportunities for success that promote the value and benefits of work and a solid work ethic. Promoting and sustaining individual change is not easy or quick; this is a marathon, not a sprint, which will have moderate and incremental successes. Societal expectations must be managed, with the acknowledgment that not all public assistance recipients will be able to obtain and keep employment that eliminates their eligibility for all types of assistance. Some level of poverty will remain for some individuals.

Stories of individuals who have achieved successes on their paths to economic independence should be shared with a variety of stakeholders, community partners and legislators. These personal journeys demonstrate the complexity of poverty and the great things that can be achieved by engaged individuals who seek a better future for themselves and their children. Such examples can help inform state partners and legislators about the multi-faceted barriers faced by individuals who have touched or been touched by numerous public systems.

For example, “N” is a 33-year-old woman who needed an array of services over the course of nine years before she was able to move completely off public assistance. She has two children and overcame multiple barriers to economic independence, including chemical dependency, legal problems, child welfare involvement, and lack of transportation, child care, child support and social support. Despite her motivation to become self-sufficient, she had numerous public assistance sanctions as she experienced setbacks on her path forward. During this nine-year period, she attended school, improved her employability skills and obtained a degree while receiving an extension of OWF cash assistance beyond the 36-month time limit due to her hardship situation. “N” is now gainfully employed in a social service arena that allows her to give back to the community and help others with similar barriers. In response to a request for her input, “N” identified the top five most significant barriers for OWF recipients as lack of client motivation and commitment to success, lack of transportation, lack of child care, lack of work experience, and lack of available jobs and/or lack of jobs at the appropriate skill level. She furthermore said she believed the most effective method of assisting recipients was a hybrid of immediate labor force attachment, human capital development and benefit sanctioning, based on each individual’s circumstances. Her success and subsequent contributions have been monumental.

In contrast, “B” is a 22-year-old woman who received OWF cash assistance as a child, from age 6 to age 18. Her father’s paternity was never established. She had her first child at age 16 and a second child at age 20. She began receiving OWF as an adult when she was 18. The highest level of schooling she completed was the eighth grade. She has been unable to succeed in passing the GED exam despite multiple attempts. Her other barriers to success include unstable housing, food insecurity, lack of child care, mental health issues, chemical dependency, and legal problems such as eviction and drug possession. Through the OWF program, “B” had a variety of work experience opportunities but also served six different sanctions for noncompliance with her self-sufficiency contract. Assistance with child care, GED preparation, and emergent needs such as food and utility payments were provided. Additional referrals for housing, mental health and transportation assistance were coordinated. “B” applied for numerous jobs, but her lack of work history and inability to pass a drug screen were significant barriers. Neither absent father has ever paid support, and orders have not been established because the men cannot be located. A few months ago, she reported that she had no permanent housing and that shelters were full. Three months ago, she exhausted her 36-month time limit for OWF and is no longer eligible for cash assistance. She continues to receive supplemental food assistance and Medicaid. She also has an open child welfare case because of an alleged incident of physical abuse.

## CONCLUSION

In this report, the workgroup provided a framework of recommendations for initiating a person-centered case management strategy that begins to reduce reliance on public assistance. The framework includes recommendations for defining person-centered case management, using standardized tools within a flexible delivery system, and utilizing existing research and demonstrated best practices to develop Ohio's model. The report further identifies a practical starting point and initial target population for strategic implementation. The workgroup strongly recommends evaluating the initial implementation before expanding the program to additional populations.

This report outlines the various resources needed to implement an initial strategy, including financial resources, human resources, technological resources and local infrastructure. It emphasizes the importance of local flexibility in using available resources to meet community needs.

The report further contains recommendations for establishing and evaluating performance to gauge the progress of both recipients and county agencies and to make adjustments, when necessary. The roles of both recipients and county agencies will be clearly stated, with an emphasis on personal responsibility. These recommendations highlight the individualized nature of person-centered case management, with unique goals for each participant. They further acknowledge that, because of the number and severity of recipients' employment barriers, successes may be modest and incremental.

The workgroup provided examples of competing performance metrics for existing programs and identified opportunities for legislative advocacy to align the metrics for programs with similar goals. The competing metrics have significant funding implications that must be considered in any statewide initiative.

Lastly, the workgroup has emphasized that poverty is a community conversation and that many partners must work in concert to improve the lives of all Ohioans. Continued, enhanced dialogue and coordination are necessary.

The recommendations included in this report are a starting point for an effort to address long-term reliance on public assistance in Ohio. The workgroup recommends that this outline be used to develop initial strategies, analyze progress and refine future projects based on demonstrated outcomes. Additional work should include the input of public assistance recipients, county agency staff, community partners and various other stakeholders identified throughout this report.

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Sincerely,

Members of the Workgroup  
to Reduce Reliance on Public Assistance

