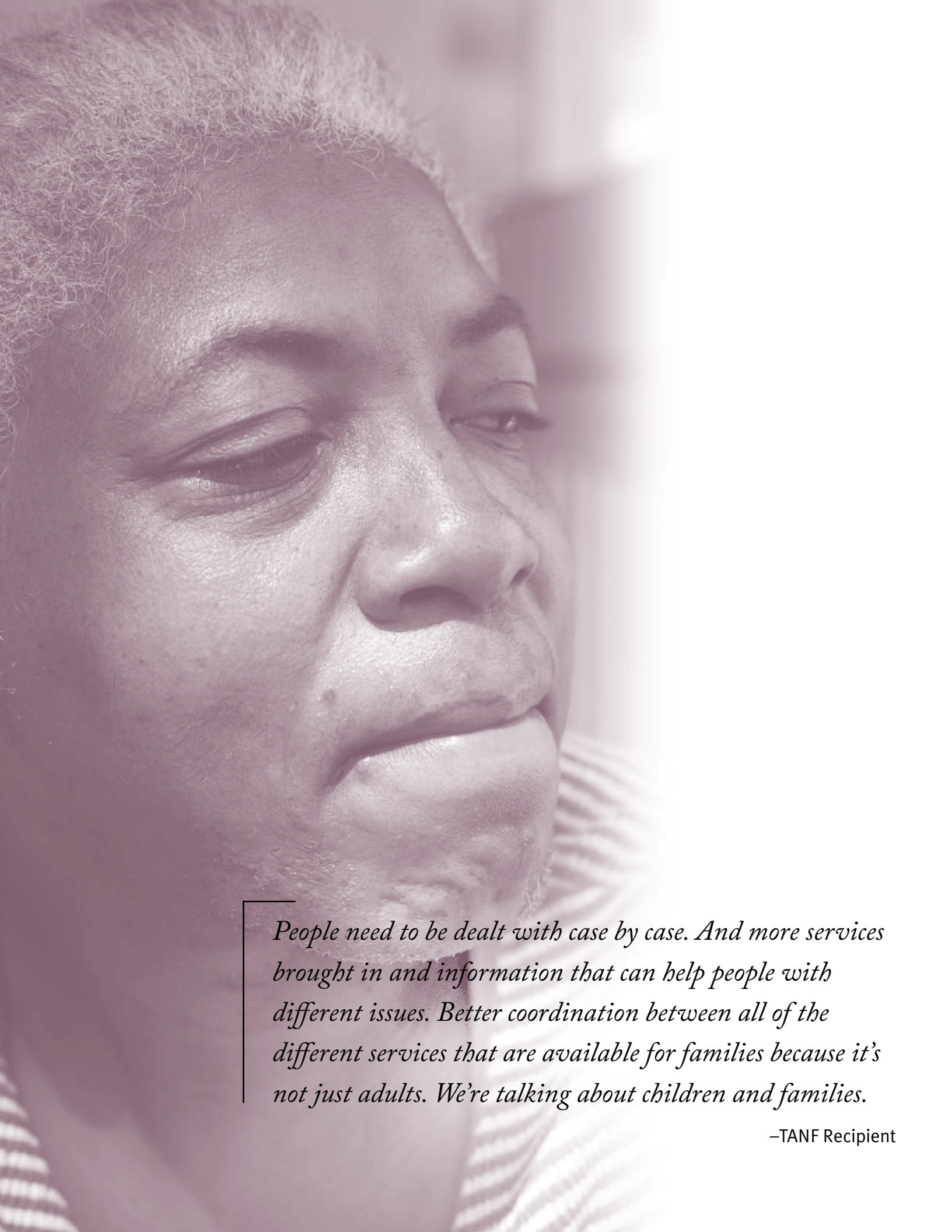


Voices for Change

Perspectives on Strengthening
Welfare-to-Work From
DC TANF Recipients
by Katie Kerstetter and Joni Podschun

DC Fiscal Policy Institute
SOME, Inc. (So Others Might Eat)



People need to be dealt with case by case. And more services brought in and information that can help people with different issues. Better coordination between all of the different services that are available for families because it's not just adults. We're talking about children and families.

—TANF Recipient



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Executive Summary

A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY

FAMILIES (TANF) program is vital to the health and wellbeing of families and children in the District of Columbia. One in three children growing up in DC is on TANF. These families — currently 16,000 households — turn to safety net programs when they have exhausted all other means of support. Under TANF, families receive monthly cash assistance and are connected to other services such as food stamps and health care from DC's Income Maintenance Administration (IMA). Most TANF recipients are expected to participate in job readiness activities and look for work.

DC's TANF program should provide financial support that offers at least a minimal level of stability, and it should provide services that build employment-related skills and address barriers to work. And indeed, the program is designed to meet these goals. The District adopted a number of progressive policies when it established its TANF program, with the goal of helping TANF recipients address barriers to work and obtain the needed skills and knowledge for employment. In particular, DC avoided adopting policies that have significantly lowered caseloads in other states, such as full family sanctions and strict enforcement of the 60-month time limit.

Unfortunately, the progressive components of the District's program have not lived up to their promise because of inadequate implementation. Addressing these issues is critical to reducing poverty, increasing employment, and improving child welfare in the District.

This report takes a unique approach by examining DC's TANF program from the perspectives of TANF recipients and frontline social service workers who work in the nonprofit agencies that assist them. This research is an effort to include their voices in TANF policy development and program design. We conducted focus groups with 35 District TANF recipients to explore their experiences with job training, child care, services to address barriers to work, and the challenges of living on cash assistance. We also interviewed 13 direct service providers to learn their perspectives on different aspects of the TANF program. Our findings include:

- **Employment services are “one-size-fits-all” and don't address individuals' specific skills, barriers, and goals.** DC's TANF employment services are driven substantially by federal rules

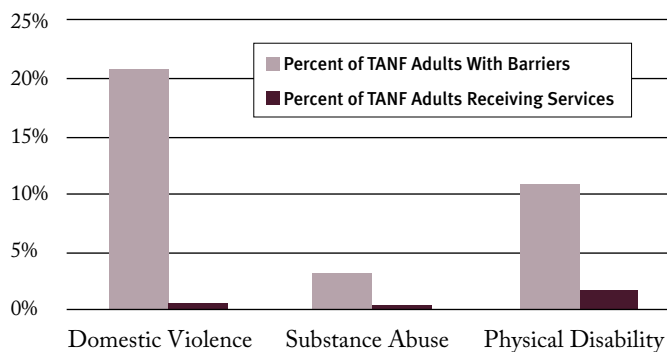
I been to 1, 2, 3 [vendors] and it seems to me they were more about getting you placed anywhere than getting you somewhere ... [where] you can provide for your kids. —TANF RECIPIENT

that require the District to have a certain percentage of TANF recipients in federally defined work activities. Federal law focuses on a “work first” approach — short-term job readiness with the goal of moving recipients into any kind of employment as quickly as possible. The core of DC’s TANF employment services — operated by private and nonprofit TANF Employment Program (TEP) vendors under contract with the District — is geared towards this work first approach.

However, federal law gives states flexibility to pursue more in-depth training and education options. DC’s TANF program includes a number of education and training components but provides IMA staff and the TEP vendors with no guidance as to when to refer TANF recipients to these services and no systematic process to assess and refer clients. In fact, vendors face disincentives to direct TANF recipients to education and more intensive training. The vendors’ one-size-fits-all approach does not work well for many recipients and leaves other, more individualized services underutilized. Additionally, the

most common TANF employment services seldom prepare TANF recipients for higher-wage jobs.

Gap Between Recipients With Barriers to Work and Those Receiving Needed Services, FY 2008



Source: Gregory Acs and Pamela Loprest, “A Study of the District of Columbia’s TANF Caseload,” Urban Institute, 2003. DC Income Maintenance Administration program data, obtained January–February 2009.

- **TANF recipients with barriers to work are not consistently connected to appropriate services.** To help residents with personal and logistical challenges that make it hard to get and keep a job, the District provides programs such as child care, domestic violence services, substance abuse treatment, and physical and mental health services. However, assessments and referrals to specialized services are not consistent. While many focus group participants (hereafter referred to as “Participants”) had a positive experience with securing child care, recipients often are not connected to appropriate services, and many families are therefore unable to reach their full potential.

- **Families cannot meet their basic needs on the TANF benefit, even when it is combined with other assistance.** In addition to helping families secure employment and address barriers to work, TANF is intended to provide a safety net, in the form of cash assistance, for families who are experiencing financial and personal crises. The maximum monthly benefit is \$428 for a family of three, which equals 28 percent of the federal poverty line. Other high-cost cities have much larger maximum monthly benefits: a family of three in Los Angeles can receive up to \$723, while a family in New York can receive as much as \$691

a month. Participants agreed, more than on any other issue, that the cash benefit amount is not sufficient.

Even when combined with benefits from the Food Stamp Program — now called the

I get it down to the penny. I’m very good at it. This is how much I get, this is how much I’m spending, this is how much I need, and I still always run out that last week. –TANF RECIPIENT

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) — and other supportive programs, the level of cash assistance provided by TANF is not enough to make ends meet. Despite careful budgeting, Participants explained, they still run out of funds before the end of the month. For the two-thirds of TANF recipients without housing subsidies, the struggle to make ends meet is especially hard, with many spending all or most of their grant for rent. The consequences of inadequate income include hunger, unstable housing and homelessness, academic underachievement for children, and exposure to violence. Additionally, many families have trouble transitioning from TANF to employment because of the loss of work supports and other public benefits.

To address these problems, the District can take a number of steps to build on the strengths of the existing TANF program. The final chapter of this report contains detailed information about recommendations to strengthen DC's program, including:

- **Improving the assessment and referral process:** IMA should adopt a more individualized approach in order to connect TANF recipients to the appropriate mixture of support services, job training, and educational opportunities. This could be accomplished through changes in the intake and recertification processes to ensure that applicants know about their options within TANF, including an orientation to employment and supportive services. Recipients or applicants also should complete an enhanced up-front assessment and meet one-on-one with specialized staff at IMA service centers to construct an individualized plan.
- **Increasing the range of options for job training, adult education, and support services:** IMA will revise its TEP vendor contracts in 2010. The District should use this as an opportunity to increase the availability of education and hard skills training options for TANF recipients, as well as to increase the use of existing tuition assistance and education and training programs. The current employment-related contracts could be expanded to include education and hard skills training providers, in addition to the job readiness vendors. Instead of referring nearly all recipients to job readiness services, IMA should connect recipients with services that fit their individualized needs, with the focus remaining on finding employment.

The District should consider providing more intensive services for TANF recipients who have participated in TANF job readiness and still do not have employment, including subsidized employment, case management through the District's Family Services Administration, and education services.

Monthly Budget for a TANF Family of Three Receiving Child Care Assistance, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Housing Assistance

Monthly TANF Income:	\$428
Monthly Expenses:	
Rent Paid (after housing subsidy)	\$107
Child Care Costs with Voucher	\$0
Food Expenses (after food stamps)	\$0
Transportation	\$118
Health Care (with Medicaid)	\$0
Miscellaneous	\$336
Total Monthly Expenses:	\$561
Shortfall:	-\$133

Source: Transportation, Health Care, and Miscellaneous: "DC Metro Self-Sufficiency Calculator," Wider Opportunities for Women, 2008. Housing: Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in DC for FY 2009, US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Child Care: Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy's 2004 Market Rate Survey, adjusted for inflation to equal 2009 dollars. Food: U.S. Department of Agriculture's monthly Thrifty Food Plan for one child 4-5, one child 9-11, and one adult 20-50, March 2009. The miscellaneous category includes all other essentials: clothing, shoes, paper products, diapers, nonprescription medicines, household items, personal hygiene items, and phone.

- **Ensuring adequate income for TANF recipients:** There are a variety of strategies the District could employ to expand income supports while families are on TANF. We recommend an increase in the cash benefit amount and child support pass-through and disregard — the amount that families can keep without facing a reduction in TANF benefits — to help more families meet basic costs.

It is also important that families continue to receive support as they transition to employment, especially as their income rises and they become ineligible for other work supports. The District should adopt a transitional TANF benefit to incentivize work and help families meet rising costs. Transitional TANF benefits provide a monthly cash supplement for a period of time to families that have left TANF for employment. These benefits help to supplement the wages of families that may be transitioning into low-wage employment and seeing decreases in their TANF and food stamp benefits. Transitional benefits also can help a state increase its work participation rate, because families receiving these benefits are counted as receiving TANF assistance.

- **Measuring outcomes:** Beyond improving the access to high-quality TANF services, the District should take steps to better measure and report outcomes. One way District agencies track their progress is through budget performance measures. Currently, however, the city gathers relatively little information on program outcomes and reports only a small amount of this information in its budget documents. Future TANF performance measures should include wage levels of recipients who obtain employment, job retention rates, participation in support services, and customer service.

A strong safety net supports the most vulnerable members of our society, creates shared opportunity, and fosters healthy communities. Supporting families as they work toward self-sufficiency can reduce childhood poverty and hunger and improve the quality of life throughout the District. To allow TANF to meet these important goals, it is incumbent on District agencies and city leaders, as well as their non-profit and for-profit partners, to ensure that TANF recipients have access to the combination of programs and services necessary to meet their long-term goals — employment in a career track with an adequate wage, stable housing, and increased opportunities for their children.

CHAPTER 1

Characteristics of DC's TANF Program and Recipients

SOME, INC. (SO OTHERS MIGHT EAT) AND THE DC FISCAL POLICY

INSTITUTE launched a research project in the summer of 2008 to explore recipients' experiences with the District's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and to identify ways to strengthen it. TANF is the District of Columbia's foremost safety net for parents who face temporary or long-term unemployment or underemployment due to limited skills, domestic violence, or the need to care for an ill or disabled family member. TANF provides cash assistance, job preparation, and supportive services to more than 16,000 households, including 29,000 children, or one in three children in the city.¹ The Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) within the Department of Human Services administers DC's TANF program.

This chapter contains basic information about the District's TANF program — federal restrictions, funding structure, eligibility, benefit levels, and the federal work requirements. It also describes the TANF population in DC, including the prevalence of skills-based, personal, and logistical barriers to work.

This study grew out of an effort to include the voices of TANF recipients and frontline social service providers in discussions about program and policy changes. We conducted seven focus groups with 35 TANF recipients across DC. In addition, we interviewed 13 frontline workers at community-based organizations — individuals with an understanding of TANF built from years of working with TANF recipients. (See Appendix for more information on methods.) We also conducted a review of national best practices and collected information from IMA on various aspects of TANF. Because of the small sample size and nonrandomized study design, our findings cannot be considered representative of all TANF recipients and all frontline staff at service providers, yet they provide useful insights into the operation of the District's TANF program.

Basics of the District's TANF Program

TANF is a federal-state program that provides cash assistance, work preparation, and other services to low-income families with children. TANF replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) following passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996. States receive federal TANF funds in the form of a block grant, and each state is required to allocate their own funds, called "maintenance of effort" (MOE) funds. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, the District will receive \$92 million in federal TANF funds and will budget \$75 million to meet its MOE requirement.

The four purposes of federal TANF funds are to:

- assist 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 out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.²

Federal TANF funds can be used for a variety of initiatives in addition to cash assistance, as long as they meet these goals and target families with income up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level (\$54,930 a year for a family of three in 2009). The District spends nearly half of its TANF block grant funding on subsidized child care (Table 1).³

Table 1: TANF Federal Block Grant Spending in the District, FY 2008

	FY 2008
Child Care	\$37,190,982
Two-Parent Family Formation and Maintenance	\$10,500,000
Administration	\$6,338,997
Education and Training	\$5,880,008
Transfer to Social Services Block Grant	\$3,935,917
Systems	\$3,475,969
Other Work Activities & Expenses	\$3,285,721
Prevention of Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies	\$1,271,526
Other	\$14,025,130
Total	\$82,618,529

Source: DC Office of the Chief Financial Officers, "FY 2008 TANF ACF 196 Financial Report," obtained April 2009.

DC's TANF program provides a monthly cash payment, which is calculated based on family size (Table 2). The maximum benefit for a family of three is \$428 per month.⁴ Clients automatically apply for food stamps and Medicaid when they apply for TANF and also are eligible for child care vouchers.

To be eligible for cash assistance in DC, applicants must have very low incomes (less than \$588 a month in earnings for a family of three) and no more than \$2,000 in assets (\$3,000 if the household has an elderly or disabled member). The asset limit does not include the value of a house or car.⁵ The parent must agree to cooperate with the Child Support

Services Division in establishing paternity, locating non-custodial parents, and establishing court orders for support. Recipients can receive up to \$150 in child support; states and the federal government claim the remainder as a form of reimbursement.⁶ Pregnant women without other children can apply if they are at least five months pregnant.

To qualify for TANF benefits, an applicant must be a U.S. citizen or a “qualified alien” (i.e., lawful permanent resident, asylee, or refugee). A parent or other family member can apply for TANF on behalf of qualified members of the family — including children who are U.S. citizens — without having to disclose their immigration status. One of several barriers to TANF for immigrants is the potential impact on future citizenship applications. If it is the household’s sole means of support, receipt of cash assistance is one of the factors that federal officials take into account when granting or denying citizenship.⁷

Under federal rules, states must have 50 percent (with some adjustments) of all single-parent TANF recipients and 90 percent of two-parent TANF households engaged in a federally defined work activity. To comply with the federal rule, the District requires TANF recipients with a child under 6 years of age to perform 20 hours of work activities per week and recipients with children ages 6 and older to perform 30 hours of work activities per week. TANF recipients in two-parent families are required to participate in a combined total of 35 hours of work activities each week (or 55 hours if they are receiving federally subsidized child care and are not disabled or caring for a child with a disability).⁸

DC exempts the following recipients from the work requirement: single parents with children under 12 months, recipients who are 60 years old or older, recipients who have been granted a medical exemption or domestic violence waiver, those caring for an ill or injured family member, women in their second or third trimester of pregnancy, and full-time AmeriCorps or VISTA volunteers.⁹

DC has identified a range of work activities that recipients must engage in, all of which count toward the federal work participation rate. These include subsidized and unsubsidized employment, on-the-job training, work experience, community service, job search and job readiness assistance, and vocational education. Job skills training, education related to employment, and education connected to obtaining a high school diploma or GED can count toward the work participation requirement only after the TANF recipient fulfills 20 hours of countable activities per week (or 30 hours of countable activities per week if the family includes two parents).¹⁰ The IMA Policy Manual notes that in a limited number of cases, TANF recipients may be allowed to meet their DC work requirement through activities that do not count toward the federal work rate, such as participating in adult basic education, but it does not outline the process for approving such cases.

Table 2: Monthly Cash Benefit Amount for DC TANF Recipients

Family Size	TANF
1	\$270
2	\$336
3	\$428
4	\$523
5	\$602
6	\$708
7	\$812
8	\$897

To meet the federal work requirement while also assisting many families with significant barriers to work, the District operates a solely state-funded (SSF) program as part of its TANF program. This program uses DC funds to assist families who are unable to meet the work requirement in a given month, are exempt from the work requirement due to a domestic violence situation or health issue, or have exhausted the program's 60-month time limit. By using only local funds, the District can avoid counting these recipients towards its federal work participation rate. About half of the states have a solely-state funded program, in part because the federal work participation requirements, which Congress tightened in 2006, have proven difficult for many states to meet fully.

DC TANF recipients who fail to meet the work requirement can be sanctioned, meaning that their monthly benefit amount is reduced. For example, a family of three would see its monthly benefit decrease from \$428 to \$336 if the adult were sanctioned. One-fifth of all District TANF recipients were sanctioned at any point during FY 2008.¹¹ A sanction remains in effect for the minimum sanction period (one month for the first violation, three months for the second violation, and six months for the third and subsequent violations) or until the recipient complies with the program requirements, whichever period is longer.¹² Recipients are not sanctioned if they can prove “good cause” for not complying with the work requirement. Examples of good cause include a verified illness or medical condition, the threat of domestic violence, and lack of available or affordable childcare for a child under 6.¹³

TANF Recipients and Barriers to Work

The DC TANF program serves a wide range of families with different needs and has a large caseload relative to the population. In FY 2008, an average of 14,892 DC households received TANF each month, and the number of households had increased to 16,300 as of March 2009.¹⁴ At least 1,000 TANF households lived in every ward except Ward 3 in FY 2008. The highest number of TANF households are found in Ward 7 (3,228 families) and Ward 8 (4,070 families).¹⁵

The vast majority of TANF households in DC are African-American, female-headed households. Nearly two-thirds of adult TANF recipients are over the age of 25.¹⁶ According to a 2003 Urban Institute report, the typical (median) TANF household in DC is a woman with two children, one of whom is under age 6.¹⁷ Several thousand families in the DC TANF program are child-only cases, meaning that any adults in the household are not included in the TANF grant.

Research indicates that TANF recipients have goals very similar to the wider United States population.¹⁸ This was also true of our focus group

participants (hereafter referred to as “Participants”). When asked to describe their goals for the next three to five years, they most often mentioned career goals and the desire to further their education by earning a GED, certification, or college degree. Many Participants also aspire to have stable housing, including owning their own home. Participants also mentioned owning a car, leaving TANF, ensuring their children have high quality child care and educational opportunities, becoming a business owner, transitioning out of homelessness, reuniting with their children, and owning a computer as goals.

Unfortunately, many TANF recipients have not accumulated the human capital necessary to achieve their goals. Nearly all TANF recipients face challenges that make it difficult to find employment and keep a job: 90 percent of recipients face one barrier to work, 74 percent face two or more barriers, and 54 percent face three or more barriers.¹⁹ The employment rate for recipients facing three or more barriers is very low (15 percent) compared to those with no barriers (38 percent).²⁰ Families facing multiple barriers to work also experience high sanction rates for failure to meet work requirements.²¹

Table 3 outlines the specific barriers to work that TANF recipients face, including skills challenges, personal challenges, and family and logistical challenges. In 2002 (the most recent year for which data are available), more than a third of DC TANF recipients did not have a high school diploma or GED. About one in five suffered from a mental health issue, and a quarter were caring for a child with health or behavioral problems.²²

DC has several policies and programs to address these barriers, but, as discussed in the following chapters, these programs are greatly underutilized because most TANF recipients do not know they exist. These programs include the Tuition Assistance Program Initiative for TANF, which pays a scholarship for TANF recipients to attend secondary education classes; the POWER program, which connects TANF recipients who have disabili-

Table 3: Barriers to Work Faced by DC TANF Recipients

Skill Challenges	Percent
Less than high school diploma/GED	37.9
Lack of work experience	27.1
Personal Challenges	
Mental health issue	20.9
Severe domestic violence in past year	14.6
Physical disability	10.8
Possible presence of learning disability	8.6
Criminal record	6.9
Substance abuse	3.1
Family and Logistical Challenges	
Child care problems	41.6
Caring for child with health or behavioral problems	25.7
Transportation problem	19.4
Pregnant or have child under age 1	19.3
Unstable housing	12.6
Caring for sick family member other than child	10.7

Source: Gregory Acs and Pamela Loprest, “A Study of the District of Columbia’s TANF Caseload,” Urban Institute, 2003.

ties or incapacities to the appropriate support services; and the Family Violence Option, which exempts domestic violence survivors from the work requirement if participation would endanger their family.

The following chapters present our findings related to employment services, programs to address personal barriers to work, and income supports. The final chapter contains recommendations developed from our research and a review of national best practices, with the goal of ensuring that adults and children in TANF have access to high-quality services to build human capital. The recommendations focus on ways to both stabilize families during temporary difficulties *and* support them as they work toward self-sufficiency.

NOTES

1. District of Columbia Income Maintenance Administration caseload data, obtained March 2009. "District of Columbia Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: 2005-2007," U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, About TANF, 2008, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/tanf/about.html>
3. DC Department of Human Services, "Notice of Public Interest: Request for Comments on State Plan," DC Register, 2008, pp. 012060-012063.
4. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "Cash Assistance Payment Levels and Sanction Amounts Effective October 1, 2007," obtained July 2008.
5. Code of DC Municipal Regulations, 29-3815. Mary Rowe and Gretchen Rowe, "Welfare Rules Databook: State TANF Policies as of July 2006," Urban Institute and Department of Health and Human Services, 2006, pp. 58, 72.
6. DC Department of Human Services, "IMA Policy Manual: Child Support," Section 4.9.
7. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Questions and Answers: Public Charge," 1999. Rowe and Rowe, pp. 20-21.
8. DC Department of Human Services, "IMA Policy Manual: Work Activities," Section 1.5.
9. DC Department of Human Services, "IMA Policy Manual: Exemptions from Work Requirements," Section 1.6.
10. DC Department of Human Services, "IMA Policy Manual: Work Activities," Section 1.5.
11. DC Income Maintenance Administration, monthly average of TANF adults sanctioned during FY 2008, obtained July 2008.
12. DC Department of Human Services, "IMA Policy Manual: Sanctions for Noncompliance With Work Activities Without Good Cause," Section 1.8.
13. DC Department of Human Services, "IMA Policy Manual: Good Cause for Noncompliance With Work Activities," Section 1.7.
14. DC Income Maintenance Administration caseload data, obtained March 2009.
15. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "TANF Ward Data – FY 2008," obtained June 2008.
16. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "TANF Household Characteristic Profile: October 2007-September 2008," obtained December 2008. Reporting demographic data during IMA intake is optional, so this may not be representative of all TANF recipients in DC. The demographic figures listed here are fairly consistent with demographic data collected in 2002 for an Urban Institute report on the DC TANF population: Gregory Acs and Pamela Loprest, "A Study of the District of Columbia's TANF Caseload." Urban Institute, 2003, http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410863_DC_TANF.pdf, pp. 5-8.
17. Acs and Loprest, p. 8.
18. Steven Anderson, Anthony Halter, and Brian Gryzlak, "Difficulties after Leaving TANF: Inner-City Women Talk about Reasons for Returning to Welfare," *Social Work* (April 2004) Vol. 49, No. 2, p. 190.
19. Acs and Loprest, p. 38.
20. Employed is defined as working 20 or more hours per week. Results are a snapshot of TANF recipients at the time of the survey. Acs and Loprest, pp. 41-42. See also: Mary Jane Taylor and Amanda Smith Barusch, "Personal, Family, and Multiple Barriers of Long-Term TANF Recipients," *Social Work* (April 2004) Vol. 49, No. 2.
21. Acs and Loprest, pp. 59-61.
22. Acs and Loprest, pp. 4, 24-42.

CHAPTER 2

“People need to be dealt with case by case”

One-Size-Fits-All Approach to Employment Services Doesn't Work for Many Recipients

FEDERAL RULES REQUIRE THE DISTRICT to have a specified percentage of TANF recipients in federally defined work activities. These rules reflect a “work first” approach — a focus on providing TANF recipients with short-term job readiness with the goal of rapid employment. DC’s TANF Employment Program (TEP), operated by private vendors under contract with the Department of Human Services, is geared toward meeting the federal requirements.

However, states have flexibility to pursue more in-depth training and education options as well, and DC’s TANF program includes a number of different education and training components. Unfortunately, DC does not provide vendors with guidance as to when to refer TANF recipients to these services. In fact, vendors face *disincentives* to directing TANF recipients to education and training. The vendors’ one-size-fits-all approach does not work well for many recipients and, other services such as tuition assistance and subsidized employment are under-utilized.

This chapter describes the DC TANF program’s work-related requirements and the experiences of focus group participants (hereafter referred to as “Participants”) and service providers with the program’s education and employment services. It focuses specifically on recipients’ barriers related to education and employment, while the next chapter discusses other barriers and services.

KEY FINDINGS:

- *TANF recipients generally lack information about education and training options.*
- *Referrals to education and other training programs are inconsistent.*
- *Job readiness training is one-size-fits-all and doesn’t address individuals’ specific skills, barriers, and goals.*
- *Employment services don’t prepare TANF recipients for higher-wage jobs.*

That’s welfare-to-work. ... They want you to get a job no matter what the job is, what it pays, as long as you get off of TANF. ... —TANF RECIPIENT

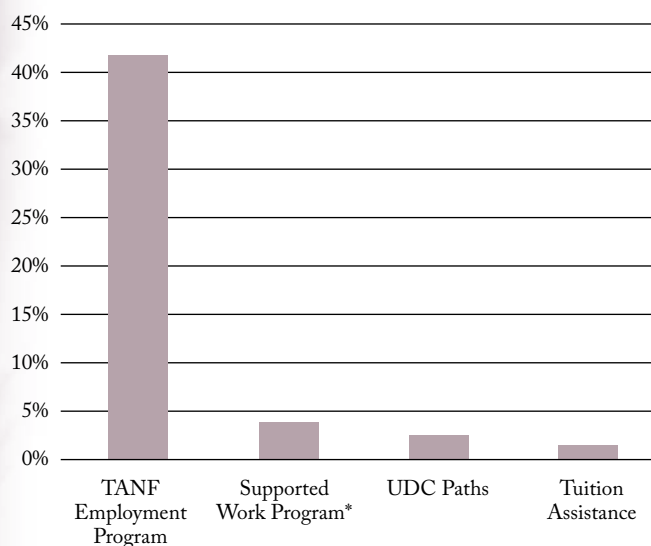


TANF Employment and Training Services

The District's Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) is responsible for ensuring that DC meets the federally-defined TANF work requirement. To help District residents move from welfare to work, IMA administers three programs:¹

- **The TANF Employment Program (TEP) contracts with nonprofit and private organizations to provide employment assessment, job readiness, job search, and case management services to TANF recipients.** These fairly limited services last six weeks and are geared toward meeting federal work participation guidelines. The services usually do not include education or hard skills training. TEP served 5,275 District TANF recipients (42 percent of all adult recipients) in FY 2008 (Figure 1). This is the District's main employment program for TANF recipients and the primary vehicle for meeting federally mandated work requirements.

Figure 1: Percent of TANF Recipients Participating in Education and Other Work Activities, FY 2008



Source: Income Maintenance Administration data, FY 2008 total participation for TANF Employment Program, Supported Work Program, UDC's Paving Access to Higher Security (PATHS) program, and Tuition Assistance Program Initiative for TANF (TAPIT)
*SWP was eliminated in the FY 2010 budget.

- **Tuition Assistance Program Initiative for TANF (TAPIT) provides scholarships of up to \$4,000 to TANF recipients for use at local universities, colleges, and other post-secondary institutions.** IMA staff offer coaching and case management services to TAPIT participants and help secure additional financial aid. TAPIT has been operating since 1999 and has served 2,051 District TANF recipients. In FY 2008, it served only 201 recipients — or about 2 percent of the adult caseload.

- **University of the District of Columbia (UDC) Paving Access to Higher Security (PATHS) Program is a 16-week job training and literacy program for TANF recipients, in partnership with IMA.** The program includes eight weeks of math and English training and eight weeks of internship experience. PATHS also provides small scholarships to students who complete the program to use for GED preparation, college courses, or continuing education classes at UDC. These scholarships are meant to serve as transitional benefits, covering education costs while recipients apply for TAPIT.² In FY 2008, PATHS served 325 recipients, or about 3 percent of the adult caseload.

According to the IMA Policy Manual, most recipients are referred by IMA to a TEP vendor, but some recipients are assigned to — or permitted to attend — other programs, including PATHS, DC Department of Employment Services' Project Empowerment Program, adult basic education programs, and other recipient-initiated training activities.³ The policy manual does not specify how recipients are selected for these activities and, based on Participants responses, many recipients do not know about these options.

From mid-2006 until the end of FY 2009, the District also operated a subsidized work program for TANF recipients, called the Supported Work Program (SWP). Based on a model from Georgia, SWP provided subsidized employment and intensive case management to TANF recipients who had received assistance for several years and had not found or maintained employment. The program placed recipients in private sector jobs and paid their wages for up to nine months to allow recipients to gain skills and work experience. After the period of subsidized employment, recipients were placed in an unsubsidized job and continued to receive case management.

However, this program was eliminated in FY 2010 as part of Mayor Adrian Fenty's budget gap-closing plan. The Mayor's plan stated that the program was cut because it was ineffective, but it is unclear how this determination was made. IMA's program description states that from mid-2006 to February 2008, 164 recipients had been placed into permanent, unsubsidized jobs through SWP.⁴

Assessments and Referrals

As detailed in Chapter 1, many TANF recipients in the District face skills-based, personal, and family and logistical barriers to work that make it difficult for them to find and keep employment. An Urban Institute study of the DC caseload found that about 38 percent of recipients did not have a high school diploma or GED, and about one in four recipients had limited or no work experience.⁵ Assessing individual recipients' skills and barriers and connecting them with appropriate services are critical to a successful transition from welfare to work.

DC's TANF program provides two opportunities to assess education and learning issues that may affect TANF recipients' ability to work: when recipients apply at IMA and when they are referred to a TANF vendor. (See the list of IMA and employment vendor responsibilities in Table 4.) This process has the potential to assess clients' needs effectively and connect them with appropriate work services. As discussed below, however, our focus groups and a review of enrollment in various education and training options show that the system does not work well.

- **IMA eligibility workers are responsible for assessing TANF applicants' skills, prior work experience, employability, and barriers to employment.**⁶ When an individual applies for TANF, the intake form asks applicants if they lack education or had learning difficulties in school. The intake process also includes a three-question screening for learning needs, which an IMA staff member reads to each applicant. If applicants answer "yes" to at least two questions, the staff member is prompted to inform the applicant that they may benefit from additional assessments that could qualify them for the Program on Work, Employment, and Responsibility (POWER).

Eligibility workers are then supposed to ask clients whether they would like to be referred to the District's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for further help.⁷ RSA provides independent living and vocational services to

Table 4: Responsibilities of IMA and Vendors for Assessment and Job Training Service

IMA	TANF Employment Program (TEP) Vendors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine whether an applicant is eligible for the TANF program • Provide initial screening for education issues and learning disabilities • Refer TANF recipients to Rehabilitation Service Administration if they indicate they may have a learning issue that prevents them from working • Refer TANF recipients to job training vendors • Contract with an organization to provide technical assistance to vendors • Provide form to vendors to assess recipients' employability • Provide assessment plan and instructions to vendors regarding how to assess for learning disabilities • Provide format for vendors to complete Individual Responsibility Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a plan to encourage recipients to participate in vendor services • Provide orientation to the vendor's job readiness program • Assess recipients' strengths and barriers • Develop Individual Responsibility Plan with recipients • Provide on-going case management to help recipients address barriers • Provide job readiness services • Facilitate a structured job search • Develop links to employers interested in hiring recipients • Develop unpaid work experience opportunities for recipients who can't find unsubsidized employment • Help recipients access job training and education programs • Reassess recipients as needed • Provide job retention services • Request that sanctions be imposed or lifted

Sources: DC Department of Human Services, "Intake Packet for Families with Minor Children," 2008. DC Department of Human Services, "District of Columbia TANF Employment Program Vendor Contract," 2005.

District residents with disabilities. If the applicants decline, they are referred to a TEP vendor. IMA also performs assessments for other barriers to work, including substance abuse, domestic violence, and health problems; these are discussed in the next chapter.

- **The TANF employment vendors are required to provide an initial assessment of TANF recipients' strengths and barriers to work, including learning disabilities.** Based on this assessment, the vendor is responsible for referring clients to the appropriate education and job training. Vendors also are responsible for reassessing recipients as needed.

Many TANF Recipients Are Not Able to Benefit from Education and Training Options

Despite the availability of various education and training options and despite assessment and referral processes that both IMA and the employment vendors are expected to use, DC's TANF system appears to be designed primarily to refer recipients to a TANF vendor for short-term employment readiness services. This stems in part from a lack of a structured process for IMA staff to refer recipients to education and training, as well as disincentives for employment vendors to refer clients to these services.

As a result, many recipients do not understand their education and training options and referrals to education services and hard skills training are inconsistent.

- **TANF recipients lack information about their education and job training options.** Most Participants were unaware that they could choose a different vendor from the one they were assigned or that they could participate in another education or training program rather than go to a vendor. Without understanding all of their options, recipients cannot make an informed choice about the program that best fits their individual skills and needs.
- **Referrals to education and other training options are inconsistent.** While IMA and the TEP vendors have the flexibility to refer recipients to education and other training programs, the process for making these referrals is unclear.

IMA briefly screens applicants for any learning needs that would prevent them from working. Traditionally, recipients deemed to have a possible learning disability are referred to RSA for additional assessment. However, RSA's primary mission is to provide vocational training and independent living services to people with disabilities — not to provide basic education or GED services to those needing less intensive assistance.

You are destined to go to whatever training facility that's in your area. ... And sometimes that place is not qualified to handle all sorts of people. ... It's like everybody is in the same category and everybody starts in the same place. —TANF RECIPIENT

IMA refers some recipients to UDC's PATHS Program to receive adult basic education instruction and job training. It is unclear from the IMA Policy Manual, however, how IMA chooses individuals for this program. One Participant who referred to PATHS suggested that it was simply the "luck of the draw."

• **TEP vendors face disincentives to refer recipients to education services.**

According to the District's TEP contract, vendors are responsible for referring recipients to education programs when they deem it appropriate. Vendors are paid the same amount whether a client is participating in education or another work activity (\$50 per recipient per week if the recipient is meeting the work requirement). However, vendors receive bonus payments (as much as \$1,200

They don't offer you school. It's like well, yeah, you can go to school but we really want you working so that you're off TANF. —TANF RECIPIENT

per recipient) only when the client finds and retains a job — any job — for up to six months.⁸ Neither vendors nor TANF recipients receive a bonus for meeting an

education goal. Thus, vendors who can place particular recipients in a job for up to six months have a disincentive to encourage recipients to pursue educational opportunities. Also, vendors have no incentive to place recipients in jobs that will last for more than six months or to provide recipients with supportive services to help them retain their jobs longer.

Several Participants mentioned that TANF recipients often need more education before they can obtain higher-paying jobs. Aware that under the current TEP contract, employment vendors are paid when a TANF recipient finds a job, Participants state that this work-first approach discourages vendors from helping recipients obtain more education.

In addition, vendors do not appear to have a consistent process for referring recipients to education and other training services.

As a result, most applicants referred to the TEP vendors remain with the vendors, who may not have the capacity to address their needs. As noted above, only a small percentage of TANF recipients are referred to PATHS or the District's college tuition assistance program. IMA does not track the number of recipients who are referred to or receive adult education and English as a Second Language (ESL) services.

They just want you off TANF. ... As soon as you say something about school, they're like "Oh no, you don't really want to work." —TANF RECIPIENT

Many TANF Recipients Fail to Receive Appropriate Help

In nearly every focus group, Participants discussed the need for training that is better tailored to their individual skills and needs.

- **TEP vendors provide limited services that focus mainly on job readiness skills.** Vendors contracting with TEP are required to provide six weeks of job readiness training and structured job search assistance. Job readiness training includes assisting clients to find potential employers, build interviewing skills, and create or update resumes. Vendors are not required to provide educational, vocational, or other types of skills training, but may refer clients to other programs.

Nearly every Participant had been referred to a TEP vendor, and much of the job training discussions focused on the performance of these vendors. Participants generally had negative opinions about the vendors' performance. They reported vendors were unable to provide meaningful job readiness assistance and that most vendors provided a similar set of limited services.

Participants also discussed instances in which the computers recipients were supposed to use for typing resumes or searching for jobs did not work, vendors could provide only basic résumé and interviewing assistance, and staff lacked connections to employers.

A few Participants noted that they had a positive experience at a vendor because they received specialized training, felt that a staff member cared about their success, or could connect with potential employers through job fairs and other events. Across the seven focus groups, however, the vast majority of Participants reported that they did not receive adequate training or support from the vendors.

- **Repeat clients receive repeat services.** TANF recipients who are unable to find employment after one round of training with a vendor — or those who lose a job and return to TANF — sometimes are reassigned to the same vendor and receive the same job readiness training they received during their prior time on TANF. A lack of job training options can lead TANF recipients to remain in the program longer than they might if they had more opportunities to address their barriers to work. Some Participants reported giving up and receiving a sanction because they were referred to the same vendor multiple times and did not receive the help they needed.

They have you on the computer all day. Nobody in there saying, "Well, let's come on, let's go get on the phone, call a couple of these jobs" or, "We gonna help you out as you go along with the conversation." You never get none of that. So, basically, you doing it on your own. —TANF RECIPIENT

You do your resume; you go on an interview; that's it. And if you come back, they're like "Why you come back?"

—TANF RECIPIENT

- **TEP vendors lack the capacity to serve recipients with limited English skills.**

While federal law requires that all TANF recipients have access to services, TANF recipients with limited English proficiency may not receive the full range of services available through the job training vendors. In the focus group conducted in Spanish, only one of the four Participants had any experience with the vendors — and this was the only participant who was also proficient in English.

While the District encourages vendors to refer clients with limited

English skills to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, it reminds vendors that these are not core activities and should be pursued only in addition to job training.⁹ IMA does not currently track how many TANF recipients are referred to or participate in ESL classes.

I graduated from the same place three times, and they keep sending me there. And now, the fourth time, I refused to go — I want to go somewhere else. So, they siphoned my check. —TANF RECIPIENT

Employment Services Don't Prepare Recipients to Be Self-Sufficient

The District's emphasis on job search and job readiness training often does not provide recipients with the skills and experience they need to obtain living-wage jobs. Participants felt that they were discouraged from pursuing education classes and were pressured to take any job that was available, even if it did not pay enough to support their family.

- **Work first can lead to low-wage jobs.** Participants reported being pushed into low-wage jobs as a result of the work first approach. Given that many recipients lack a high school diploma and have little work experience, finding employment often means taking a minimum wage job. Working full time at the minimum wage, a DC worker will earn only \$17,160 per year — below the poverty line for a family of three and well below what a family needs to make ends meet in the District. In fact, Wider Opportunities for Women's DC Metropolitan Area Self Sufficiency Calculator estimates that a family of three (a parent, preschooler, and school-age child) needs an annual income of about \$51,600 to meet basic costs in the District.
- **Work first can lead to recipients returning to TANF.** When recipients are encouraged to take jobs that don't pay enough or aren't matched to their skills, they find it difficult to maintain employment.

But a lot of people, since they never had a job, they end up coming back because they done accepted a job that they don't have the skills for, don't know what they're doing, or there's something that happens that they end up getting fired. And then they come back and do it all over again. It's like a revolving cycle — you just keeping going and keep going back. They're not getting the proper training to just go and stay.

—TANF RECIPIENT

TEP vendors lack incentives to help recipients find higher-wage jobs. The elements of DC's TANF program that are intended to encourage vendors to help recipients find higher wage jobs are not well designed. Vendors receive a bonus for placing recipients into "higher wage" jobs, defined in 2005 as those paying \$7.50 an hour or more. This wage provides a full-time worker with about \$15,600 a year — far below what families need to make ends meet in DC and far below the District's living wage of \$12.10. In fact, the "higher wage" threshold is now below DC's minimum wage, which was increased to \$8.25 in July 2009.

So, a lot of times within a year or two, you find yourself right back where you started. ... If you would have just let me go to school and get my two to three years out of the way, then I wouldn't be back, because I would have the diploma.

—TANF RECIPIENT

The District's one-size-fits-all approach has not produced positive outcomes. Only 500 to 600 households are meeting the full work requirement, according to the District's data. For those who do find employment, only 45 percent are still working six months later, the last point at which DC tracks post-TANF employment. The average wage for TANF recipients who find employment is \$9.00 an hour.¹⁰ A full-time worker making \$9.00 an hour earns an annual income of \$18,720, or barely above the poverty line for a family of three.

Other job training programs — both inside and outside the District — achieve better outcomes by moving beyond a work first approach. The Strive program, with branches in New York, DC and other cities, combines job readiness training, job placement, and follow-up services.¹¹ The program has a national job placement rate of about 70 percent, and between 55 and 65 percent of its DC graduates retain their jobs two years after employment.¹² In DC, SOME's Center for Employment Training (CET) provides basic education and soft and hard skills training focused on three professions (building maintenance service technician, medical administrative assistant, and business and customer relations associate) that provide livable wages and a career ladder. CET has a 70 percent job retention rate at 6 months. While these programs do not serve TANF recipients exclusively, they focus on serving a similar population: unemployed adults with multiple barriers to work.

Conclusion

While the District provides several education and job training options, most recipients are referred to the TEP program, which emphasizes short-term job readiness and placement. Participants report that the District's emphasis on work first has created a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't emphasize education or obtaining a well-paying job. Expanding individuals' knowledge of their options as well as improving the assessment and referral process could help more TANF recipients locate sustainable employment and transition successfully from TANF. Chapter 5 presents more detailed recommendations for improving employment services.

NOTES

1. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "Program Descriptions," February 2008.
2. University of the District of Columbia, "About PATHS," http://www.udc.edu/academics/school_business_public_admin/paths/about_paths.htm.
3. DC Department of Human Services, "IMA Policy Manual: Work Requirements," Section 1.3..
4. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "Program Descriptions," February 2008.
5. Acs and Loprest, p.18.
6. Code of DC Municipal Regulations, 29-5806.1.
7. DC Department of Human Services, "Intake Packet for Families with Minor Children," 2008, p. 3.
8. DC Department of Human Services, "District of Columbia TANF Employment Program Vendor Contract," 2005, p. 26.
9. DC Department of Human Services, "Service Provider Guidelines for the TANF Employment Program," 2008, p. 23.
10. DC Income Maintenance Administration wage data, obtained February 2009.
11. Harry Holzer, "Berry Workers for Better Jobs: Improving Worker Advancement in the Low-Wage Labor Market," 2007, p. 29.
12. Strive DC Website, last updated October 6, 2008, <http://strivedc.org>.

CHAPTER 3

“If you don’t get the right kind of support, it’s hard”

TANF Recipients Are Not Consistently Connected to Support Services

THE DISTRICT’S TANF PROGRAM PROVIDES SERVICES TO HELP recipients address the challenges that make it difficult for them to get and keep a job. Due to the emphasis on “work first,” an inadequate referral process, and poor relationships with frontline staff, only a small number of adult TANF recipients receive the services they need to reach their full potential.

This chapter addresses the most frequently reported personal challenges — mental health problems, physical health problems, and severe domestic violence — along with substance abuse and lack of child care.

Many focus group participants (hereafter referred to as “Participants”) expressed the need for additional services for TANF recipients going through a rough time.

DC’s TANF program contains elements to help recipients overcome personal and logistical barriers to work. Unfortunately, the results of these programs are mixed. Assessments and referrals are not consistent. While many Participants had a positive experience with securing child care, the general impression of both Participants and frontline service providers is that clients are not connected with other needed services. Very low program participation rates support this impression.

KEY FINDINGS:

- *Programs meant to address personal barriers to work aren’t meeting the need.*
- *TANF recipients are hesitant to disclose issues to IMA and vendor staff, and when they do disclose these issues, they may not be connected to appropriate services.*
- *Child care is working well for most TANF recipients.*

They need to offer support because everybody’s needs are different. So they will need to get to that, because how I’m going to take care of my children, it has a lot to do with how stable I am emotionally. I’m getting all this training but it’s some other things, some gaps in there that if you don’t get the right support, it’s hard.

—TANF RECIPIENT



TANF Support Services

DC's TANF program includes opportunities to assess recipients for barriers to work and to make appropriate referrals. These are conducted both by the Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) and by the TANF Employment Program (TEP) vendors that provide employment services under contract with IMA. These policies have the potential to help address barriers faced by recipients, but inadequate implementation means that these services are not consistently provided.

The intake and recertification processes at IMA service centers include a written screening for learning disabilities, domestic violence, health problems, transportation challenges, child care issues, illiteracy, legal issues, and substance abuse.¹ In the Preliminary Assessment Form, IMA eligibility workers are prompted to ask follow-up questions related to learning needs, substance abuse, and domestic violence. The assessment does not contain questions related to mental health and has only one question related to physical disability.² As described in Chapter 2, the bulk of TANF recipients are referred to a TEP vendor for job readiness services, additional assessments, and referrals to appropriate services.³

If an assessment reveals a personal barrier to work, recipients are referred to service providers and city agencies:

- **The POWER Program for People with Disabilities or Substance Abuse Problems:** TANF recipients who need treatment for substance abuse or rehabilitative services for a mental or physical incapacity are enrolled in the Program on Work, Employment and Responsibility (POWER). Recipients cannot apply directly to the program but must instead be screened for eligibility by IMA or vendor staff and visit their doctor for a medical assessment, after which a medical review team determines whether they can enroll. Once in the program, they must complete a self-sufficiency plan.
POWER clients are referred to the appropriate program: Rehabilitative Services Administration, Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration, Department of Mental Health, or UDC's PATHS Program. A person who fails to comply with POWER's requirements can be sanctioned.⁴
- **Domestic Violence Services:** To protect the physical and mental health of victims of violence, federal TANF law encourages states to screen for domestic violence and provide supportive services as well as exemptions from certain program requirements. DC requires all TANF applicants to be notified about the exemption and screened at application and before a sanction. Eligible recipients can be exempted from the time limit, child support, and work requirements, and are supposed to receive counseling.⁵
- **Child Care:** The Early Care and Education Administration administers the Child Care Subsidy program, which offers child care for children ages 5 and under, and before- and after-school care for children up to age 12. Families

with gross income up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) are eligible for the program, and once families are in the program, they can continue to receive services as long as their income is below 300 percent of the FPL.⁶ Families with income from TANF alone receive child care without paying a co-pay. As families transition to higher wages, the co-pay increases on a sliding scale.⁷

- **Strong Families Program:** IMA refers families in need of case management services to the Strong Families Program, run by the Department of Human Services. Through this program, families with complex problems and at high risk of intervention by the child welfare agency receive wrap-around services and case management.⁸ It is unclear what criteria are used to refer clients to this program, as the IMA Policy Manual does not mention it.

Few TANF Recipients Receive Needed Support Services

TANF recipients generally do not benefit from the above services. During our focus groups, we asked Participants about substance abuse, domestic violence, child care, and mental and physical health. For each area, we explained how TANF is designed to work and asked about the effectiveness of the program and what other services are needed.

When we told Participants about POWER and the exemption for domestic violence, most insisted that

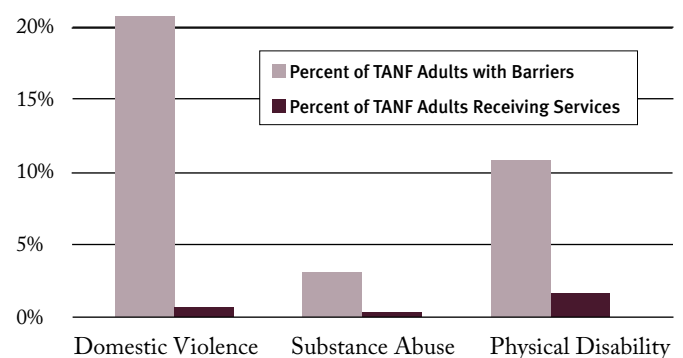
Different programs are out there, but nobody knows about them. –TANF RECIPIENT

they did not exist but said that they would be useful for TANF recipients. The direct service providers interviewed were also largely unaware of the supports available through TANF, even within their area of expertise.

Program data from IMA demonstrate that participation in the District's key programs for families with personal barriers to work is very low relative to the need. Figure 2 shows the share of DC TANF recipients affected by domestic violence, substance abuse, and a physical disability, as well as the share currently utilizing programs to address these barriers through referrals from IMA.

- While an estimated 21 percent of TANF recipients — as many as 2,611 adults — experienced domestic threats or physical violence in FY 2008, only 81 individuals received domestic violence services, and only one recipient received an exemption from the work participation requirement. In FY 2009, the District contracted with a new provider for these services, and 21 exemptions were granted in the first six months of the fiscal year.⁹

Figure 2: Gap Between Recipients With Barriers to Work and Those Receiving Needed Services



Source: Gregory Acs and Pamela Loprest, "A Study of the District of Columbia's TANF Caseload," Urban Institute, 2003. DC Income Maintenance Administration program data, obtained January-February 2009.

- Of an estimated 391 adult TANF recipients struggling with substance abuse, only 39 were referred to the Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration.¹⁰
- Of an estimated 1,362 adult TANF recipients with a physical disability, only 152 were referred to the Rehabilitative Services Administration, and 46 were considered “medically exempt” or eligible for SSI.¹¹
- An estimated twenty percent of TANF recipients — 2,522 adults — experience mental health issues.¹² Because there is no system for tracking referrals from the TANF program to mental health services, it is unclear how many TANF recipients are being connected to counseling and treatment.

In total, only 2 percent of the TANF population, or 305 adults, were referred to services through POWER in FY 2008.¹³ It is not clear how many TANF recipients actually receive POWER services because IMA does not track that number.

Culture of Work First Discourages Disclosure of Barriers to Work

In our focus groups, Participants articulated several concerns related to communicating with IMA and vendor staff about personal problems that can create barriers to work.

- **Work first can lead staff and recipients to downplay personal issues.** An overarching problem is that the IMA service centers and TEP vendors have adopted a culture of “work first,” rather than a more individualized approach to

They don't really care about you. They want you to get a job, get out the system. —TANF RECIPIENT

support the entire TANF household as it works toward stability and self-sufficiency.

- **Assessments of personal barriers are inadequate.** While there are multiple opportunities to assess TANF recipients and connect them with appropriate services, the majority of the service providers interviewed said the assessment process is not implemented effectively. Some providers reported that they did not think their clients were being assessed at all, while others said that the assessment process did not adequately screen for domestic violence and substance

They don't flat out ask you; they'll just give you a piece of paper saying do you need assistance with this, do you have an abusive boyfriend, and most of the time people are not going to open up to you — they're going to be embarrassed.... It takes a little bit more than that to find out what's going on with these people and you have to actually care. —TANF RECIPIENT

abuse. Several Participants noted that the primary way the District seeks information on personal barriers — the intake form that applicants are expected to fill out — is not an effective method to elicit this kind of information.

Poor Relationships Between Frontline Staff and TANF Recipients Contribute to Inadequate Referrals

Although we did not ask specifically about Participants' relationships with IMA and vendor staff, Participants raised the issue during the discussion of supportive services. Overwhelmingly, they found those relationships to be unsatisfactory, or even confrontational, and many reported that they would not readily disclose a significant issue such as domestic violence or substance abuse. A few service providers mentioned that it is difficult for recipients to confide in their benefits eligibility worker at IMA because they usually see a different staff person each time they visit a service center. Several Participants felt IMA and vendor staff stigmatized them and shared details of their cases with other staff.

DC's approach of giving frontline workers at IMA a high level of discretion in determining eligibility for services has proven ineffective. Research has shown that frontline workers have to make difficult, subjective decisions that may be influenced more by judgments of which applicants are "worthy" of exemptions and services than by the program's legal provisions.¹⁴ In DC, staff discretion — combined with lack of training for frontline workers and unclear policies — leads to inconsistent access to services, with some families getting the help they need while others do not.

The District's current policy also relies on vendor staff to direct recipients who disclose an issue with physical or mental health, substance abuse, or domestic violence to IMA or to the domestic violence service provider for further screening.¹⁵

However, Participants had diverse and inconsistent interactions when they disclosed an issue to vendor staff. Several reported being asked a few informal questions and told by staff that they were able to work. One had a Civil Protection Order against her abuser but was told by vendor staff that she was not eligible for a domestic violence exemption. One focus group participant, a domestic violence survivor, discussed a sanction she was facing for attending

I'm a recovering alcoholic and it didn't help me at all. ... Their focus isn't on the family and the needs of that family or that person. It's a generic kind of thing.

—TANF RECIPIENT

I've been through domestic violence and everything, and I'm now diagnosed with PTSD and major depression... I'm supposed to stop the therapy and all those other things that [vendor staff] feel are not important. But it's actually what I need to be okay and then to move forward.... They're just going to have to sanction me because I need to do what I need to do.

—TANF RECIPIENT

I told them I needed to be in my out-patient [treatment] because that was my goal, to finish that before I start my job.... [Vendor staff] said, "Well I don't, you know, we really don't do this through the job vending programs." And I told them, "I need this program to be able to excel in a job. I need this as a foundation." So they paid me my stipend for going to the outpatient meeting. So they do, you know, it depends on the worker. —TANF RECIPIENT

therapy appointments instead of her employment vendor:

Two Participants in our focus groups had been able to get the physical health, mental health, and substance abuse support they needed, but they too stated that the decision to provide them with needed services rather than a sanction depended largely on which staff person they talked to.

A few service providers mentioned that at times they reach out to IMA administrators rather than frontline workers for help because they are more flexible with clients' attempts to address barriers to work and various education and job training needs. This *ad hoc* approach, while helpful for a handful of TANF recipients who are already connected to attorneys or savvy service providers, is insufficient.

Child Care Is Working Well for Most People Who Need It

Participants had mostly positive experiences with applying for and receiving child care vouchers from the Early Care and Education Administration. They also were able to locate a child care provider with vacancies for their children, though some noted that it can be difficult to find care during the summer and care for an infant.

A few Participants struggled, however, to find quality daycare in a convenient location. The service providers we spoke with had a more negative

view of the program. In particular, they lamented the Catch-22 of clients needing to secure a job or regularly attend job training before applying for child care, during which time they have to rely on neighbors and family members for child care or pay out of pocket.

My youngest son is three and wow, what a great thing [child care] is. To be able to put your children [there] and to be able to move forward. To be able to go to school and go to work. And daycare is so expensive, how could we ever afford it? —TANF RECIPIENT

The District appears to have made significant progress in making child care subsidies readily accessible to TANF recipients. However, more targeted questions about child care would illuminate which factors — location, vendor policies, age of children, etc. — make it more difficult for some TANF recipients to obtain the child care they need to attend job training and eventually get a job. We recommend this as an area for future research.

Conclusion

Research has shown that TANF recipients with multiple barriers to work are more frequently sanctioned, spend a longer time receiving public benefits, and have a more difficult time getting and keeping a job.¹⁶ Participants and service providers agree that recipients need access to support services to overcome challenges in their lives. The District's TANF program should do a better job of connecting recipients with available support services by improving the process of information sharing with recipients and service providers, strengthening the upfront assessment, and ensuring that recipients are connected to a staff person they feel comfortable with. Chapter 5 outlines specific recommendations for meeting these goals.

*They need to have someone in there who actually cares
... that's basically it.* –TANF RECIPIENT

NOTES

1. Code of DC Municipal Regulations, 29-5806. DC Department of Human Services, "Policy Manual: Case Maintenance," Section 4.4.
2. DC Department of Human Services, "Intake Packet for Families with Minor Children," 2008. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Frequently Asked Questions: Meeting the Needs of TANF Applicants and Beneficiaries Under Federal Civil Rights Laws," 2009, <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/specialtopics/tanf/faqtanf.html>.
3. DC Department of Human Services, "District of Columbia TANF Employment Program Vendor Contract," 2005.
4. DC Department of Human Services, "Policy Manual: Case Maintenance," Sections 3.11-3.11.6.
5. Code of DC Municipal Regulations, 29-5819 to 29-5826. DC Department of Human Services, "Policy Manual: Case Maintenance," Sections 3.8-3.8.3.
6. DC Department of Human Services, "Policy Manual: Case Maintenance," Section 3.4.
7. DC Department of Human Services, "Notice of Final Rulemaking," 2006, http://osse.dc.gov/seoframes.asp?doc=/seo/lib/seof/pdf/parent_co-pay_levels.pdf, p.3.
8. DC Department of Human Services, "Strong Families Program," <http://dhs.dc.gov/dhs/cwp/view,a,3,Q,568270.asp>.
9. DC Income Maintenance Administration domestic violence services data, obtained March 2009. Percentage of recipients with barriers to work is taken from Acs and Loprest, p. 19-28. Rates of experiencing barriers to work are fairly consistent with national studies: Pamela Caudill Ovwigho, Correne Saunders, and Catherine E. Born, "Barriers to Independence Among TANF Recipients: Comparing Caseworker Records and Client Surveys," *Administration in Social Work* (March 2008) Vol. 32 No. 3, http://www.familywelfare.umaryland.edu/articles/barriers_to_independence.pdf, p.4.
10. Acs and Loprest, pp. 19-28. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "Customers in Codes 60B, 60C, 60D, 60F, 60G, 60H, 60K, 60L – a Monthly Count during the Fiscal Year 2007-2008," obtained December 2008.
11. Acs and Loprest, pp. 19-28. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "Customers in Codes 60B, 60C, 60D, 60F, 60G, 60H, 60K, 60L – a Monthly Count during the Fiscal Year 2007-2008," obtained December 2008.
12. Acs and Loprest, p. 22.
13. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "Medical Review Team Division of Program Development and Training FY2007-2008 Yearly Report," obtained December 2008.
14. Jan Hagen and Judith Owens-Manley, "Issues in Implementing TANF in New York: The Perspective of Frontline Workers," *Social Work* (April 2002) Vol. 47 No. 2, p. 173-176. Ovwigho, Saunders, and Born, p. 25.
15. Code of DC Municipal Regulations, 29-5819.
16. Acs and Loprest, pp. 56-61.

CHAPTER 4

“I still always run out that last week”

High Cost of Living, Low Benefits Leave TANF Families in a State of Constant Crisis

KEY FINDINGS:

- *Families cannot make ends meet on the TANF benefit, even when it is combined with food stamps and other assistance.*
- *The two-thirds of TANF recipients without housing assistance often struggle with unstable housing and homelessness.*
- *Low TANF benefits contribute to negative outcomes for children and their families.*
- *The transition from TANF to employment is difficult for many families because work supports end too early.*

TANF PROVIDES A SAFETY NET FOR FAMILIES who are experiencing financial and personal crises. It helps families for whom work may not be practical, such as those caring for a disabled child, and provides stability for recipients as they prepare for work.

Focus group participants (hereafter referred to as “Participants”) agreed, more than on any other issue, that the cash benefit amount is not sufficient. Even when combined with food stamps and other supportive programs, the level of cash assistance provided by TANF is not enough to make ends meet, resulting in negative outcomes for children and their families. Additionally, the transition from TANF to employment is difficult for many families because they lose eligibility for many supports, such as TANF and food stamps, even at low earnings levels.

Public Benefits for TANF Recipients

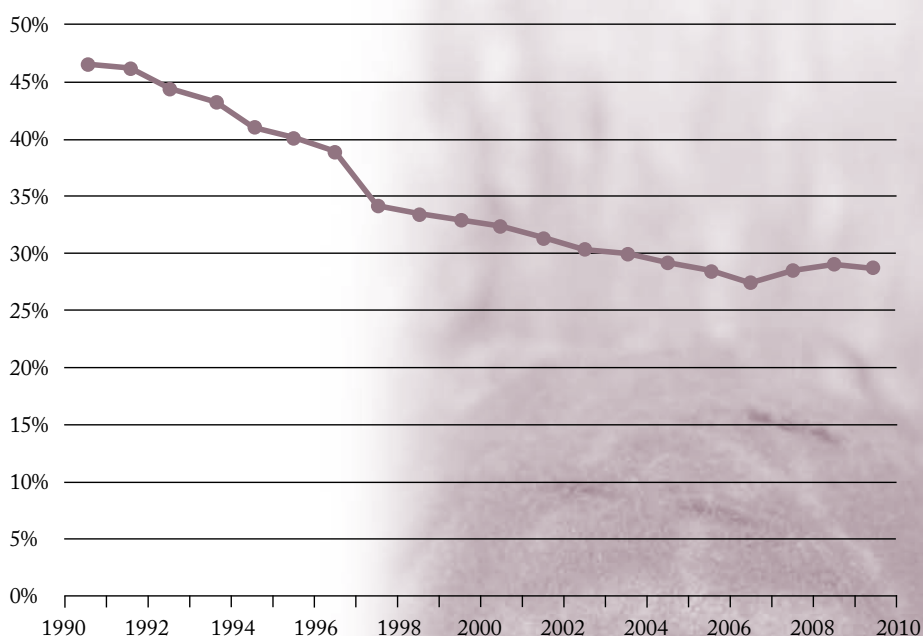
TANF provides a monthly cash assistance payment to families to help them meet basic costs. The amount of the benefit is based on family size. For example, a family of three in the District can receive \$428 a month. This provides an annual income of \$5,136, placing the family at 28 percent of the poverty line. When food stamps — recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) — are included, a family of three receives \$11,448 in benefits each year, placing them at 63 percent of the poverty line.¹

TANF applicants are automatically screened for food stamps and Medicaid when they apply for TANF and also are eligible for child care vouchers. Most TANF recipients receive at least food stamps and Medicaid. Some families live in subsidized housing, but this is not guaranteed. In fact, only one-third of DC TANF recipients receive housing aid. Currently, more than 25,000 DC households (including TANF and non-TANF households) are on the waiting list for housing assistance, which means that families are likely to wait years before getting assistance. Those who do not receive assistance can face steep housing costs — the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the District is more than \$1,200 a month.²

Since the early 1990s, the District's TANF benefits have not been adjusted to keep pace with the cost of living each year; as a result, they have lost value over time. If benefits had been adjusted for inflation each year since 1990, a family of three would receive a monthly benefit of \$665 in 2009. Figure 3 shows the decline in TANF benefits due to inflation.

DC ranks in the middle (25th out of 51) when states' maximum benefits for a family of three are compared. However, the District's benefits are quite low compared to other cities with high costs of living, such as Los Angeles (\$727 a month for a family of three) and New York (\$691 a month). Other states with much lower costs of living, like Wyoming and South Dakota, have higher benefit levels than DC. The District's benefit level for a family of three also falls below Maryland's current level of \$565 a month.

Figure 3: TANF Benefits as a Percent of the Federal Poverty Line, 1990-2009



TANF Benefits and Federal Poverty Line for a family of three, adjusted for inflation to equal 2009 dollars.

If food wasn't so high, if the cost of living wasn't so high, if taking care of your kids wasn't so high, you know what I'm saying? We'd be able to make it. The older your kids get, people say it's going to get better because they don't need Pampers and stuff, but it gets more expensive. Because they want more things, they need more things: school supplies, field trips, tennis shoes... —TANF RECIPIENT

Beginning in FY 2010, IMA will have the authority to provide monthly \$100 bonus payments to recipients who meet the program's work requirement, if sufficient funding is available. The agency estimates that about 1,500 adult TANF recipients would be eligible to receive this bonus in FY 2010.³

Families Can't Make Ends Meet on TANF

Overwhelmingly, participants reported that their benefits ran out before the end of the month. Given the District's high cost of living, TANF recipients cannot meet basic costs, even when TANF benefits are combined with food stamps, child care assistance, and Medicaid.

Table 5: Monthly Budget for a TANF Family of Three Receiving Child Care Assistance, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Housing Assistance

Monthly TANF Income:	\$428
Monthly Expenses:	
Rent Paid (after housing subsidy)	\$107
Child Care Costs with Voucher	\$0
Food Expenses (after food stamps)	\$0
Transportation	\$118
Health Care (with Medicaid)	\$0
Miscellaneous	\$336
Total Monthly Expenses:	\$561
Shortfall:	-\$133

Source: Transportation, Health Care, and Miscellaneous: "DC Metro Self-Sufficiency Calculator," Wider Opportunities for Women, 2008. Housing: Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in DC for FY 2009, US Department of Housing and Urban Development and "DC Metro Self-Sufficiency Calculator," Wider Opportunities for Women, 2008. Child Care: Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy's 2004 Market Rate Survey, adjusted for inflation to equal 2009 dollars. Food: U.S. Department of Agriculture's monthly Thrifty Food Plan for one child 4-5, one child 9-11, and one adult 20-50, March 2009. The miscellaneous category includes all other essentials: clothing, shoes, paper products, diapers, nonprescription medicines, household items, personal hygiene items, and phone.

• **Recipients who receive the maximum amount of benefits are still unable to afford basic expenses:** Table 5 shows a monthly budget for a TANF family of three living in the District. The budget assumes that the family receives a child care voucher, food stamps, subsidized housing assistance, and Medicaid. This is an optimistic scenario, since only one-third of TANF recipients are in subsidized housing programs.⁴ The table shows that even with these benefits, this family still falls \$133 short of what it needs to meet basic costs each month.

• **Recipients without subsidized housing face even greater challenges.** Two-thirds of TANF recipients do not receive subsidized housing assistance from the District. Many Participants who did not receive housing assistance said they had to spend their TANF benefits on the first day of the month to pay rent.

Service providers highlighted the difficulties that high housing costs create for their clients. One said that she does not know a single client who receives enough TANF to cover rent and that several clients face eviction for living in apartments that are too small for their family. Others

mentioned clients living doubled-up or in housing that is dangerous or substandard. In FY 2008, nearly 60 percent of applicants for emergency shelter at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center listed TANF as their income.⁵ Of families in city-funded shelter, 92 percent are on TANF.⁶

I pay electric, rent. And my rent is more than what I get from TANF a month. How is my rent going to be more than what I get for my benefit? –TANF RECIPIENT

Now, it's like I'm late on my rent, I don't have no food in my house, I'm pulling resources from other people... and it's hard, you know. –TANF RECIPIENT

Table 6 highlights the high housing costs that TANF recipients face if they do not receive housing assistance. Despite receiving food stamps, TANF, child care assistance, and Medicaid, this family — a parent with two children — falls \$1,314 a month short of what is necessary to make ends meet. To live within their limited benefits, TANF recipients often must make do without basic necessities, and many are at risk of becoming homeless.

- **Food stamp benefits often run out before the end of the month.** While food stamp benefits seemed to last longer than TANF cash benefits for many recipients, many still reported that their food stamps ran out before the last week of the month. A national survey of families seeking food assistance also found that food stamp benefits last, on average, 2.5 weeks out of the month.⁷ (These findings reflect food stamp benefit levels prior to the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which includes a 13 percent increase in food stamp benefits.)

Low Benefits Contribute to Negative Outcomes for Children and Families

When benefits run out before the end of the month, children in TANF families go without essential items like food and clothing, and families are faced with eviction when they fall behind on rent payments.

Table 6: Monthly Budget for a TANF Family of Three Without Housing Assistance

Monthly TANF Income:	\$428
Monthly Expenses:	
Rent Paid	\$1,288
Child Care Costs with Voucher	\$0
Food Expenses (after food stamps)	\$0
Transportation	\$118
Health Care (with Medicaid)	\$0
Miscellaneous	\$336
Total Monthly Expenses:	\$1,742
Shortfall:	-\$1,314

Source: Transportation, Health Care, and Miscellaneous: "DC Metro Self-Sufficiency Calculator," Wider Opportunities for Women, 2008. Housing: Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in DC for FY 2009, US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Child Care: Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy's 2004 Market Rate Survey, adjusted for inflation to equal 2009 dollars. Food: U.S. Department of Agriculture's monthly Thrifty Food Plan for one child 4-5, one child 9-11, and one adult 20-50, March 2009. The miscellaneous category includes all other essentials: clothing, shoes, paper products, diapers, nonprescription medicines, household items, personal hygiene items, and phone.

They have me on food stamps but it's not enough.... I'm becoming an expert, teaching myself how to buy the food, that I will not throw anything [away], that I'll be able to last for the whole month before the benefit is up. And yet I haven't figured out how can I do it.

By two weeks, I end up running out of food. –TANF RECIPIENT

I can't afford nothing. But see, before my husband left, we got coats and stuff. But we ain't had no coats or no shoes in almost four years now. And my son, you know, his coat, his arms are getting longer, and so when I said I'll see if I can put a coat on layaway or something before it gets too cold — this is how I'm living. –TANF RECIPIENT

Several service providers described how TANF families' lack of income affected their children's social and emotional development. One mentioned the large number of children in TANF families who witness violence, which she thought was largely due to living in overcrowded housing. Another discussed the educational effects of children going to school hungry. Research has shown that babies and toddlers living in families that are food insecure⁸ are more likely to have been hospitalized and to be in fair or poor health.⁹ The long-term outcomes for children living in food-insecure households are even more costly and severe: academic underachievement, lower lifetime earnings, and poor

physical and mental health.¹⁰

It seems like the babies get sicker. When you running out of funds, they get even sicker. –TANF RECIPIENT

If I risk my life to have my baby to eat, I'm gonna feed my baby. Just like when I went in there and stole some milk when I wasn't on WIC, he talked about, "Well, why you in here stealing milk?" I said, "Because my baby need it." –TANF RECIPIENT

Some Participants and service providers reported that families can feel it is necessary to break the law in order to make ends meet. A few Participants discussed stealing food, selling food stamps, and engaging in prostitution as a means of survival.

Service providers reported that other families simply went without food and other basic necessities at the end of each month.

Rapid Phase-out of Benefits Makes Transitioning from TANF to Employment More Difficult

When TANF recipients transition to work, they face reductions in TANF, food stamps, and child care assistance. After the first \$160 a family earns each month, its TANF benefits are reduced by \$1 for every \$3 earned. A family of three earning more than \$1,444 per month is no longer eligible for any TANF cash assistance.¹¹

In addition to losing TANF benefits, families also face the reduction or loss of other benefits. When families begin to work, their food stamp benefits are reduced based on their earnings. A family of three is no longer eligible for food stamps if it earns more than \$23,000 per year. A family of three receiving child care assistance can continue receiving it until its earnings exceed \$53,000 per year,¹² but co-pays for child care are based on income and increase once a family's income reaches a certain level. TANF recipients in subsidized housing must pay 30 percent of their cash income in rent, which means that 30 percent of any net increase in income (new earnings minus lost TANF cash benefits) goes toward higher rent payments.

Table 7 examines a family of three living in subsidized housing that transitions from TANF to full-time work at \$9 an hour. The family's annual

cash income would increase by about \$11,740, compared to its TANF cash assistance, and the family would remain eligible for Medicaid. With the increase in income, the family's food stamp benefits would decrease by about \$4,500, child care co-payments would increase by approximately \$580, and rent payments would increase by about \$5,000 per year. On the other hand, the family would become eligible for federal and DC tax credits of about \$8,400 annually.

When tax credits are considered, the family ends up much better than it was on TANF, with a net increase of about \$11,000 in income. However, including tax credits may not accurately reflect the income families have on hand each month, since tax benefits come just once a year when a family files a tax return. Research has shown that low-income families often treat income from tax refunds differently from wage income; many families use tax refunds for one-time expenses, such as paying down debt or buying a car, rather than on monthly expenses like utility bills or food purchases.¹³

When tax credits are not considered, the TANF family in Table 7 still ends up better off with employment, but the difference is much smaller. Given the sometimes steep decrease in benefits, many Participants discussed the difficulty of transitioning from TANF to a low-wage job.

Families that move to employment while on TANF generally experience an increase in their total resources, even when benefit reductions are factored in. However, our findings suggest that the relatively steep decline in multiple benefits makes some families feel that it is not worth it to work for low wages.

Table 7: Changes to Income and Benefits for a TANF Family of Three Transitioning to Work

Annual Income:

Earnings increase from \$0 to \$18,720 (assumes full-time work at \$9 per hour)	\$18,720
Tax credits increase from 0\$ to \$8,366	\$8,366
Income and payroll taxed increase from \$0 to \$1,844	-\$1,844

Annual Benefits

TANF decreases from \$5,136 to \$0	-\$5,136
Food Stamp benefits decrease from \$6,312 to \$1,800	-\$4,512
Child care expenses increase from \$0 to \$580	-\$580
Rent payments (minus housing assistance) increase from \$1,284 to \$5,616	-\$4,332
Medicaid eligibility remains	—

Difference *with* Tax Credits Included **\$11,262**

Difference *without* Tax Credits Included **\$2,896**

Sources: Transportation, Health Care, and Miscellaneous: "DC Metro Self-Sufficiency Calculator," Wider Opportunities for Women, 2008. Housing: Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in DC for FY 2009, US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Child Care: Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy's 2004 Market Rate Survey, adjusted for inflation to equal 2009 dollars. Food: U.S. Department of Agriculture's monthly Thrifty Food Plan for one child 4-5, one child 9-11, and one adult 20-50, March 2009. The miscellaneous category includes all other essentials: clothing, shoes, paper products, diapers, nonprescription medicines, household items, personal hygiene items, and phone.

It's more than you get with TANF but when you look at it, if you take that job, they're going to take all your benefits from you once you get that job, so that means you have no help with food — they took the little bit of cash they give you away so you left with that check and you're trying to figure out okay, I've got to buy food now and pay bills and child care... —TANF RECIPIENT

National research has found that, regardless of the reason for leaving TANF, former recipients are likely to struggle with lack of access to medical care, insufficient food, and housing problems.¹⁴ Given that many TANF recipients are transitioning to jobs that pay well below the living wage, the District should ensure that families working to achieve their employment goals are given the supports they need to meet their families' basic needs.

Conclusion

With cash assistance benefits that place them at 28 percent of the poverty line, TANF families struggle to make ends meet. When recipients are solely focused on daily survival, it is difficult to prioritize job training or to address barriers to work — and food insecurity can contribute to negative health and educational outcomes in children and adults. Additionally, some benefits phase out too quickly when recipients transition to low-wage jobs. It is important to ensure that families have the financial support they need to transition successfully to employment. Chapter 5 contains specific recommendations for improving TANF income assistance.

NOTES

1. This includes the food stamp benefit increase from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.
2. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "FY 2009 Final Fair Market Rents for Existing Housing."
3. This estimate is based on data from IMA, which states that 500-600 recipients are already meeting the work requirement, and an additional 1,000 recipients are meeting more than half but less than the full amount of required work participation hours. IMA assumes that the bonus will encourage the 1,000 recipients to meet the full requirement.
4. DC Housing Authority resident information, obtained March 2009.
5. Virginia Williams Family Resource Center applicant data, obtained March 2009.
6. DC Department of Human Services shelter occupant data, obtained February 2009.
7. Rhonda Cohen, Myoung Kim, and Jim Ohls, "Hunger in America 2006: A Report on Emergency Food Distribution in the United States in 2005," America's Second Harvest and Mathematica Policy Research, 2006, p. 139.
8. Food insecurity is defined as "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally acceptable and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways." Carolyn Murphy, Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, John Cook, Rachel Cooper, and James Weill, "Reading, Writing and Hungry: The Consequences of Food Insecurity on Children and on Our Nation's Economic Success," Partnership for America's Economic Success, 2008.
9. Children's HealthWatch, "Frequently Asked Questions," www.childrenshealthwatch.org/page.php?id=21.
10. Murphy et al., p. 41. "School Breakfast Scorecard," Food Research and Action Center, 2008, <http://www.frac.org/pdf/breakfast08.pdf>, p. 2.
11. State Policy Documentation Project, "Earnings Eligibility Limits: Single Parent Family of Three," 2000.
12. Families who are already receiving child care assistance can continue to receive assistance until their income exceeds 300 percent of the federal poverty line (about \$53,000 for a family of three). Families applying for the child care program can receive assistance if their income is at or below 250 percent of the federal poverty line (about \$44,000 for a family of three).
13. Timothy M. Smeeding, Katherine Ross Phillips, and Michael O'Connor, "The EITC: Expectation, Knowledge, Use, and Economic and Social Mobility," Center for Policy Research, 2000, <http://www-cpr.maxwell.syr.edu/cprwps/pdf/wp13.pdf>.
14. Taryn Lindhorst and Ronald Mancoske, "The Social and Economic Impact of Sanctions and Time Limits on Recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* (2006) 13:1, p. 17.

CHAPTER 5

Recommendations

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ADOPTED a number of progressive policies when it implemented welfare reform in the late 1990s. These policies aim to help TANF recipients gain the tools they need to address barriers to work, obtain needed skills and knowledge for employment, and find a job — without the threat of full-family sanctions or inflexible time limits. As a result, DC serves a wide range of families with different needs and has a large caseload relative to its population.

However, implementation of the District’s progressive policies and programs has not lived up to their promise on paper.¹ Participants described being pushed toward “work first” and expressed a desire for a system that takes into account their strengths and needs and helps them develop a tailored plan to obtain stable, well-paying employment.

The following recommendations build on the strengths of the District’s existing but underutilized programs — tuition assistance, PATHS, and POWER — and outline steps for a system-wide culture shift to a more individualized approach.² In other states, this culture shift has produced dramatic improvements in rates of disclosure of barriers to work and increased access to support services.³ But, as other states’ experiences have shown, it will require clear, consistent messages from city and agency leadership and the support of frontline staff.

Work first is an effective model for a small number of TANF recipients. Rather than using work first in a one-size-fits-all strategy, we envision an individualized approach that uses work first as one of a mix of employment programs and supportive services to facilitate self-sufficiency. Our recommendations include:

- Improving the assessment and referral process to better connect TANF recipients with the job training, adult education, and support services they need to succeed.
- Expanding the service delivery system to place a greater emphasis on vocational hard skills training, adult basic education programs, and support services. This approach would help more TANF recipients address their personal, skills-based, and family and logistical barriers to work.



- Strengthening income supports for TANF recipients, including increasing cash assistance levels and child support pass-throughs and implementing transitional benefits. This is necessary to enable TANF families to meet basic living expenses.
- Measuring the effectiveness of the TANF program by establishing outcome measurements, gauging progress, and creating a mechanism to share information with the public.

Adopting these changes can help the District provide better services to TANF recipients while continuing to meet the federal work requirement. Increasing recipients' income would help them meet their goals to find adequate work and contribute to long-term positive impacts for their children, an outcome that would benefit the District as a whole.

Recommendation 1: Create an Intensive Assessment and Referral Process to Connect Individuals to the Services They Need

Recipients who are unable to address their barriers to work often have longer stays on TANF and difficulty retaining a job. Yet Participants and service providers report that referrals to education, other training programs, and supportive services are inconsistent due to problems with the assessment process, poor relationships between recipients and frontline staff, and lack of information about services. The experiences of other states suggest that changes to IMA's existing intake, assessment, and referral processes could help address some of these concerns.

IMA and the vendors currently share responsibility for assessing TANF recipients' skills, interests, and barriers to work. Other jurisdictions place more responsibility for assessment and referrals on the government agency that administers TANF.⁴ This approach would provide a standardized protocol for assessing clients' needs and offering them information about services. It also would help connect clients with services more quickly.⁵ A similar process for IMA could follow these steps:

1. **TANF applicants would complete an application and meet with a benefits eligibility worker, who would determine whether the client is eligible for TANF but would not screen for barriers to work.** Currently, IMA benefits eligibility workers have a dual mission: to determine whether an applicant is eligible for TANF and to screen for barriers to work. Other states have moved away from this approach, for several reasons. First, due to high caseloads, benefits eligibility workers may not have the time to complete an effective assessment. Second, many of these workers do not have the background or training to assess clients for a wide variety of barriers, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, and learning disabilities. Finally, research with TANF

recipients has shown that recipients are not comfortable disclosing their barriers to someone who is responsible for determining their public benefits.⁶

2. **Applicants deemed eligible for TANF would participate in an orientation at IMA to learn about options available in the program.** A staff person with detailed knowledge of TANF could provide the orientation, either one-on-one or with a group of TANF clients. All applicants would receive a written resource in their native language and an oral explanation about the job training and education services available. Clients also would receive detailed information on exemptions from the work program and services to address barriers to work. This would help ensure that recipients have adequate information about their different options and aid them in making more informed decisions during the referral process.

Starting in 2010, the District will implement a new policy requiring TANF applicants to attend an orientation and assessment as a condition of TANF eligibility. Applicants who are unable to attend would no longer be eligible for any TANF assistance, a practice that has not been successful in other states.⁷

Instead of denying access to those who do not attend an orientation, IMA should focus on making its orientation and assessment more accessible and relevant, so that recipients are more motivated to attend and face the least amount of barriers possible.

Just even getting information to people, I mean ... different programs are out there but nobody knows about them. –TANF RECIPIENT

3. **Recipients would meet with a social worker to complete assessments and make a plan for referrals.** A social worker would administer a basic written and oral assessment with recipients, then complete any more intensive assessments that are necessary, based on the results. IMA should improve the assessment tool to reflect current best practices, which include a validated scale screening for mental and physical health, substance abuse, and domestic violence.⁸ After completing the assessments, the social worker could work with recipients to formulate a plan, including referrals to supportive services, education opportunities, and job readiness and hard skills training.

Currently, IMA provides an initial screening for some barriers to work and then relies on the vendors to perform a limited assessment of clients' skills and needs. Completing a more comprehensive assessment *before* referring clients to vendors could help to connect clients with services more quickly; it would also reduce the oversight burden on IMA to determine whether vendors are implementing assessments effectively. IMA also could obtain recipients' consent to share the results of the assessments with organizations IMA is contracting with to provide services and training, and encourage these organizations to perform additional assessments as needed.

Some states that have separated the benefits eligibility and assessment functions use specialized staff to perform assessments, often as part of clients' orientation.⁹ Some states have hired agency staff, while others have co-located

staff from nonprofits or other agencies.¹⁰ This helps to ensure that the staff have the expertise to implement and interpret the assessments; it may also make clients more willing to disclose personal barriers to work because these staff are separate from the benefits eligibility process.

States such as Kansas, Nevada, North Dakota, and Virginia use a more centralized assessment process with a mixture of formal and informal assessment tools. In Arlington, Virginia, after an orientation, applicants meet with an employment case manager at the agency who administers additional assessments and develops an individualized plan with the client.¹¹ In Montgomery County, Kansas, TANF recipients complete several assessments during their orientation, including the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory, CAGE substance abuse screening questions, a basic reading and math skills assessment, and an Adult Learning Disability Screen. After the orientation, recipients meet with their case manager to discuss the results of the assessments and to complete an Assessment Guide, which includes additional questions about barriers to work.¹²

4. **IMA staff would reassess recipients during recertification to see if additional referrals or services are needed.** TANF recipients are required to recertify for TANF every 12 months, which provides an opportunity for agency staff to conduct an assessment to determine whether changes are needed to their individual plans and services. Recipients who complete the assessment process outlined above and return for recertification should meet with the same social worker, if possible, to discuss their plan.

Recommendation 2: Expand Access to Appropriate Job Training, Education, and Support Services

The work first approach does help a small number of TANF recipients succeed, primarily those who have recently held a job and expect to find another one relatively quickly. The District should continue to use work first when it is most effective. However, DC also should expand the scope of employment services to include other education and training options.

Under this more holistic model, the majority of TANF recipients would not be referred to a job readiness vendor. Instead, the District would contract with a variety of organizations to provide education, job training, and other services with the goal of providing recipients with the skills and resources they need to obtain and retain employment. Through the assessment and referral process, all recipients would be encouraged to access the job training, education, and support services that they need, in an integrated service delivery system.¹³

This requires a two-pronged approach. First, we recommend expanding job training and education options, in addition to increasing referrals to programs such as tuition assistance and PATHS:

- **Hard skills training:** The District should contract with private and nonprofit organizations to provide hard skills and other types of industry-focused job training and placement on a pay-for-performance basis. This would provide more options for recipients who are looking for a specific type of training and career track. The contract could require that these types of training reflect the local job market and provide a bonus for placing recipients in jobs that meet or exceed the District's living wage (\$12.10 per hour as of January 2009).¹⁴
- **Adult education:** At any given time, an estimated 500 people are on the waiting list for literacy and adult secondary education services because of inadequate funding. To address the need for more education services, the District should create grants for adult basic education, ESL, and adult secondary education (GED) classes for TANF recipients, either through the existing job training vendors or new providers.

Second, we recommend the following changes to the service delivery system to ensure that TANF recipients have access to appropriate support services to address personal barriers to work:

- **Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA):** Currently, POWER refers people with mental or physical incapacities to RSA for rehabilitative services. In fiscal year 2008, RSA instituted a waiting list, which may force TANF recipients to wait for needed services. IMA should work with RSA or partner with other providers to eliminate the waiting list for TANF recipients who need rehabilitative services.
- **Mental health services for adults:** TANF recipients usually receive mental health services through Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCOs). Currently, low reimbursement rates from the MCOs result in limited access to mental health services for many people in need of treatment. We recommend that IMA work with the Department of Health Care Finance and Department of Mental Health to improve oversight of the MCOs and ensure that all TANF recipients are able to obtain the mental health care they need.
- **Domestic violence:** Currently, IMA refers all TANF recipients qualifying for a domestic violence exemption to one private agency for services, even if a given recipient is already receiving services from another organization. The District should allow recipients with a domestic violence exemption to seek services from agencies other than the TANF-contracted agency. IMA also should implement a partial exemption that would cut the number of required hours of work in half, in addition to the full exemption. A partial exemption recognizes that victims of domestic violence may need time to address legal and safety issues but also allows them to seek employment services. Other states have increased participation in services through implementing similar changes.¹⁵
- **Substance abuse treatment:** Because DC has only one residential family-based treatment program, low-income women are often forced to choose between caring for their children and participating in treatment. The Department of

Health should remedy this deficiency by dedicating additional funding to family-based residential substance abuse treatment programs using best practices such as the Therapeutic Community Treatment model. Family-based treatment is cost effective when one takes into account positive impacts on employment, family reunification, criminal arrests, and physical and mental health.¹⁶

- **Special attention for recipients facing serious employment challenges:** The District also should employ innovative approaches with proven long-term success for TANF recipients who have participated in job readiness and still do not have employment. For example, it could place a greater emphasis on education and subsidized employment opportunities for recipients who are frequently sanctioned, have received TANF for more than four years, or struggle with many barriers to work.¹⁷ These recipients also should be connected to case management through the Family Service Administration's Strong Families Program and continue to meet with a case manager during their first year of employment, an approach that other states have used successfully.¹⁸

To implement this recommendation effectively, the District needs better program administration. Several service providers we interviewed stated that the administrative burden of providing TANF-funded services is unnecessarily onerous, especially given the low reimbursement rates. IMA should revisit these rates and as well as its administrative processes to encourage high-quality nonprofit and for-profit organizations to compete for funding to serve TANF recipients. The District should also enhance oversight of employment training, support services, and adult education programs to ensure that they generate positive outcomes for TANF recipients.

Recommendation 3: Expand Income Supports for Families

TANF cash assistance benefits, even when combined with other benefit programs, do not provide enough income for families to make ends meet.

The cost of living goes up every year. Why, if Social Security can go up, why can't TANF go up? They need to do cost of living increases. –TANF RECIPIENT

Benefits also phase out too quickly when families transition from TANF to low-wage jobs. The District can take several steps to support families while they are living on TANF and transitioning to employment.

- **Increase TANF Cash Assistance:** The District's current cash assistance benefits leave families at just 28 percent of the federal poverty line. The District should adopt a multi-year strategy to increase TANF benefits to a level closer to that of other major cities and surrounding jurisdictions. For example, the monthly benefit for a family of three is \$618 in Boston, \$691 in New York, and \$565 in Maryland.

- **Increase Child Support Pass-Throughs:** Currently, the District allows TANF recipients to keep \$150 per child of any child support they receive each month; the rest goes to the District and the federal government to help defray TANF costs. Federal law allows states to pass through the full amount of child support payments to TANF recipients, though there is a cost to states if the pass-through is more than \$200 per child for families with more than one child. The federal government also will share in the cost of the pass-through if states disregard this income when calculating recipients' benefit levels.¹⁹ Increasing the District's child support pass-through to \$200 for families with two or more children and disregarding this income when calculating benefits could increase a family of three's annual income by as much as \$1,200 per year.
- **Adopt Transitional TANF Benefits:** Transitional TANF benefits provide a monthly cash supplement for a period of time to families who have left TANF for employment. These benefits supplement the wages of families that may be transitioning into low-wage employment and seeing decreases in their TANF and food stamp benefits. Research has shown that policies similar to transitional benefits can help to reduce poverty, increase employment rates, and improve outcomes for longer-term TANF recipients with less education and work experience.²⁰ Transitional benefits also can help a state increase its work participation rate, because families receiving these benefits are counted as meeting work participation hours.

About one-third of all states, including Virginia, have authorized transitional TANF benefits. Currently, the District provides bonus payments to TANF families that find employment and are still working at 30 days, 90 days, and 180 days. These payments range from \$150 to \$400.²¹ While these payments are a significant source of income for families, they are not a consistent, monthly payment that families can depend on to help with child care and other costs. The District could implement transitional benefits either by increasing the earned income and child support disregards in the regular TANF program (thereby making families at higher income levels eligible to continue receiving TANF payments) or by creating a new transitional benefit.

Recommendation 4: **Measure Program Effectiveness and Efficiency**

In order to evaluate the impact of various aspects of TANF, IMA needs to enhance data collection practices so that agency leadership can more quickly and easily see successes and failures. One way District agencies assess their progress is through budget performance measures. Along with their requests for funding, agencies must report their progress on key indicators. These performance measures provide a way for policymakers and the public to track an agency's progress.

The FY 2010 budget includes three agency performance measures related to TANF: the percentage of TANF Employment Program customers who obtain employment, the percentage of TANF recipients who move from sanctions into employment or a work activity, and the number of the 3,000 identified TANF families with child support payments in arrears whose income increases by at least 5 percent. The third performance measure tracks the performance of a new pilot program for TANF families with unpaid child support.

Future performance measures should be expanded to focus on the following areas:

- **Employment Retention and Wages:** IMA currently measures employment retention at six months after leaving TANF but does not published these data on a regular basis. This information should be included as a budget performance measure and expanded to include long-term wage and retention data, such as the number and percentage of TANF recipients earning above 100 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) at 6, 12, 24, and 36 months after leaving TANF.²² Without information on recipients' lives in the years after they leave TANF, policymakers, agency leaders, and advocates cannot measure long-term success and the return on investment in support services, child care, education, and job training programs.
- **Participation in Supportive Services:** Given that many TANF recipients do not appear to be receiving needed services, IMA should be required to report the number and percentage of recipients who are receiving assistance for domestic violence, substance abuse, and physical and mental health issues. IMA already collects some of this information, but it should be available to the public and formally used by the administration to measure the agency's performance. These indicators would help to measure how well the agency is moving toward a more individualized approach.
- **Customer Service:** All IMA Service Centers have a protocol for collecting the feedback of TANF applicants and recipients who come through their door. Because a welcoming and holistic approach is important for disclosure and basic access to safety net programs, IMA should set a baseline and goals for improving customer service.

NOTES

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Conclusion

TANF PROVIDES CRITICAL SERVICES AND INCOME SUPPORT to one-third of the District's children and more than 16,000 DC families. While the voices represented on the preceding pages represent a small fraction of the District's TANF population, many other TANF recipients likely share their views and experiences. These voices provide a wealth of experiences and recommendations for how the TANF program can be strengthened.

TANF recipients' experiences and the District's own data demonstrate that DC's TANF program has many progressive components, but the implementation needs to be improved. Employment services should be more individualized; more recipients should be connected to education, support services, and job training options to address their barriers to work; and cash assistance levels need to be increased so that families can focus on more than daily survival.

Addressing these issues will help the District to improve its work participation rate and reduce its sanctioned population. More importantly, it will help more DC families obtain the services they need, find jobs that pay adequately and are connected to a career track, and achieve stability and self-sufficiency.

Appendix: Methods Used

THIS APPENDIX PROVIDES MORE DETAILED INFORMATION about how the data for this report were collected. It describes the methods for recruiting Participants and conducting the focus groups and interviews. It also includes demographic data about Participants and information about direct service providers' places of employment. The two authors of this report contributed equally to the data collection, analysis, and report writing.

Focus Group Methods

To recruit Participants, we partnered with nonprofit organizations across the District that serve low-income families. When choosing nonprofit organizations to approach, we sought to balance those that serve TANF recipients in different geographic areas of the District with those that serve special populations of TANF recipients, including homeless residents, domestic violence survivors, Spanish-speaking recipients, and teen mothers.

We partnered with six nonprofit organizations to conduct seven focus groups. (One organization sponsored two focus groups, at two different program sites.) Each of the focus groups was held on-site at the nonprofit organization and the organizations were provided with a customized flyer to publicize the focus group. Child care was provided by volunteers at each of the focus groups.

In addition to partnering with nonprofits, we attempted to recruit focus group participants who were not connected to direct service providers. We organized a focus group at an affordable housing property, but no TANF recipients came to that focus group. We also publicized another focus group, which we were holding with a direct service provider, at a nearby public housing property, but no residents from the public housing came to that group.

At the beginning of each focus group, a nonprofit staff member introduced the focus group facilitators. Both facilitators were white and female. Facilitators read a consent statement at each focus group and emphasized that the focus group was independent of both the nonprofit and of IMA and would not affect Participants' ability to receive benefits or other services. Participants also indicated their consent by signing a paper when they entered that described the format and purpose of the focus group. Each session began with an activity that asked Participants to draw a picture of where they wanted to be in three to five years. After Participants shared their goals, they collectively were asked a series of questions about their experiences with the TANF program's job training, child care, supportive services, and benefit levels.

At the end of the focus group, Participants were asked to complete a demographic survey and were provided with the opportunity to sign up to receive information about future advocacy events. Participants' contact information was collected separately from the demographic survey to protect their anonymity. Participants were provided with a \$20 grocery gift certificate for their time.

Focus groups ranged in size from four to seven individuals. A total of 35 women participated in the seven focus groups (Table 8). Most were African American, either single or never married, and were between 18 and 35 years of age. More than 60 percent had either one or two children. Slightly more than half of recipients reported living east of the Anacostia River, in Wards 7 and 8, and most reported receiving some type of housing assistance. One out of five focus group recipients did not have a high school diploma or GED,

while half reported having a diploma or GED, and 23 percent reported attending some college. Most Participants were not employed at the time of the focus group. The age, gender, race, and household size of our sample were very similar to those of the entire TANF caseload in FY 2008: in FY 2008, on average, 95 percent of adult TANF recipients were women, 97 percent of TANF heads of household were African American, and nearly two-thirds were older than 25. Most households had three or fewer members.¹

Focus groups were audiotaped with Participants' permission and the tapes were transcribed after each focus group. Major themes were identified across the seven focus groups, and transcripts were coded using these themes. A summary document was created to outline the major themes relating to job training, child care, supportive services, and benefits, as well as other themes that emerged, such as a lack of information about TANF's education and training options. When quotes from the focus groups were added to the report, they were edited to remove common filler words, such as "um" and "you know," so that these would not detract from the speaker's meaning.

Service Provider Interview Methods

We focused on service providers, also referred to as frontline workers, because they have direct experience with the TANF system and often do not have the time to advocate or lend their ideas to policy discussions. We defined a frontline worker as someone who works directly with TANF recipients at least half of his or her time during a typical work week.

Table 8: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Gender	Percent (Total = 35 participants)
Female	100
Race	
Black/African American	74
Latino/Hispanic	11
White	6
Other	9
Age	
Under 18	0
18-24	34
25-34	26
35-49	37
50-64	3
65 and above	0
No response	0
Marital Status	
Married/Living with Partner	0
Single/Never Married	69
Divorced/Widowed/Separated	31

To select frontline workers for participation, we used both convenience and snowball sampling techniques. To begin, we tested our definition of frontline worker with a small group of service providers, and asked them to recommend frontline workers for our interviews. We then emailed this larger group to invite them to participate and asked them to recommend other service providers if they did not fit the definition, did not want to participate, or were unavailable. If service providers expressed interest and confirmed they met the definition of a frontline worker, they were added to the interview pool.

We used a method called “convergent interviewing” to structure the interview process because it both fit the exploratory nature of our research and allowed us to maximize the information we collected from our small sample (13 providers). This method involves conducting interviews with members of the sample who are likely to have divergent views. At the beginning of each conversation, interviewees are asked an open-ended question and are encouraged to talk as long as possible. Follow-up questions are asked at the end of the interview if the interviewee did not discuss certain topics. After each set of interviews, the interviewers meet to debrief about what they learned and note areas of agreement and disagreement among the interviewees. These areas of convergence and divergence are used to develop the follow-up questions for the next round of interviews. This process is continued until the sample of people to be interviewed runs out or two consecutive interviews fail to provide any new information.²

Once our interview pool was finalized, service providers were divided into three categories based on their area of focus: social services, job training/basic education, and legal. Within these categories, service providers were ordered based on their years of experience in the position, whether they worked with special populations, such as domestic violence survivors and immigrants, the degree to which they worked directly with TANF recipients, and whether they were from the same organization as another member of the interview pool.

The researchers divided up the list of interviewees and interviewed two or three service providers each week for six weeks. Eleven interviews were conducted in person at the interviewees’ organizations and two interviews were completed via phone. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher discussed the purpose of the

Table 9: Household Characteristics of Participants

		Percent* (Total = 35 participants)
Number of Children		
1–2		63
3–4		20
5 and above		9
No response		9
Housing Status		
Transitional Housing		37
Public Housing		17
Section 8		14
Rental without Assistance		9
Shelter		9
Live with Family/Friends		6
Other		3
No response		6
Ward Currently Living In		
1		9
2		9
3		0
4		6
5		6
6		17
7		29
8		23
No response		3

* Some categories may not equal 100 percent due to rounding

Table 10: Education Level and Employment Status of Participants

Education Level	Percent (Total = 35 participants)
Less than 9th Grade	6
Some High School	14
High School Diploma/GED	49
Tech/2-Year College Degree	3
Some College	23
College Degree or More	0
Other Response	3
No response	3

Employment Status	
Never Employed	3
Not employed	80
Currently employed	17

Table 11: Organization Characteristics

Organization Type	Frequency (Total = 11 organizations)
Nonprofit	10
Government Agency	1

Where Organization is Based	
Ward 1	6
Ward 2	3
Ward 3	0
Ward 4	1
Ward 5	2
Ward 6	1
Ward 7	1
Ward 8	2

Source: DCFPI and SOME, Survey of Organizations Participating in Frontline Worker Interviews, 2008

interview and asked the service provider to sign a consent statement. Interviewees then were asked an open-ended question about what was and was not working with TANF. Interviewers used body language and follow-up questions to encourage service providers to talk as long as possible. Then we asked more detailed questions about any areas of discussion that the participant had not already covered, including questions related to the four areas of emphasis: job training, child care, services to address barriers to work, and benefits.

After each interview, the researcher who performed the interview wrote a summary of what was discussed. Each week, researchers held a debriefing session in which they shared their notes and discussed in which ways the interviews converged and diverged. Probing questions were developed for the next round of interviews to test the points of agreement and disagreement. This process was repeated until we exhausted most of our interview pool and started seeing a good deal of convergence among interviewees' responses.

When all of the interviews had been completed, the notes were combined into a single document. Interviews were assigned an identification number to maintain service providers' confidentiality. Major themes from the interviews were identified, and the interview notes were coded using these themes. A summary document was created to note how many interviewees mentioned a certain theme during their interview, and a second document was created to document which themes interviewees tended to emphasize in the interviews.

Thirteen interviews were completed with service providers from ten nonprofits and two government agencies (neither of which was the Department of Human Services). An organization survey was developed to collect information about service providers' organizations. These surveys were either completed at the time of the interview or emailed to service providers after the interview was completed. Eleven of the thirteen service providers interviewed completed a survey. Over half of the survey respondents reported that their organization was based in Ward 1; the rest were spread out among the other Wards in the District, with the exception of Ward 3.

Organizations reported a variety of target populations (Table 12). Most reported serving low-income or poor residents and over half said that they served homeless residents. Other target populations included children and youth, mental health consumers, unemployed and elderly residents, and domestic violence survivors. Most organizations provided a variety of services, including legal services, mental health/counseling, education services, housing, and medical care.

Table 12: Organizations' Target Populations

	Frequency* (Total = 11 organizations)
Low-Income/Poor	8
Homeless	6
Children/Youth	5
Unemployed	5
Domestic Violence Survivors	4
Immigrants	3
Substance Users	3
Uninsured	3
General Population	3
Ex-offenders	2
Other	1

Source: DCFPI and SOME, Survey of Organizations Participating in Frontline Worker Interviews, 2008

*Organizations were asked to indicate all populations they served.

Table 13: Assistance Provided by Organizations

	Frequency* (Total = 11 organizations)
Legal Services	7
Mental Health/Counseling	6
Education/Tutoring	4
Housing	4
Medical Care	4
Clothing	3
Emergency Shelter	3
Job Training/Skill Tech.	3
Food and Nutrition	2
Substance Abuse Treatment/Prevention	2
Recreation	1
Utility Assistance	1
Transportation	1
Child Care	0
Other	4

Source: DCFPI and SOME, Survey of Organizations Participating in Frontline Worker Interviews, 2008

*Organizations were asked to indicate all types of assistance they provided.

NOTES

1. DC Income Maintenance Administration, "TANF Household Characteristic Profile: October 2007-September 2008," obtained December 2008. Reporting demographic data during IMA intake is optional, so this may not be representative of all TANF recipients in DC.
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SOME, INC. (SO OTHERS MIGHT EAT) AND DC FISCAL POLICY INSTITUTE

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Voices for Change:

Perspectives on Strengthening
Welfare-to-Work From
DC TANF Recipients



60 'O' Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
www.some.org



820 First St, NE, Suite 460
Washington, DC 20002
www.dcfpi.org