
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of follow-up surveys of families who left Work First in selected counties in North Carolina. Results are presented for 1,878 families who left Work First in eight counties between December 1998 and April 1999.

A. OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEYS

The surveys were designed to collect information on a broad range of topics relating to the status of families after leaving welfare. Information was gathered on the following key items:

- Employment status and earnings;
- Work hours, type of job, advancement opportunities, and job satisfaction;
- Reasons for not working if currently unemployed;
- Receipt of child support;
- Employment and earnings of household members
- Use of benefit programs such as Medicaid, Food Stamps, and WIC;
- Likelihood of reapplying for welfare
- Food situation;
- Housing situation;
- Health insurance and health care access;
- School attendance and performance among children;
- Child care arrangements and use of subsidized child care;
- Anticipated needs for services in the future; and
- Factors associated with returns to welfare (recidivism).

B. SAMPLE DESIGN, RESPONSE RATES, AND SURVEY METHODS

This section provides information on the design of the sample for the survey, the response rate on the survey, and the methods used to conduct the survey.

1. SAMPLE DESIGN

Under the sample design for the survey, a total of 2,683 families were selected for the sample frame from eight counties. The sample frame consisted of all families who had left Work First for any reason between December 1998 and April 1999 for at least one month. In five of the eight counties, all of the families who had left welfare during this time frame were included in the sample frame. In each of the other three counties, samples of 546 families were selected from the universe of families who left welfare. These counties have large welfare caseloads, so sampling was necessary. "Child only" cases were not included in the sample.

The survey sample was limited to these eight counties because they were the counties where we also conducted site visits for the evaluation. It was determined that combining the site visits and surveys might be helpful in terms of being able to interpret the survey findings. In

addition, since telephone numbers for Work First families are typically not available on the state’s Eligibility Information System (EIS), obtaining the telephone numbers for the sample members involved asking counties to look through case records. Limiting the surveys to eight counties was designed to make this process more manageable.

Because we used a sample design limited to eight counties, the results of the surveys should not be generalized to North Carolina as a whole. The survey results, however, are useful for showing the status of families in individual counties, including some of the largest counties in the state. The survey results are also useful for showing how counties vary in terms of client outcomes, use of services, and awareness of benefit programs. Because the surveys were limited to eight counties, all of the results are presented by individual county. However, the names of the counties are not identified in the report. Instead, code names are used, such as County A and County B.

Two of the counties were small rural counties with very few cases. Together, these two counties had only 35 cases in the overall sample frame, and only 24 survey completions. Because of the small number of cases in these counties, the results for these counties are analyzed in a separate chapter at the end of the report (Chapter VIII). The reason for presenting the results separately is that the small number of cases makes it difficult to draw meaningful comparisons between these counties and the larger counties in terms of the percentages presented in the data tables. Specifically, the results for the two counties can be affected significantly by one or two respondents on any given question.

2. RESPONSE RATES

Of the 2,683 families in the sample frame, the caseheads in four families were either deceased or incarcerated at the time of the surveys, leaving 2,679 families potentially available for interviews. Surveys were completed with 1,878 of these families, representing a response rate of 70.1 percent.

Response Rates by County

As indicated in Exhibit I-1, the response rates did vary somewhat by county. The variations were due largely to difficulties that some of the counties had in researching the cases to find telephone numbers. However, none of the counties had a response rate lower than 66.7 percent.

**EXHIBIT I-1
RESPONSE RATES BY COUNTY**

County	Response Rate
County A	68.3%

County B	71.3%
County C	66.9%
County D	75.7%
County E	68.9%
County F	70.9%
County G	70.0%
County H	66.7%
TOTAL	70.1%

Response Rates by Demographics

To test for non-response bias, we examined the response rates among major demographic sub-groups. Information for the overall sample frame was available on ethnicity, age, and gender.

Exhibit I-2 shows the survey response rates by ethnicity. The data show that the response rates did not vary significantly between whites and blacks, who together made up 96 percent of the respondents. The response rate was lower among “other” respondents, but these made up 4 percent of the sample.

**EXHIBIT I-2
RESPONSE RATES BY ETHNICITY**

Ethnicity	Response Rate
White	68.3%
Black	71.8%
Other	59.4%
TOTAL	70.1%

Exhibit I-3 shows the response rates by age. The data indicate that response rates did not vary substantially by age group, although the response rate among respondents aged under 22 was slightly lower than the overall response rate.

**EXHIBIT I-3
RESPONSE RATES BY AGE**

Age Group	Response Rate
------------------	----------------------

Under 22	65.3%
22-25	68.9%
26-30	71.2%
31-35	69.1%
36-40	71.7%
40 +	71.2%
TOTAL	70.1%

Exhibit I-4 shows the response rates by gender. The data indicate that the response rate among males was somewhat lower than the response rate among females. However, males accounted for only about 3.9 percent of the sample.

**EXHIBIT I-4
RESPONSE RATES BY GENDER**

Gender	Response Rate
Female	70.3%
Male	60.6%
TOTAL	70.1%

Methods Used to Minimize Non-Response Bias

Although the surveys were conducted by telephone, MAXIMUS used several approaches to ensure that persons without telephones were adequately represented in the sample. First, each sample member was mailed a letter offering a financial incentive to call the toll-free number at the MAXIMUS Survey Research Center. Respondents who did not have telephones were able to call this number toll-free from a pay phone or by using the telephones of family members, friends, or neighbors. Second, at the latter stages of the survey, MAXIMUS deployed field staff to locate persons whom we had not been able to reach through telephone calls or through the mail-outs. These respondents were provided cell phones to call the MAXIMUS toll-free number.

3. SURVEY PROCEDURES

The interviews for the study were conducted by telephone using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing. The interviews were conducted from the MAXIMUS Survey Research Center located in McLean, Virginia. The first step in the process was to consult with staff in each of the counties to obtain telephone numbers on the sample members. MAXIMUS sent listings of the names of sample members to each county for this purpose. The counties were able to provide telephone numbers for most but not all of the sample members. However, a large percentage of the numbers provided by the counties were no longer valid when we attempted our calls.

After receiving the telephone numbers back from the counties, MAXIMUS interviewers called the available telephone numbers. Directory Assistance calls were made if no telephone number was provided or if the available number had been disconnected. A financial incentive of \$25 was offered to sample members to participate in the survey. This was later increased to \$35 and eventually to \$50 in the final stages of the survey.

MAXIMUS also used the services of a commercial data broker to obtain credit bureau matches for the sample members. This data broker also matched the names of sample members against other available records, including DMV records from 27 states. However, DMV data were not available from North Carolina itself because of the state's restrictions on the use of this information.

During the survey process, periodic matches were conducted against the state's Eligibility Information System (EIS) to obtain updated addresses on families who were still using public assistance programs or who had returned to Work First. Access to child support information was not possible for this study, but may be available for the second round of follow-up surveys.

The final stage in the survey process was to deploy field staff to several of the counties to increase the response rates. Staff were sent to four of the largest counties to locate respondents at the available addressees. The objectives of the fieldwork were to (1) determine whether respondents were still at the available address, (2) encourage them to participate if still at the address, and (3) find out where they may have moved if they were no longer at the address.

4. SURVEY TIME FRAME

Most of the surveys were conducted between June and December 1999. A few of the surveys were conducted in the first four months of 2000. Efforts were made to time the initial surveys based on the month when families left welfare.

5. ADDITIONAL SURVEYS

An additional round of surveys with the sample members is planned for the period May to August 2000. This second round of surveys should provide information on the status of the families within a relatively specific follow-up period of 18-20 months after they left Work First. The second round of surveys will be timed so that families who left in December 1998 will be surveyed first, followed by families who left in January 1999, and so on.

C. PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Of the 1,878 respondents who were interviewed for the study, approximately 20 percent were back on welfare at the time of the survey. These families were identified both through the survey itself and through an analysis of administrative data from the Eligibility Information System (EIS). In the report, most of our analyses are focused on the 80 percent of the respondents who were still off welfare. The report is organized as follows:

- Chapter II presents data on the characteristics of respondents who were still welfare at the time of the surveys. This chapter also examines the reasons why they left Work First, and the amount of time remaining on their 24-month time clocks.
- Chapter III of the report presents findings on employment and earnings among respondents still off welfare at the time of the survey. The chapter also presents findings on work hours, non-traditional work schedules, job satisfaction, and employer health insurance.
- Chapter IV provides survey findings on the receipt of child support, other income, and public assistance benefits by respondents no longer on welfare at the time of the surveys. This chapter includes an analysis of the percentage of families living above the poverty level, as well as findings on the perceived adequacy of income and benefits to meet family needs.
- Chapter V presents survey findings on various indicators of family well-being among those respondents still off welfare at the time of the surveys. The chapter examines food security, adverse events, health insurance coverage, school attendance and performance issues, housing adequacy, and overall perceptions of life after welfare.
- Chapter VI presents the survey findings on use of child care, receipt of child care assistance payments, and use of other services designed to promote self-sufficiency. The chapter also examines the anticipated needs of respondents for future services.
- Chapter VII presents findings on welfare recidivism among the survey respondents, including an analysis of recidivism rates by county and sub-groups. The chapter also examines how recidivism varied by reasons for leaving Work First.
- Chapter VIII briefly presents the results for the two small rural counties. The findings are presented in narrative form because of the very small sample sizes in these counties.