

When Families Leave Welfare Behind

First Survey Findings

**Illinois
Families in Transition**



Illinois Department of Human Services

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When Families Leave Welfare Behind: Illinois Families in Transition

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Population of Interest	2
Administrative Data and Survey Procedures	3
Representativeness of the Sample	3
Who is Leaving TANF?	6
Why Do People Leave TANF?	8
TANF Recycling	9
What are the Employment Experiences of Welfare Leavers?	11
Hours Worked, Wages, and Household Income	13
Types of Jobs	14
Job Stability	14
Problems in Getting/Keeping a Job	15
What Hardships Have TANF Leavers Experienced?	17
What Public and Informal Supports Are Used by Welfare Leavers?	18
Medical Coverage	18
Food Stamps	19
Earned Income Tax Credit	19
Child Care	20
Child Support	21
Other Benefits and Supports	21
Availability of Informal and Family Supports	22
Summary	23

When Families Leave Welfare Behind: Illinois Families in Transition

First Survey Findings

**Institute for Public Affairs, University of Illinois at Springfield
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Executive Summary

This is the first in a series of reports describing findings of a study that explores how people are faring after they leave welfare in Illinois. The fundamental questions addressed in this report are:

- a. What are the characteristics of clients at the time of TANF case closure?
- b. What happens to clients in the months following their exit from TANF?
- c. What factors appear to affect the stability of TANF exits and employment-related outcomes?

These questions are addressed with information from administrative data and telephone interviews of a stratified random sample of those who left the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Illinois in either December, 1997 or June, 1998. Leavers were defined as those whose case closed in the selected month and did not reopen the following month, i.e., whose case remained closed for at least two months. The interviews were conducted by the Survey Research Office of the University of Illinois at Springfield primarily between November, 1998 and December, 1998. A total of 427 interviews were completed, 190 from Cook County and 237 from the rest of the state, or “Downstate.”

A comparison was made, using an administrative database from the Illinois Department of Human Services, of the characteristics of the respondents and non-respondents to determine the representativeness of survey information. The two groups were comparable in age, size of household, and average number of children. The proportion of African-American households in Cook County was slightly greater among respondents than non-respondents, while downstate, the opposite pattern was found, with African Americans under-represented. Hispanic families were under-represented among respondents in both regions. In addition, respondents tended to be better educated than non-respondents.

Key findings to date include:

A majority of leavers cited employment as the reason for leaving welfare.

- C** 77 percent lived in a household where either they or a partner, or both, were working at exit. This figure declined slightly to 72 percent at interview.
- C** 69 percent of the respondents were employed at exit.
- C** 65 percent of the respondents were employed at interview.
- C** Only 15 percent of the respondents had not been employed at all since leaving TANF.

Executive Summary

The indicators show relatively high employment characteristics for many since exit.

- C Median hourly pay rate at exit was \$7.00, and mean hourly pay rate was \$7.59. Seventy-eight percent (78%) earned over \$5.50 per hour.
- C Median hourly pay on current/most recent job was \$7.11 and mean hourly pay for this job was \$7.78.
- C Average weekly hours worked in current/most recent job was 35.8.
- C Median number of months worked at current or most recent job was 5, with 36 percent employed over six months.
- C Median total income after taxes for the previous month was \$1,000, although 26 percent reported income of \$500 or less for the previous month.
- C 20 percent of workers earned over \$10 per hour in their current job.

Most jobs are in service-related occupations. Satisfaction is relatively high.

- C Occupations since leaving welfare included clerical (21%), sales/cashiers (16%), hospitality (12%), service (12%), and health services (11%).
- C 80 percent reported they are somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with their current (or most recent) job; only 17 percent reported they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

There was considerable turnover in employment.

- C 51 percent were employed both at time of exit and interview.
- C Movement in and out of jobs was common; 18 percent were employed at TANF exit but were unemployed at interview, while 14 percent were unemployed at exit but were employed by the time of interview.
- C In some cases, changing jobs brought a wage increase. Of those who changed jobs since TANF exit, 70 percent reported higher wages on their current jobs.
- C Only 37 percent of those who held jobs when leaving in December, 1997 still had the same job when interviewed one year later.

A sizeable majority have remained off welfare.

- C 80 percent have not returned to welfare.
- C 15 percent are currently receiving TANF assistance.
- C 5 percent returned to TANF at some point but left again.

The median length of time on welfare was 3.5 years.

Child care is a commonly-needed support for getting and keeping a job.

- C Paying for child care (31%), finding someone to provide child care (34%), and finding child care for work hours (28%) were the most frequently-cited problems for employment.
- C Transportation was also a problem, cited by 26 percent.
- C Additional expenses related to working were also a problem, cited by 25 percent.

Executive Summary

On average, the age of the youngest child was less than 5 years.

- C The youngest child of 63 percent of respondents was less than 5 years old. The average age of the youngest child was 4.9 years.
- C The average age of children in the household was 6.6 years.

22 percent lacked a high school diploma.

Fewer hardships were reported for the period after leaving welfare than for the six months prior to leaving, with the exception of getting medical treatment.

- C In the six months prior to leaving welfare, 20 percent reported going without utilities because they could not afford them. Only 10 percent reported this hardship after leaving.
- C In the six months prior to leaving welfare, 50 percent got behind in rent/housing payments, whereas 38 percent reported this hardship after leaving.
- C In the six months prior to leaving welfare, 17 percent had to move because they could not pay their rent, whereas 10 percent reported this happening after leaving.
- C Since leaving welfare, 26 percent reported an inability to obtain medical treatment for someone in their home because they were unable to afford it. Prior to leaving welfare, only 18 percent had difficulty obtaining medical treatment for someone in their family.
- C The difficulty in receiving medical treatment is in part a function of low participation in medicaid: In Cook County less than half of the respondents and their children continued to receive Medicaid, compared to two-thirds of Downstate respondents and nearly three-fourths of their children.

Use of other resources and supports changes little from before to after welfare.

- C About 40 percent received school lunch program benefits both before and after leaving TANF.
- C Slightly fewer received WIC program benefits after (27%) compared to before (34%).
- C 10 percent received Supplemental Social Security (SSI) both before and after.
- C About one-quarter received gifts of money or food from family or friends both before and after leaving welfare.

Introduction

When Families Leaver Welfare Behind: Illinois Families in Transition

First Survey Findings

Introduction

As in other states, public assistance caseloads in Illinois have declined in the last few years, beginning with the implementation of federal waivers and continuing with the subsequent implementation of the state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. While these caseload declines suggest optimism, little is known about what happens to individuals and families who leave TANF. In an effort to understand the implications of this policy change, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) sponsored a collaborative study being directed by the Institute for Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Springfield (IPA), with the School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Using both administrative and survey data, this study addresses three overarching questions about those who leave the Illinois TANF program: (1) What are the characteristics of clients at the time of TANF case closure? (2) What happens to clients in the months following their exit from TANF? and (3) What factors are associated with exit stability and employment-related outcomes? This report describes the results of the initial phase of this study and, after first summarizing the methodology employed, is organized according to the following substantive questions:

Who is leaving TANF?

Why do people leave TANF?

What are the employment experiences of TANF leavers?

What hardships are experienced while on TANF and after leaving?

What public and informal supports are used by TANF leavers?

Methodology

Methodology

Population of Interest

The welfare leavers of concern in this study are all adults with children who received Illinois TANF cash assistance at some point and then left the TANF grant during the months of interest. In elaborating this statement, we first note that explicitly excluded from the study are people who were only part of ‘child-only’ grants and also pregnant women with no other children (the second phase of this study does include these pregnant women who leave TANF). Adults who were on full-family cases that changed to child-only cases are, however, included in the study as another form of adults leaving cash assistance.

The determination of who has left TANF assistance begins with a change in the administrative status of the adult in question from ‘active’ to ‘closed’ in a particular month. Closed in this sense means those who are no longer receiving TANF cash assistance; there are a variety of other public programs that these adults may be participating in, but it is the closing of the TANF cash assistance grant that defines someone as leaving TANF. As for the time-based criteria for inclusion in the study, no restriction is made on how long an adult needs to have received TANF assistance in order to be eligible; even an adult who was on TANF

assistance for one month and then left is included in the population of interest for this study. On the other hand, to ensure that those being studied are only those who indeed left TANF, this study followed the convention of other state studies in excluding those individuals who left the TANF rolls for only one month before returning. Thus, former clients must be off TANF assistance for at least two months before they are considered genuine leavers. As indicated in Table 1, this definition of ‘TANF leaver’ resulted in a population of 14,429 leavers in December, 1997 and June, 1998 (8,395 for Cook County and 6,034 for Downstate). Stratified random sampling resulted in 1400 individuals (one later excluded when found not to have met leaver criteria) divided equally between the two regions (Cook County and Downstate) and the two monthly cohorts. From this sample, 427 interviews were completed (190 for Cook County and 237 for Downstate). In order to allow proper inference from this stratified sample (where the equal numbers of former recipients that were drawn from the two months of exit and from Cook County and Downstate do not reflect the relative numbers of closed cases in the population), weights were applied to reflect the numbers of closed cases in the state during the months of study. These weighted averages are used in all tables that report survey data and aggregate by region or by month, from Table 4 until the end of the report.

Table 1: Population of Interest and Samples

Monthly Cohort	Number of Closed Cases		Survey Sample		Survey Respondents	
	Cook County	Downstate	Cook County	Downstate	Cook County	Downstate
December 97 closings	1,878	2,172	350	349	93	120
June 98 closings	6,517	3,862	350	350	97	117
Total cases	8,395	6,034	700	699	190	237

Methodology

Administrative Data and Survey Procedures

The administrative data were derived from the DHS Client Database (CDB). These data were processed by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago and then linked to the survey data. The survey data were compiled based on interviews conducted primarily in November and December, 1998. The survey procedures were as follows: potential respondents were sent letters notifying them of the study and told that they would be paid \$15 if they completed the upcoming telephone interview; this letter also provided an 800 number that they could call if they wished. They were then called at the telephone numbers provided by DHS (up to ten attempts if necessary). In cases where the DHS-supplied telephone number was not current for the client, Internet directory assistance was used to find updated telephone numbers and addresses.

Representativeness of the Sample

The overall response rate for the first phase of this study was 30.5 percent, with 427 respondents from a stratified random sample of 1,399 TANF leavers. To assess the representativeness of the respondents, administrative data available for both respondents and non-respondents were used to compare the two groups. Administrative data were not available for a small subset of leavers. As a result, for purposes of this comparison of respondents and non-respondents, only 1,310 of 1,399 cases could be used. Using this group of 1,310 cases as a base, 400 of the 427 respondents could be analyzed, along with 910 of the non-respondents. The non-respondents consisted of 474 in Cook County and 436 in Downstate, indicating a higher response rate Downstate.

For the most part, respondents are similar to non-respondents. Table 2 compares respondents to non-respondents for the two regions, Cook County and Downstate, and shows that the median age in years was similar for respondents (30.5) and non-respondents (29.5) in Cook County and similar for respondents (26.5) and non-respondents (27.2) Downstate. Other

similarities include the mean number of children, the mean number of persons on a case, and the prior work experiences of recipients (though respondents were more likely to have had clerical experience).

However, there were also a number of differences between respondents and non-respondents. Cook County respondents were less likely to be married (7.7%) than Cook County non-respondents (10.6%), whereas Downstate respondents were more likely to be married (22.8%) than non-respondents (18.6%).

Respondents in both geographic areas were better educated than non-respondents. For example, respondents are more likely than non-respondent to have at least high school diplomas or GEDs: 66.9 percent versus 54.8 percent for Cook County and 64.8 percent versus 58.6 percent for Downstate.

In Cook County, whites were under-represented among the respondents (9.9% vs. 13.9% for non-respondents), while African-Americans were over-represented (78.5% vs. 66.8% for non-respondents). There was a reverse pattern Downstate. White respondents were over-represented (71.2% vs. 62.6% for non-respondents) while African-Americans were under-represented (26.5% vs. 31.0% for non-respondents). Hispanics were under-represented among respondents in both regions with 10.5 percent versus 16.9 percent for non-respondents in Cook County, and 2.0 percent versus 5.5 percent for non-respondents Downstate.

Table 3 compares the characteristics of the respondents and non-respondents aggregated by month of leaving. Respondents are comparable to non-respondents on some variables (e.g., mean number of children on the case); on other variables there are some notable differences. For example, there are greater differences between respondents and non-respondents on prior work experience when organized by monthly cohort than is apparent when organized by region. In addition to the overall greater frequency of

Methodology

respondents having experience in clerical work than non-respondents that was evident when comparing by regions, service workers were over-represented and laborers were under-represented in the December, 1997 cohort. However, the opposite pattern was found for the June, 1998 cohort. Finally, education of respondents was

higher than for non-respondents. For example, respondents were more likely to have at least a high school diploma or equivalent than non-respondents: 63.8 percent versus 56.3 percent for the December, 1997 cohort 67.6 percent versus 56.8 percent for the June 1998 cohort.

Table 2: Characteristics of Survey Responders and Non-Responders, by Geographic Area, Using the CDB Administrative Variables

Administrative File Variable	Cook County		Downstate Counties	
	Responders n = 181	Non- Responders n = 474	Responders n = 219	Non-Responders n = 436
Female Recipient	95.0%	93.6%	89.5%	88.9%
Married Recipient	7.7%	10.6%	22.8%	18.6%
Education of Adult Recipient: (100% w/o rounding)				
Less than High School Completed	33.1%	45.2%	35.2%	41.4%
High School Diploma or GED	46.4%	38.7%	52.5%	46.3%
Education beyond High School	20.4%	16.1%	12.3%	12.3%
Race/Ethnicity (100% w/o rounding):				
White Adult Recipient	9.9%	13.9%	71.2%	62.6%
African American Adult Recipient	78.5%	66.8%	26.5%	31.0%
Latino/Hispanic Adult Recipient	10.5%	16.9%	2.0%	5.5%
Other	1.1%	2.3%	0.5%	0.9%
Median Age: Adult Recipient	30.5 yrs	29.5 yrs	26.5 yrs	27.2 yrs
Median Age: Youngest Child	4 yrs	4 yrs	3 yrs	3 yrs
Mean Number of Children	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8
Mean Total Persons on Case	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.1
Prior Work Experience (total: 100%):				
Service	27.1%	26.6%	41.6%	41.5%
Clerical	18.8%	11.6%	6.4%	3.9%
Laborer	18.2%	18.1%	20.0%	16.7%
Other	8.8%	6.8%	6.8%	5.3%
No prior experience	19.9%	26.2%	6.8%	7.6%
Missing data	7.2%	10.7%	18.4%	25.0%

Methodology

Table 3 Characteristics of Survey Responders and Non-Responders, by Monthly Cohort, Using the CDB Administrative Variables

Administrative File Variable	December 1997 Cohort		June 1998 Cohort	
	Responders n = 196	Non-Responders n = 445	Responders n = 204	Non-Responders n = 465
Female Recipient	93.3%	90.8%	90.7%	92.0%
Married Recipient	21.9%	26.9%	17.6%	13.8%
Education of Adult Recipient: (100% w/o rounding)				
Less than High School Completed	36.2%	43.7%	32.4%	43.2%
High School Diploma or GED	47.4%	40.7%	52.0%	43.8%
Education beyond High School	16.3%	15.6%	15.7%	13.0%
Race/Ethnicity (100% w/o rounding):				
White Adult Recipient	41.8%	37.9%	45.1%	36.6%
African American Adult Recipient	52.6%	47.2%	47.5%	52.0%
Latino/Hispanic Adult Recipient	4.6%	13.5%	6.9%	9.4%
Other	1.0%	1.8%	0.5%	2.0%
Median Age: Adult Recipient	29.9 yrs	29.1 yrs	27.0 yrs	27.8 yrs
Median Age: Youngest Child	3 yrs	4 yrs	3 yrs	3 yrs
Mean Number of Children	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8
Mean Total Persons on Case	2.8	2.8	3.0	3.0
Prior Work Experience (total: 100%):				
Service	37.2%	31.7%	32.8%	35.7%
Clerical	11.7%	8.5%	12.2%	7.9%
Laborer	15.8%	20.7%	22.5%	14.4%
Other	7.1%	7.2%	8.3%	9.0%
No prior experience	11.2%	16.6%	14.2%	17.9%
Missing data	17.0%	10.0%	15.3%	16.1%

Who is Leaving TANF?

Who is Leaving TANF?

To understand the experiences of those leaving TANF it is important to identify who is leaving. Table 4 provides some background information based on the survey responses of those who left TANF in December, 1997 and in June, 1998. As with much of the survey data summarized in this report, Table 4 provides weighted averages that reflect the total number of cases closed for the two months studied. The Total column also represents weighting by total cases closed in the two regions.

As indicated in Table 4, over 94 percent of the respondents were female, with similar percentages in both Cook County and Downstate. Ethnicity, however, varied by region in that 78.4 percent of those in Cook County described themselves as African-American, in contrast to 26.6 percent of those Downstate. An even greater, though opposite, contrast is seen in those who described themselves as white: 8.9 percent in Cook County versus 70.5 percent Downstate.

The two regions differ also in terms of the marital status of respondents. Whereas over 25 percent of those downstate indicated they were married at exit from TANF and living with their spouse, only 12.3 percent of those in Cook County reported being married. Similarly, more of those Downstate were unmarried but living with a partner than those in Cook County (8.8% vs. 2.9%) and far more respondents Downstate were divorced (22% vs. 6.2%). Correspondingly, respondents in Cook County were more likely to have never been married— 67.7 percent versus 36.2 percent of those Downstate. The apparent importance with regard to stable TANF exits of living with a partner, married or not, will be

developed later in this report. Because of this importance, the phrase “living with a partner” will be used in the broad sense of either being married or living with a partner. When distinctions are to be made between married and unmarried partners, they will be specified as such.

Regional differences in the size of the household and in the ages of the youngest child were not as large as those just noted, though fewer downstate households have one or two members in the household than in Cook County (19.8% vs. 26.1%) and fewer Cook County respondents reported children under 5 years old (65.5% vs. 60.7%). Similarly, fewer of those in Cook County reported receiving TANF assistance for less than one year (12.5%) than for the rest of the state (17.9%) and more reported being on welfare for 5 or more years than is the case for Downstate (45.9% for Cook County and 30.6% for Downstate).

Finally, as indicated in Table 4, over one fifth (22.2%) of the respondents indicated that they had not, at time of interview, earned their high school diploma or a GED (administrative data indicate that over 30 percent do not have a high school diploma or equivalent). In terms of region, the lack of a high school degree or its equivalent is more prevalent Downstate than in Chicago (26% vs. 19.5%). Similarly, Cook County compares favorably with Downstate in terms of the number of respondents who have attended a trade or technical school (12.3% vs. 6.2%), some junior college (21.5% vs. 15.3%), or some experience in a four year college (8.5% vs. 5.8%), and in terms of the number who have earned college or university degrees (4% vs. 2%).

Who is Leaving TANF?

Table 4: Who is Leaving TANF?

Gender	Total	Cook	Downstate
Gender			
Female	94.6%	94.2%	95.2%
Male	5.4%	5.8%	4.8%
<i>Number of respondents</i>	427	190	237
Race/ethnicity			
African American	56.6%	78.4%	26.6%
White	34.8%	8.9%	70.5%
Hispanic	7.7%	11.6%	2.5%
Asian	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%
Native American	0.5%	1.1%	0.0%
<i>Number of respondents</i>	427	190	237
Marital status when left welfare (Dec. 97 or June 98)			
Married, living with spouse	17.7%	12.3%	25.3%
Unmarried, living with partner	5.4%	2.9%	8.8%
Separated	9.2%	10.6%	7.2%
Divorced	12.8%	6.2%	22.0%
Widowed	0.4%	0.2%	0.5%
Never married, not living with partner	54.5%	67.7%	36.2%
<i>Number of respondents</i>	427	190	237
Number in household			
One or two	23.5%	26.1%	19.8%
Three	28.5%	28.2%	28.9%
Four	21.2%	18.0%	25.7%
Five or more	26.8%	27.7%	25.6%
Mean number in household	3.72	3.70	3.75
<i>Number of respondents</i>	426	190	236
Age of Youngest Child (among those with children)			
Less than 5 years old	62.7%	60.7%	65.5%
6 to 11 years old	24.3%	25.8%	22.2%
12 to 14 years old	7.4%	9.2%	4.8%
15 to 18 years old	4.7%	3.8%	6.1%
More than 18 years old	0.9%	0.5%	1.4%
Mean age of youngest child (years)	4.88	5.00	4.71
<i>Number of respondents</i>	415	186	229
Total Time on Welfare as an Adult (own case)			
Less than one year	14.4%	12.5%	17.9%
Between one and four years	43.2%	40.1%	47.8%
Five or more years	39.6%	45.9%	30.6%
Don't know	2.8%	1.5%	4.6%
<i>Number of respondents</i>	427	190	237
Education Level of Respondents			
Less than high school degree	22.2%	19.5%	26.0%
High school degree	32.5%	29.0%	37.3%
Trade or technical school	9.7%	12.3%	6.2%
Some junior college	18.9%	21.5%	15.3%
Associates degree	5.2%	4.5%	6.2%
Some four-year college education	7.4%	8.5%	5.8%
Four-year college degree	3.1%	4.0%	2.0%
Other	1.0%	0.8%	1.2%
<i>Number of respondents</i>	422	187	235

Why Do People Leave TANF?

Why Do People Leave TANF?

Respondents were asked to describe in their own words why they had left TANF. Table 5 shows that earnings-related reasons were easily the most frequent response. Two-thirds of respondents offered earnings-related reasons, and these reasons were fairly consistent across the two monthly cohorts. Downstate leavers were more likely to stress earnings reasons than Cook County leavers; over three-fourths of Downstate leavers (75.8%) offered an earnings-related reason, as compared to three-fifths (60%) in Cook County.

The second most frequent response was being discontinued from TANF, with 14.5 percent of all respondents indicating that they had been cut off. The majority of these respondents stated that the reason for this was failure to comply with program requirements.

Cook County leavers were nearly three times as likely to offer administrative discontinuance reasons as Downstate leavers (19.6% vs. 7.3%). Additional analysis showed that Cook County leavers were much more likely to indicate that non-compliance was the reason for discontinuance; over 13 percent of Cook County respondents said they were cut off for non-

compliance reasons, as opposed to only three percent Downstate. Such reasons were particularly likely to be given by Cook County respondents in the June, 1998 cohort. While study data do not allow a determination of the reasons for this Cook County-Downstate difference, this is an important issue for further study.

Beyond earnings and discontinuance reasons, no other reason for leaving was given by over five percent of respondents. These remaining responses were difficult to categorize, and ranged from dissatisfaction with welfare or TANF requirements to reuniting with a partner or receiving more benefits from child support or other programs.

In addition to respondent-offered reasons for TANF exit, leavers were asked whether selected factors contributed to their decision to leave. These questions focused on policy-related issues that had been prominent in the welfare reform debates preceding TANF passage. As indicated in Table 6, earnings reasons again dominated, with 57.6 percent of respondents indicating that the availability of more money from earnings was a contributing factor.

Table 5: Reasons for Leaving TANF

	Total*	Cook*	Downstate*
Earnings related	66.5%	60.0%	75.8%
Cut off by department	14.5%	19.6%	7.3%
Don't like welfare	4.2%	4.5%	3.7%
Money not worth it	3.6%	4.7%	2.2%
Back with partner	3.7%	2.8%	5.0%
Don't like bureaucratic requirements	2.7%	3.5%	1.7%
More child support or other benefits	2.1%	1.1%	3.4%
Moved from state	2.6%	3.5%	1.5%
Children too old	2.1%	2.2%	2.0%
Children moved in with others	1.9%	1.5%	2.3%
Other	8.2%	5.7%	10.5%

* Responses do not add up to 100 percent, because some respondents offered more than one reason.

Why Do People Leave TANF?

Table 6: Factors Contributing to TANF Exits

	Total	Cook	Downstate
Availability of more money from earnings	57.6%	49.0%	69.6%
Caseworker encouragement	19.0%	11.5%	29.5%
Time limits placed on welfare	18.6%	19.0%	18.1%
Work and training requirements	18.4%	18.7%	17.8%
No additional welfare if another child	4.1%	4.1%	4.2%

Between 18 and 19 percent of respondents said that time limits, work and training requirements, or caseworker encouragement contributed to their exit, while only four percent mentioned the lack of additional benefits if one has another child. Further analysis showed that, of those mentioning any of these factors, over two-thirds mentioned only one factor. Most respondents (57.9 percent) indicated that *neither* time limits, work and training requirements, caseworker encouragement, or family caps were contributing factors.

While these policy-related reasons were stable across the two monthly cohorts, two differences in reasons were evident between the Cook County and Downstate leavers. First, Cook County respondents were less likely to indicate that improved earnings availability or caseworker encouragement were reasons for leaving. The Cook County versus Downstate comparison was particularly striking for the December, 1997 cohort, for which Downstate leavers were almost four times as likely as Cook County leavers to respond that caseworker encouragement contributed to TANF exits. When coupled with the higher percentage of Cook County

respondents who indicated they were discontinued from TANF, this difference argues for further study to determine whether caseworkers interact differently with clients in Cook County than in Downstate areas.

TANF Recycling

Table 7 shows that 80 percent of respondents had not returned to TANF when they were interviewed five to eleven months after exiting (differing because of the six months between the December, 1997 and June, 1998 cohorts). Slightly over 15 percent of respondents were back on TANF when interviewed, and 4.8 percent had returned but then exited again. Overall return rates were higher in Cook County than Downstate, but this varied between the two cohorts. One would expect return rates to be higher for the December, 1997 cohort than for the June, 1998 cohort, simply because those in the December cohort had six more months to return. However, this expected difference only occurred Downstate. In Cook County, the June, 1998 cohort actually had slightly higher return rates (19.6% compared to 14% in December 1997).

Table 7: Stability of TANF Exits

	Total	Cook	Downstate
Continually off since leaving	80.0%	77.8%	83.1%
Returned to TANF at least once	20.0%	22.1%	16.9%
Returned to TANF, but off at interview	4.8%	3.8%	6.0%
Currently back on TANF	15.2%	18.3%	10.9%

Table 8: Most Frequently Cited Reasons for Returning to Welfare

Why Do People Leave TANF?

	Total	Cook	Downstate
Need to feed, support children	23.4%	22.0%	25.8%
No job; couldn't find job	18.0%	26.1%	3.6%
Lost job	16.3%	14.8%	18.9%
Hours, pay not enough	12.7%	8.3%	20.4%
Broke; needed money	12.8%	15.9%	7.2%
Health/injury to respondent	12.5%	9.8%	17.1%

Those who returned to TANF at any time after leaving were asked to describe why they had returned. As indicated in Table 8, the single most common reason (23.4%) offered by the 82 individuals who responded to the open-ended question was the need to feed and support their children. Many other reported reasons are likely related as they involve a lack of adequate jobs or money: 18.0 percent reported not having or finding a job, 16.3 percent reported having lost a job, 12.7 percent reported not enough hours or pay to be self-sufficient, and 12.8 percent reported being broke and needing money. The other notable reason given for return to TANF was the 'health/injury to respondent' reported by 12.5 percent.

Several differences in TANF return reasons between Cook County and Downstate respondents are notable. Cook County leavers were much more likely to report return because they could not find a job, while Downstate returnees more often indicated inadequate hours or pay rates. This is consistent with findings of higher employment rates but lower pay rates Downstate, which are discussed elsewhere in this report.

Cook County returnees also were more likely to suggest child care and transportation difficulties as reasons for returning, as well as going back to

school. Downstate returnees were nearly three times as likely as Cook returnees to offer health reasons (with 17.1% citing health/injury problems for themselves, 7.2% for health/injury of children, and 3.3% for spouse or relative).

Selected characteristics of TANF leavers were examined to determine if they were associated with exit stability. Table 9 indicates that level of education was important in this respect, with those with less than a high school diploma more than twice as likely to recycle than more educated respondents (16.4% vs. 34% for those without a high school diploma). Cook County recycling was particularly high for those with low educations, with 41.7 percent of all respondents without high school degrees recycling.

As one might expect, respondents in households in which neither they nor a partner worked at exit were more likely to recycle, although the differences are not striking. Nonwhite respondents also were somewhat more likely to recycle. This appears to be partially attributable to the fact that nonwhites were three times as likely as whites to live in households at exit in which neither the respondent nor partner worked. Those with children under age five also were more likely to recycle than those without young children, but the differences were small.

What are the Employment Experiences of Welfare Leavers?

Table 9: Recidivism Rates for Selected Demographic Characteristics

	Total	Cook	Downstate
Education			
Less than High School	34.0%	41.7%	24.6%
High School or more	16.4%	18.1%	14.0%
Ethnicity			
White	13.5%	17.6%	13.2%
Nonwhite	23.4%	22.7%	25.7%
Employment			
Partner or spouse employed at exit	17.3%	18.4%	16.5%
Neither respondent nor spouse employed at exit	28.6%	31.5%	18.9%
Children			
Children less than 5 years old	22.2%	24.8%	18.8%
No children under 5 years old	16.3%	18.2%	13.8%

What are the Employment Experiences of Welfare Leavers?

Respondents were asked several questions about their employment experiences since leaving TANF. The findings indicate that high percentages of TANF leavers find jobs, but employment patterns show some variation and employment tends to be unstable.

Table 10 reports that about 69 percent of respondents were employed when they left TANF, with Cook County employment rates slightly lower than for Downstate. Employment rates declined somewhat to 65.3 percent by the time of the interviews. Because Cook County respondents had lower employment rates at exit and experienced greater employment losses between exit and interview, the employment rate at interview for Cook County respondents was almost 8 percent lower than that for Downstate.

As indicated in Table 11, the relatively small aggregate decline in employment between the exit

and interview periods masks considerable instability in employment patterns. Only 51.2 percent of respondents were employed both at the time of exit and interview. Movement in and out of jobs was common, with 17.7 percent of those who were employed at TANF exit subsequently unemployed when they were interviewed. On the other hand, 14.1 percent of respondents were unemployed at exit but found jobs by the time of interview.

Because of these frequent job transitions, employment rates at any one point in time tend to understate the total work efforts of leavers. As reported in Table 11 and illustrated in Figure 1, only 14.8 percent (percents rounded to whole numbers in figures) of respondents had not been employed at all since leaving TANF. Of these, about one-fourth lived with a spouse or partner who had worked at least some since exiting.

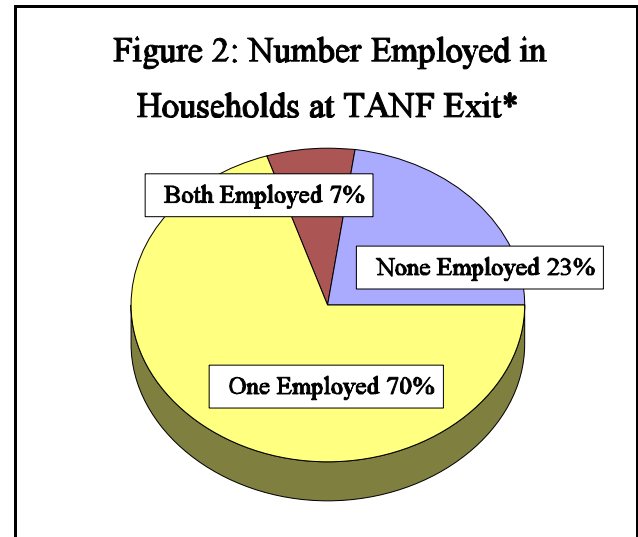
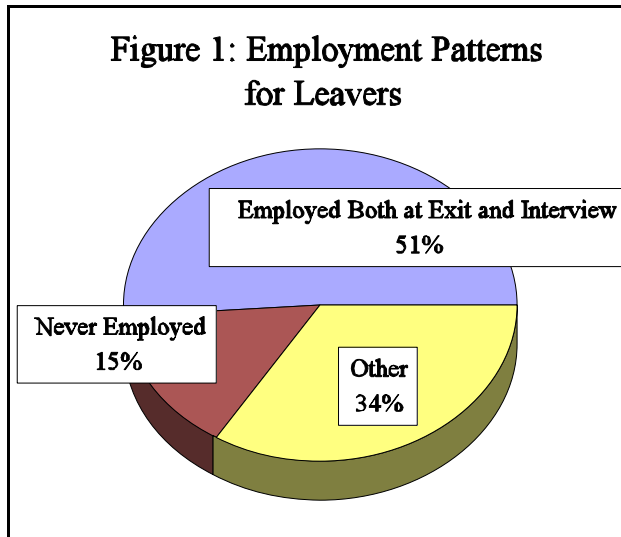
Table 10: Respondent Employment Status When Leaving TANF and At Time of Interview

	Total	Cook	Downstate	Difference Cook Vs. Downstate
Employed when leaving	68.9%	67.2%	71.5%	-4.7%
Employed when interviewed	65.3%	62.0%	69.9%	-7.9%
Employment difference: Interview vs. leaving	-3.6%	-5.2%	-1.6%	NA

What are the Employment Experiences of Welfare Leavers?

Table 11: Leaver Employment History Since Leaving TANF

	Total	Cook	Downstate	Cook vs. Downstate
Employed now and when left welfare	51.2%	47.8%	56.0%	-8.2%
Employed now/ unemployed when left	14.1%	14.2%	13.9%	0.3%
Unemployed now/ employed when left	17.7%	19.4%	15.5%	3.9%
Unemployed when leaving and interview – Some work between	2.2%	1.3%	3.4%	-2.1%
Continually unemployed since left	14.8%	17.4%	11.2%	6.2%



* Includes only TANF leaver and partner. Other workers in household not included.

Given that nearly one-fourth of respondents lived with a partner (married or otherwise) when interviewed, the employment patterns of partners are also important in determining the economic well-being of leavers. Employment patterns of partners were quite similar to those of respondents, with 66.5 percent of partners working at exit and 67.3 percent working at the time of interview. Table 12 shows that including partner employment improves the employment picture for leaver households somewhat. As represented in Figure 2, nearly 77 percent of all respondents lived in a household where either they or their partner, or both, were working at the time of exit, with the figure declining to 72.1 percent at the time of the interview. Both the respondent and their partner worked in 7.4 percent of all households at the time of exit and 9.7 percent at

the time of interview. This means that both the respondent and their partner worked in 32.3 percent of these two adult households at exit and 39.0 percent at interview.

Largely because it was much more common for Downstate respondents to live with partners, the impact of partner employment patterns was much greater Downstate. This results in a much wider gap between Cook County and Downstate respondents when household rather than respondent employment patterns are considered. For example, at the time of exit, 84.4 percent of Downstate leavers were in households where either they or their partner were working, compared to 71.5 percent for Cook County leavers. Correspondingly, the Cook County household unemployment rates rose to 33.6 percent by the time of the interview, compared to

What are the Employment Experiences of Welfare Leavers?

19.9 percent for Downstate households.

Table 12: Employment Status of Respondent and Partner At TANF Exit and At Interview

	Total		Cook		Downstate	
	When Leaving	When Interviewed	When Leaving	When Interviewed	When Leaving	When Interviewed
Either respondent or partner employed	76.9%	72.1%	71.5%	66.3%	84.4%	80.2%
One employed	69.5%	62.4%	67.3%	58.5%	72.5%	67.8%
Two employed	7.4%	9.7%	4.2%	7.8%	11.9%	12.4%
Neither respondent nor partner employed	23.1%	27.9%	28.4%	33.6%	15.7%	19.9%

Finally, though not presented in a table, in about one-tenth of leaver households someone other than a respondent or partner was working. Some of these other workers were part of a household where neither the respondent nor a partner had worked, which further reduced the percentage of leaver households in which no one worked to 21.5 percent at TANF exit (down from 23.1%) and 24.5 percent at the time of interview (down from 27.9%).

Hours Worked, Wages, and Household Income

Respondents who had worked since leaving TANF were asked to estimate the weekly hours worked at the time of leaving TANF and at their current or most recent jobs. The resulting averages of 36-37 hours per week, reported in Table 13, suggest that working TANF leavers typically found the equivalent of full-time work at some point. Over 93 percent of those who were working at exit generated all of their work hours from one job. Patterns of hours worked were similar between Cook County and Downstate for jobs at time of exit and for current or most recent jobs.

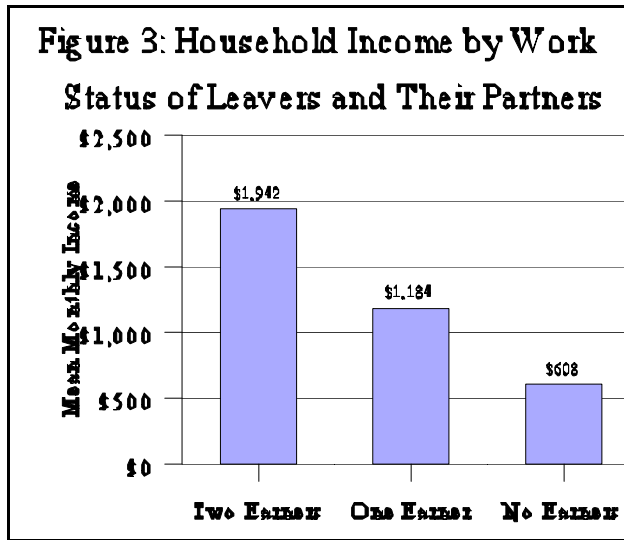
The median hourly pay rate for leavers on their current or most recent job was \$7.11, and mean pay rates were somewhat higher at \$7.78. Some leavers succeeded in finding fairly well-paid jobs, with 19.6 percent earning over \$10 per hour in their current jobs. Median hourly pay rates rose from \$7.00 for exit jobs to \$7.11

for current or most recent jobs, and mean pay rates similarly rose by 19 cents per hour. However, the approximate one-half of respondents who held jobs both at exit and when interviewed experienced somewhat higher wage gains. For example, the median hourly pay rates for these leavers rose from \$7.26 at exit to \$7.63 at the time of interviews.

In Cook County, median pay rates were slightly higher for the current or most recent job than for jobs held at exit, while Downstate median pay rates were unchanged. Also, Cook County pay rates were considerably higher than Downstate, likely reflecting higher pay scales there.

While the importance of earnings for TANF leavers is obvious, data on household income for two-earner, one-earner, and no-earner households reinforce this importance. As shown in Figure 3, for those with one earner, either the respondent or partner, working at the time of the interview, household income in the month before the interview averaged \$1,184. In comparison, average household income was only \$608 for leavers in households where neither the respondent nor partner was working. Monthly income for households in which both the respondent and partner worked rose to \$1,942. Over 40 percent of those in non-working households were back on TANF when interviewed, as compared to only 5.5% of the households in which either the recipient or

What are the Employment Experiences of Welfare Leavers?



partner was working.

Table 13: Hours Worked and Pay Rates

	Total	Cook	Downstate
Avg. hours worked per week when left	37.0	36.8	37.3
Avg. hours worked per week in current/most recent job	35.8	36.6	34.9
Median hourly pay rates when left	\$7.00	\$7.64	\$6.25
Median hourly pay rates on current/most recent job	\$7.11	\$8.00	\$6.25
Mean hourly pay rates when left	\$7.59	\$8.15	\$6.85
Mean hourly pay rates on current/most recent job	\$7.78	\$8.39	\$6.98

Types of Jobs

Respondents were asked about the types of jobs they had when leaving TANF, as well as about their current or most recent jobs. Table 14 reports that most of the responses fell into service-related occupations, with clerical work the most common occupational grouping. The occupations were similar between Cook County and Downstate, with the largest difference being the greater percentages of hospitality workers Downstate. Occupational patterns changed little between the jobs held at exit and the current or most recent jobs.

Job Stability

As shown in Table 15, there was considerable instability in the jobs held by TANF leavers, particularly Downstate. As would be expected because of the greater time between exit and interview, the December, 1997 leavers were less likely to still have the job held at exit when they were interviewed. Only 36.8 percent of those who held jobs when leaving in December, 1997 still had the same job when interviewed. Even though the June, 1998 cohort was interviewed only about four to six months after exit, only 53.5 percent of working leavers had the same job as at exit. Cook County leavers were more likely to have maintained the same job than Downstate leavers, particularly for the December cohort.

What are the Employment Experiences of Welfare Leavers?

Table 14: Occupations in Current or Most Recent Jobs

	Total	Cook	Downstate
Clerical	21.1%	23.6%	18.0%
Sales/cashier	15.8%	15.3%	16.4%
Hospitality	12.1%	8.7%	16.4%
Health services	11.0%	11.6%	10.4%
Service	12.1%	11.9%	12.2%
Factory/warehouse	9.2%	7.7%	11.1%
Professional/technical	5.7%	6.8%	4.2%
Managers/officials/proprietors	5.1%	5.8%	4.1%
Construction/craftsman/laborer	3.7%	2.6%	5.2%
Transportation	3.0%	3.5%	2.3%
Other	2.7%	3.9%	1.2%

Table 15: Job Stability

	Total		Cook		Downstate	
	Dec-97	Jun-98	Dec-97	Jun-98	Dec-97	Jun-98
Have same job as at exit	36.8%	53.5%	49.1%	55.7%	27.2%	50.0%
Median monthly tenure at current/most recent job	5.5	5.0	6.0	5.0	5.0	4.5

While previous research has shown that some job instability results from the marginal nature of low-wage work, sometimes the job changes of respondents led to better outcomes. For example, of the 279 respondents who were working at the time of interview, 78 were working in a different job than they had when they exited. Of these, 70 percent reported higher wages on their current jobs than on their exit jobs. The average hourly pay increase for these job changers was about 86 cents. In comparison, most of those who had not changed jobs were receiving the same pay rate they received at exit.

Unfortunately, not all of those who lose jobs get new jobs, and some experience unemployment spells before obtaining new jobs. However, the positive financial outcomes for some respondents who changed jobs suggests that this is an important area for further study.

Problems in Getting/Keeping a Job

Respondents were asked whether they had experienced selected problems in getting or keeping a job. These problems included the health of the respondent, child care and transportation issues, and additional expenses associated with

working.

As reported in Table 16, child care concerns were the most problematic. Finding someone to care for a child (34.0%), paying for child care (31.4%), and finding child care that would fit with the person's work shift (28.4%) all were seen as problems by large percentages of respondents. Transportation both to work (26.2%) and to child care (18.9%) were also viewed as obstacles by many respondents, as were additional work-related expenses (24.5%).

There were several notable differences between Cook County and Downstate respondents and between the monthly cohorts. In general, Cook County respondents reported higher levels of employment obstacles. Going beyond the numbers in Table 16, the two geographic areas also showed quite different patterns between the December and June cohorts. Downstate respondents had lower percentages for each type of problem in the June, 1998 cohort than the December, 1997 cohort. This may reflect the shorter time since exit for the June, 1998 cohort. However, this was not the case in Cook County, where the child care problems were cited more often by the June, 1998 cohort.

What are the Employment Experiences of Welfare Leavers?

Table 16: Percentage of Respondents Who Indicated Selected Problems in Getting/Keeping a Job

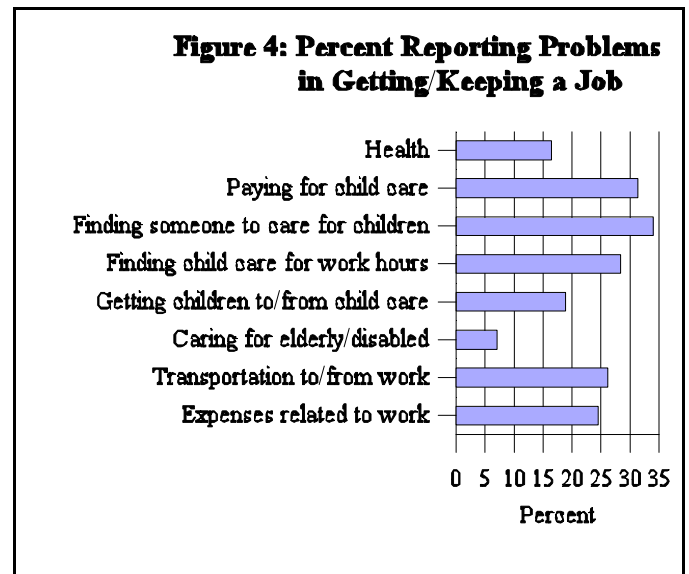
	Total	Cook	Downstate
Health	16.4%	17.5%	14.9%
Paying for child care	31.4%	36.6%	24.1%
Finding someone to take care of children	34.0%	34.2%	33.8%
Finding child care for work hours	28.4%	31.9%	23.4%
Getting children to/from child care	18.9%	24.3%	11.4%
Caring for elderly/disabled relative	7.0%	7.8%	6.0%
Getting transportation to/from work	26.2%	28.6%	22.8%
Additional expenses relating to work	24.5%	27.7%	19.9%

Table 17: Perceived Problems in Getting/Keeping a Job

Barrier	Currently Employed	Currently Unemployed
Health	9.6%	29.3%
Finding Someone For Child Care	28.2%	45.0%
Finding Child Care For Work Hours	20.7%	42.8%
Transporting Child to and From Child Care	13.5%	28.9%
Paying For Child Care	27.2%	39.3%
Transportation to and From Work	21.7%	34.5%

Even more important than the regional differences were those relating to employment. As indicated in Table 17, though many of those experiencing the selected problems are employed, unemployed respondents were much more likely to report employment obstacles. For example, unemployed respondents were three times more likely than employed respondents to indicate health problems. Large differences also were reported on each of the child care obstacles. While all problems were considered more substantial by the unemployed, note that both child care and transportation were seen as problems by 20-30 percent of employed respondents.

As with unemployment, respondents who returned to TANF were more likely than those who did not return to report employment obstacles. Child care problems occurred for almost half of the returnees. Transportation was also a problem for many of those (38.5%) returning to TANF, and close to one-third of those who returned stated that they had experienced health problems.



What Hardships Have TANF Leavers Experienced?

What Hardships Have TANF Leavers Experienced?

Respondents were asked a series of questions to determine if they had experienced selected hardships in the six months prior to leaving TANF and in the subsequent time off TANF. These hardships had been identified in past welfare research as concerns for those who exit the welfare system, and concentrated on basic needs. Questions were included on ability to pay rent, to provide shelter, to pay for utilities, requiring children to live with others because the provider could not afford them, and ability to pay for food.

Table 18 indicates that three points should be emphasized when describing the experiences of the respondents before and after leaving TANF. First, respondents' circumstances appeared to improve somewhat in relation to most hardships after they left TANF. For example, they were less likely to get behind in rent, to move because they could not pay their rent, or to go without utilities after leaving TANF. However, many respondents still experienced substantial hardships. For example, over one in three leavers still got behind in rent or housing payments, and one in four experienced times in which no funds were available to purchase food.

Second, respondents were more likely to report not receiving needed medical treatment after leaving TANF. While 17.7 percent of the leavers stated that someone in the home did not receive needed medical treatment in the six months prior to leaving TANF, 25.7 percent reported this hardship after leaving. This underscores the importance of access to medical coverage for TANF leavers.

Finally, the incidence of each of the hardships was at least slightly greater among the December, 1997 cohort than the June, 1998 cohort. This was most notable for those who had to move because they could not meet housing costs; 16.5 percent experienced this problem in the December cohort, as compared to 6.8 percent in the June cohort. Similarly, much higher percentages of December respondents reported having to send children to live with others. These higher December cohort percentages most likely result from the longer lengths of time December leavers had been off TANF. That is, respondents were asked whether they had experienced the hardships at any time since leaving TANF, and those in the December cohort generally had been off about six months longer than those in the June cohort.

Table 18: Selected Hardships Before and After Leaving TANF*

	Total		Cook		Downstate	
	Before Leaving	After Exit	Before Leaving	After Exit	Before Leaving	After Exit
Get behind in rent/housing payments	50.3%	38.3%	52.6%	37.8%	47.0%	39.1%
Have to move because unable to pay rent	17.3%	9.5%	19.1%	9.5%	14.8%	9.5%
Go to homeless shelter	2.6%	2.4%	3.4%	2.2%	1.5%	2.6%
Go without utilities because not afford	20.1%	9.7%	19.8%	8.7%	20.4%	11.0%
Children live with others because of expense	6.7%	4.9%	7.4%	4.5%	5.7%	5.4%
Person in home not getting medical treatment	17.7%	25.7%	18.2%	28.1%	17.0%	22.4%
Unable to buy food	33.0%	25.4%	32.7%	28.3%	33.3%	21.5%

* *Before leaving* refers to the last six months on assistance; *after exit* refers to the 5 to 11 months between exit and interview.

What Public and Informal Supports Are Used by Welfare Leavers?

What Public and Informal Supports Are Used by Welfare Leavers?

Both research and public policy experience have demonstrated that support services, such as medical coverage and child care, are often important in allowing low-income persons to maintain self-sufficiency. Respondents were asked detailed questions about several of the most important public supports, with more limited questioning on the use of other services and informal supports.

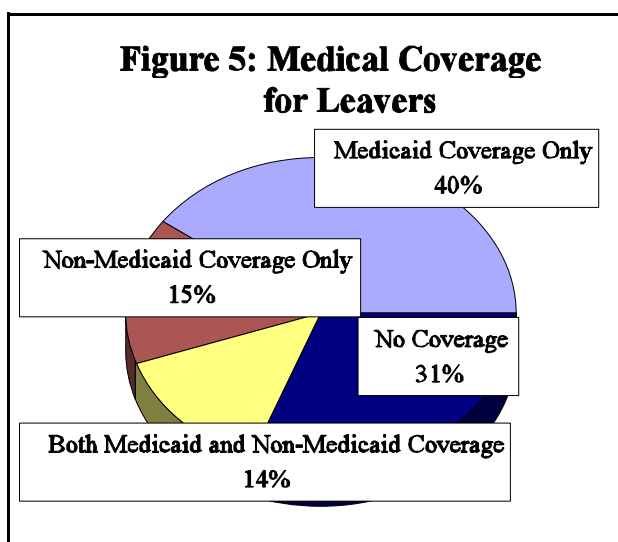
Medical Coverage

As represented in Figure 5, nearly 70 percent of the respondents indicated that they had some medical coverage for themselves. Fifty-four (54) percent relied on Medicaid for some or all of this Medicaid coverage, with 40 percent relying exclusively on Medicaid. About 30 percent of respondents had medical insurance coverage other than Medicaid (about 15% with only non-Medicaid coverage and 14% with Medicaid combined with other insurance), and over 90 percent of this coverage was offered through employers.

While most leavers had some coverage, access to medical care remains a significant problem for

many leavers. According to Table 19, slightly over 30 percent of respondents reported that they did not have any type of medical coverage. Similarly, almost 25 percent of respondents said that their children had no medical coverage. This is significant in interpreting the finding, reported in Table 18, that 25.7 percent of respondents indicated that someone in their household had been unable to get medical treatment after leaving TANF.

Given recent expansions in Medicaid coverage for low-income children, as well as the state's new KidCare program, nearly all children of these TANF leavers should be eligible for Medicaid. Likewise, those who left TANF for work would have been eligible for transitional Medicaid coverage for up to one year. Yet, nearly 39 percent of respondents who were working when they left TANF indicated that they did not continue to receive Medicaid, and 22.4 percent of working leavers received neither Medicaid nor other medical insurance coverage. Utilization of Medicaid and other public benefits will be explored further in subsequent reports based on analysis of administrative records.



What Public and Informal Supports Are Used by Welfare Leavers?

Table 19: Medical Insurance Coverage After Leaving TANF

	Total	Cook	Downstate
Respondent continued receiving Medicaid	54.4%	44.8%	67.7%
Children continued receiving Medicaid	59.1%	48.7%	73.8%
Respondent receives private coverage	29.7%	31.7%	26.9%
Children receive private coverage	29.2%	28.3%	30.4%
No health insurance coverage – respondent	30.5%	34.7%	24.6%
No health insurance coverage – children	24.8%	31.1%	16.0%

Both respondents and their children were much more likely to have medical coverage Downstate than in Cook County. This resulted from lower Medicaid coverage for both respondents and their children in Cook County, as private coverage was comparable between the two geographic areas. Less than half of Cook County respondents and their children continued to receive Medicaid, compared to two-thirds of Downstate respondents and nearly three-fourths of their children. Overall medical coverage, and Medicaid coverage in particular, was somewhat higher for the December, 1997 than the June, 1998 cohort in Cook County. Downstate, insurance coverage for respondents was slightly higher for the June, 1998 cohort, while children's coverage varied little between the two cohorts.

Food Stamps

Because of higher income eligibility standards, many persons who leave TANF remain eligible for Food Stamps. About 35 percent of respondents continued to receive Food Stamps after leaving TANF, with Food Stamp receipt much higher in Downstate than in Cook County. Only 26.5

percent of TANF leavers in Cook County continued to receive Food Stamps, as compared to 46.7 percent Downstate. These utilization discrepancies do not appear to be due to income differences between Cook County and Downstate leavers, as average incomes are comparable and Cook County had slightly higher concentrations of leavers in the lowest wage ranges.

Earned Income Tax Credit

Largely because of recent expansions, the Earned Income Credit is the most important public income support for working low-income families. Credits for full-time, low-wage workers now can exceed \$3,000, which serves as an important wage supplement.

About 75 percent of TANF leavers had heard of the Earned Income Credit, and 43 percent had received it. Given that 85 percent of respondents have been employed since leaving TANF, these findings suggest possible underutilization of this important benefit. Both knowledge about and use of the Earned Income Credit were greater among Downstate than Cook County residents.

Table 20: Child Care Arrangements for Pre-School and School Age

	Pre-school Children	School Age Children
School Child Care	1.2%	8.3%
Child Care – Friend	8.5%	3.8%
Relative	20.4%	11.8%
Church	0.2%	0.5%
Child Care Center	11.2%	7.3%
Other Center	1.9%	2.4%
Other	13.1%	9.9%

What Public and Informal Supports Are Used by Welfare Leavers?

Child Care

As shown in Table 20, many respondents reported use of child care. Forty-two (42) percent of respondents with school-aged children and 54 percent of those with pre-school children indicated making use of child care arrangements. For both school-aged and pre-school children, relatives were the most frequent caregivers. For school-aged children, schools and child care centers were the next most common caregivers, while child care centers and friends were the next most used sources of care for preschool children.

The percentages of school-aged children in care arrangements were comparable between Cook County and Downstate, but usage differed somewhat. For example, respondents in Cook County were somewhat more likely to rely on

schools for such care, while respondents Downstate were more likely to rely on relatives. Cook County respondents were less likely to have pre-school children in child care arrangements.

Table 21 indicates that slightly over one-third of respondents received help from the state with child care expenses. However, respondents often incurred substantial out-of-pocket child care expenses. For example, median weekly out-of-pocket expenses were \$32.50, which equates to about \$140 per month. Out of pocket child care costs were even more substantial for large numbers of respondents. Of those reporting some out of pocket expenses, slightly over 40 percent incurred costs of at least \$41 per week, or \$176 per month.

Table 21: State Help and Weekly Out of Pocket Expenses with Child Care*

	Total Sample	Cook	Downstate
Received Help from State	35.8%	33.6%	38.3%
Weekly Out of Pocket Expenses			
0-\$5	12.2%	9.2%	16.5%
\$6-\$15	12.9%	10.5%	16.4%
\$16-\$25	17.1%	17.6%	16.4%
\$26-\$40	17.3%	17.6%	17.0%
\$41-\$50	16.2%	20.2%	10.6%
\$51-\$75	11.5%	14.0%	8.0%
Over \$75	12.7%	11.0%	15.1%
Median	\$32.50	\$40.00	\$30.00

* Percent receiving help and facing expenses of those indicating use of child care.

What Public and Informal Supports Are Used by Welfare Leavers?

Table 22: Receipt of Child Support Payments

	Total	Cook	Downstate
Receive either formal or informal child support	17.9%	13.8%	23.0%
Court ordered support, but not receiving	22.4%	21.7%	23.5%
Currently receiving full amount of child support	9.8%	7.4%	12.8%
Average amount of child support received last month	\$231	\$210	\$247

Child Support

Table 22 shows that TANF leavers typically had difficulty in obtaining child support payments. Only 18 percent received child support help from absent parents, either through the child support system or directly. Of those who received child support and estimated an amount, the average amount received in the last month was \$231. Fifty-four percent of those who received support said they were receiving the total amount they were supposed to receive. Receipt of child support was somewhat more frequent among Downstate respondents, and the amounts received were somewhat higher.

Those who said they were not receiving any

child support were asked if the courts had established a child support order. Twenty-two (22) percent of all respondents indicated a court order had been established but they were receiving no support.

Other Benefits and Supports

Respondents were asked if they had received seventeen different types of cash and in-kind support in the six months before they left TANF and at any time since leaving TANF (see table 23). The patterns of receipt were similar before and after leaving TANF, with respondents slightly less likely to have received most services after leaving TANF.

Table 23: Receipt of Other Benefits and Services Before and After Leaving TANF *

	Total		Cook		Downstate	
	Before Leaving	After Exit	Before Leaving	After Exit	Before Leaving	After Exit
SSI (Supplemental Security Income)	10.1%	10.4%	11.5%	11.8%	8.0%	8.5%
Social security	5.0%	4.3%	5.6%	4.0%	4.1%	4.6%
Retirement/pension fund	1.2%	2.0%	1.3%	2.6%	1.1%	1.1%
Township general assistance	2.9%	2.9%	1.3%	1.3%	5.1%	5.2%
WIC supplemental nutrition benefits	33.9%	26.8%	29.2%	26.4%	40.5%	27.4%
School lunch program	44.4%	40.0%	49.6%	46.2%	37.1%	31.4%
Foster care payments	1.0%	0.8%	1.7%	1.2%	0.0%	0.3%
Military/veterans' benefits	0.4%	1.0%	0.2%	1.3%	0.6%	0.6%
Worker's compensation	1.9%	1.3%	1.3%	1.0%	2.8%	1.7%
Unemployment benefits	2.8%	2.7%	2.6%	2.3%	3.2%	3.3%
Home heating assistance	13.5%	7.3%	12.2%	6.5%	15.4%	8.3%
Rent subsidy / public housing	14.6%	11.8%	11.1%	7.7%	19.5%	17.6%
Free housing from parent/relative	10.0%	7.9%	9.5%	7.1%	10.6%	9.1%
Help paying bills from family/friends	17.8%	11.9%	16.1%	10.3%	20.1%	14.2%
Gifts of money/food by family/friends	26.3%	22.3%	27.6%	23.1%	24.4%	21.2%
Gifts of money or food / church	8.8%	6.8%	8.5%	7.9%	9.3%	5.2%
Meals/food from shelters, etc.	13.7%	12.1%	12.5%	12.2%	15.4%	12.0%
Other benefits/supports	3.1%	2.4%	2.1%	1.5%	4.5%	3.7%

* *Before leaving* refers to the last six months on assistance; *after exit* refers to the 5 to 11 months between exit and interview.

Summary

Table 24: Percentage of Respondents Who Can Count on Informal or Family Supports

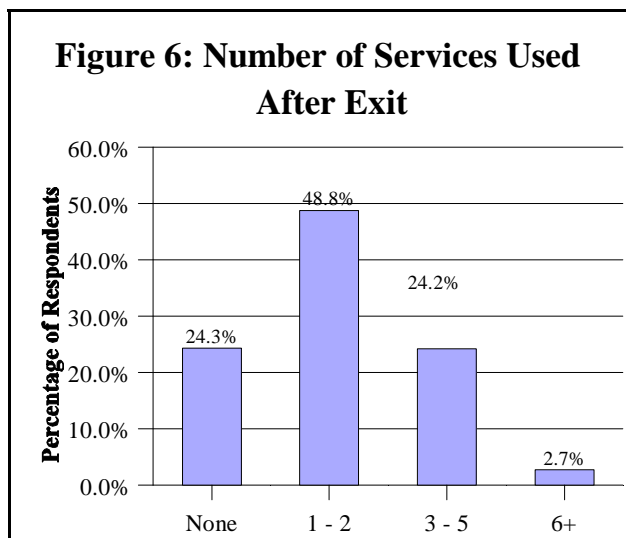
	Total	Cook	Downstate
Have someone to run errands	59.6%	54.0%	67.4%
Have someone to lend money	62.1%	56.7%	69.6%
Have someone give encouragement	81.2%	77.9%	85.9%
Have someone watch kids if needed	75.3%	71.4%	80.7%
Have someone to lend car/give ride	69.8%	60.9%	82.1%

WIC supplemental nutrition and school lunch program benefits were the most commonly-received type of help. As indicated in Figure 6, most respondents utilized at least one of these supports; about half of all respondents used one or two of these supports, while another quarter utilized between three and five. Only about one-fourth of respondents did not utilize any of these supports after leaving, which demonstrates the importance of other supports in supplementing often low wages and sporadic employment after exiting.

Availability of Informal and Family Supports

Respondents were asked if they could count on someone for help with running errands, transportation, child care, lending money, and offering encouragement. As shown in Table 24, such help was available to most respondents, ranging from 60 percent having someone to help with errands to 81 percent having someone who offered encouragement. While informal help remained fairly high in Cook County, it was consistently lower for Cook leavers than for downstate leavers.

Respondents often did receive tangible informal assistance from family and friends. Since leaving TANF, over one-fifth of respondents had received gifts of money or food from family and friends, while 12 percent had received help with paying bills and 8 percent had received free housing. However, each of these represents a slight decline from the percentages that received such help before leaving TANF.



Summary

Summary

The above sections addressed five questions about the experiences of those leaving TANF in Illinois. We can draw some preliminary conclusions from the findings of this first phase of the study and answer the questions we have posed in this report. We begin with, *Who is leaving TANF?* As expected the vast majority of leavers are female and the ethnic composition reflects the population of Cook County and Downstate regions. Leavers had two children in the household, on average, and the median age of the youngest child was three. A majority had at least a high school diploma or equivalent. Most had some prior work experience.

Why do people leave TANF? The majority leave for earnings-related reasons, although this is cited more frequently Downstate (three of four) than in Cook County (three of five). About one in seven indicated they had been cut off TANF, with more in Cook County citing this. Data on return to TANF indicate that about one in five cycle back on TANF, though about one-quarter who return exit again. There are differences between Cook County and Downstate leavers in the reasons they return to TANF. Cook County returnees more often cite inability to find a job, while Downstate returnees more often cite inadequate hours or pay rates. Cook County returnees are also more likely to give difficulties with child care and transportation as reasons for returning to TANF, as well as going back to school. Downstate returnees more often cite health reasons.

What are the employment experiences of welfare leavers? The findings indicate that high percentages of TANF leavers find jobs, but employment patterns also reflect high turnover rates. For example, only about half (51%) were employed both when they left TANF and at the time of the interview. About one in six (18%) were employed when they left TANF but unemployed when they were interviewed. And about one in seven (14%) were unemployed when they left TANF but had found a job by the time of the interview. The findings for this sample suggest that TANF leavers typically find full-time jobs in service-related occupations with median pay rates at exit of \$7.75 per hour in Cook County and \$6.25 Downstate. The most commonly cited barriers to employment involved child care and transportation to work.

What hardships do TANF leavers experience? Leavers' circumstances appear to improve somewhat after they leave TANF. For example, when compared with experiences during their last six months on welfare, leavers reported fewer hardships with regard to getting behind in their rent payments, having to move because they were unable to afford rent, and going without utilities because they could not pay their bills. Despite this improvement, many still experience substantial hardships. One in three leavers still get behind in the rent, and one in four have times when they are unable to pay for food. Respondents in this study were more likely to report not receiving medical coverage after leaving TANF. One in four reported that someone in their household did not receive needed medical care since they, the respondent, had left TANF. In addition, while substantially fewer of those now employed than those now unemployed cited health problems as an employment barrier, still nearly 10 percent of those employed indicated that their health was a barrier to getting and keeping a job.

What public and informal supports are used by TANF leavers? Over half (54%) rely on Medicaid for some or all of their medical coverage; 40 percent rely on it exclusively. Based on this sample, 31 percent do not have any type of medical coverage, with more in Cook County (35%) than Downstate (25%) lacking medical coverage. In Cook County, 31 percent do not have medical coverage for their children, while Downstate, 16 percent do not. About 35 percent continue to receive Food Stamps after leaving TANF, with much higher percentages Downstate than in Cook County. About 43 percent of

Summary

respondents had received the Earned Income Tax Credit. Child care is a commonly needed support. In this sample 42 percent with school-aged children and 54 percent with pre-school children had used child care arrangements, with relatives the most frequent caregivers.

Overall, the high percentage of TANF leavers who found work was encouraging. Many, however, have not found stable employment, and some have not been employed at all. Further, the stability of employment was found to vary according to leaver characteristics and between Cook County and Downstate. This concern about employment underscores the importance of public work supports like the Earned Income Credit, medical coverage, and child care to the success of many TANF leavers. Yet leavers often underutilized these supports. Assuring that leavers learn about and know how to access these supports may therefore improve the likelihood that TANF exits will be successful. These issues and others better addressed using administrative data will be the focus of subsequent reports of this study of the experiences of those leaving TANF in Illinois.