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Adela Beckerman
Nova Southeastern University

Leonard Fontana
Broward Community College

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ADELA BECKERMAN

Nova Southeastern University
Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services

LEONARD FONTANA

Broward Community College
Social and Behavioral Science Department

Welfare reform was implemented in Florida with the passage of WAGES. WAGES' emphasis on support services in preparation for employment portends to be a radical transformation of the "eligibility compliance" organizational culture that had developed under AFDC. Interviews with welfare staff focused on whether WAGES' offices were able to develop the organizational culture and methods of frontline practice needed to implement the goals of welfare reform legislation. The interviews indicate an emerging organizational culture in which case managers readily identify with the mantra of welfare reform. The interviews also indicate a discrepancy between the importance of the case manager role and the ability to perform all of their responsibilities in light of large caseloads and the desire to quickly involve clients in employment-seeking activities.

Introduction

The passage of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA PL 104-193) replaced the much-maligned Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program that had been in existence since 1935. The "welfare reform" package delivered on a 1992 pledge by then presidential candidate Bill Clinton "to end

welfare as we know it." Elected officials at the federal and state levels saw the legislation as a first step in eliminating the bloated welfare programs that had not eradicated the problems of poverty and welfare. The new legislation eliminated the historic entitlements program of AFDC, with the introduction of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant program. States were expected to establish stringent work expectations with time limits for assistance, and establish sanctions if recipients failed to comply with these expectations.

Welfare Reform in Florida

In Florida, TANF was implemented via state legislation, the Work and Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency Act (Section 414.015 etc. seq., Florida Statues, 1998), otherwise known as WAGES. WAGES complied with the federal welfare reform legislation, indicating that it "does not entitle any individual or family to assistance." Rather, the legislative intent of WAGES was to "emphasize work, self-sufficiency and personal responsibility, while meeting the transitional needs of program participants who need short-term assistance towards achieving independent, productive lives." Program participants were expected to meet a set of expectations and find employment with the stipulation that they could not receive more than four years of assistance in their lifetime.

Florida's WAGES legislation authorizes that support services be provided "to assist participants in complying with work activity requirements and employment requirements" (Florida Statute 414.20). Such services include assistance with child care and transportation, with ancillary expenses for items such as books and clothing, with costs associated with work-preparation activities, with medical services under Medicaid, and with personal and family counseling such as when substance abuse is an impediment to employment. While the legislation made clear that support services were not entitlements, their importance was recognized. The law gave permission to local WAGES agencies to consider the lack of provision of support services as "a factor in determining whether good cause exists" when clients fail to comply with expectations regarding participation in employ-

ment activities (Florida Statute 414.20). The importance of the coordination and integration of a network of support services is also indicated in the WAGES legislation when it mandates "integrated, nonduplicative case management," and "integrated service delivery strategies" to meet the needs of clients already involved in the child welfare system or at high risk of such involvement (Florida Statute 414.24).

Recognition of the role of support services in preparation for employment was again apparent in the 1997 legislative amendments to WAGES which provided transitional medical, childcare, and transportation services to clients for a period of one year after they had obtained employment, even in instances where clients were no longer receiving financial assistance.

Much of the early public discussion about welfare-to-work programs in Florida, as elsewhere, has focused on the immediate tangible outcomes of caseload reduction and decreased expenditures. The early sharp decline in the number of welfare recipients may be temporary. Recent analysis of welfare caseloads in Florida indicate that in an 18 month period, 74% of families who had left the WAGES program returned for additional financial assistance. Moreover, 19% of former recipients had returned two or more times (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, 2000). Since a significant number of welfare recipients are returning for assistance, the public discussion surrounding WAGES needs to be re-focused. An important public policy issue may well be whether the "reformed" welfare system has been able to implement an integrated service strategy to address the varied barriers to employment stability posed by both "easy-to-place", as well as "hard-to-place" clients. WAGES expected state and local agencies to develop a service delivery system that involves the coordination of inter-organizational networks of service agencies to move clients into the workplace.

This article explores one aspect of the restructuring of public welfare in the state of Florida: the role of the case manager in implementing the redesigned public welfare system across the state. Little attention has been paid to the expectation that local case managers, in their interactions with clients, would play a central role in moving adults off of welfare and into stable employment. This article focuses on the question of whether the re-designed

welfare agencies in Florida (i.e. WAGES) have been able to develop an organizational culture in which case managers bridge the integration of welfare eligibility and employment preparation with the delivery of supportive social services. A cultural analysis of this facet of the local welfare office is intended to illuminate whether the re-designed public welfare policy at the state level has been manifested in shared cognitive and behavioral elements among staff at the local level. This account of Florida's welfare program fits within an analytical perspective that assumes organizations develop a cultural consensus regarding norms, values, and formal practices (Martin, 1992). Studies written from this integration perspective focus on how this consensus helps to breed clarity and consistency, resulting in high levels of harmony and commitment within the organization (Martin and Meyerson, 1988). Members of an organization are seen as knowing what it is they do, and why it is they do it. With AFDC agencies, these cultural features proved to be adaptive to what was often a contentious and stressful political environment. At this point, we do not know much about the organizational culture of the local welfare office and whether it supports an integrated service strategy as envisioned by WAGES.

Issues Surrounding the Implementation of Welfare Reform

A generation of analysts has pointed to implementation problems in understanding what happens when local officials attempt to carry out major federal policy initiatives (Meyers, Glaser, and Macdonald, 1998; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). The devolution of welfare has expanded the role and discretion of what has been described in the literature as "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980). The public policy literature on "reforms" describes the dependence of policy makers on the staff at the frontline of the organization. Lipsky (1980) in his study of frontline workers notes that the work they do actually defines the services delivered. The challenge for any reform initiative, according to Stoker (1991), becomes assuring clarity of purpose and cooperation at the frontline where staff enjoys considerable autonomy. National and state legislation typically describe policy changes in general terms, a necessity due to the diversity of the locales in which

implementation occurs. Subsequently, it is variables such as organizational culture that influence the daily interactions between local bureaucratic actors and their customers which lead to the attainment of outcomes that are consistent or inconsistent with the objectives envisioned by those who initially developed the reform legislation.

The concept of organizational culture illuminates some of the problems of implementing reforms imported from the external environment of welfare organizations. Changes in the organizational culture of local AFDC offices that occurred in the late 1960s provided a context for the implementation of welfare reform in the late 1990s. Street-level welfare AFDC bureaucrats responded to demands for efficiency and routinization in claims processing by rejecting personalized services, and moving towards an organizational culture conducive to high-volume people-processing. The separation of personal social services and income maintenance in the AFDC programs set the stage for developments that would affect how local welfare offices responded to the 1996 "reformist" mandate for work-centered assistance under PRWORA. Several studies of organizations have shown that adaptation to demands of the external environment often lead to "remedial strategies" by an organization (Cook and Yanow, 1993; Schein, 1992). The remedial or corrective strategies that an organization employs represent an important area around which cultural assumptions form. Bane and Ellwood (1994) describe the organizational culture that developed among local AFDC welfare staff as one which centered around "claims processing." The response to the disparity between escalating client demands and limited resources was a rationing culture in which '"cooperative' AFDC clients were the beneficiaries" (Brodkin, 1990, p. 89).

Attendant to this shift was what has been described as the "deprofessionalization" of the frontline AFDC staff (Pesso, 1978). The emphasis on social services declined, and eligibility determinations were rountinized. The frontline AFDC staff who were formerly viewed as social workers, slowly became "eligibility technicians" (Bane and Ellwood, 1994; Simon, 1983). Since AFDC was an "entitlement" program, discussion about the client's circumstances, hardships, and capabilities was limited in content and purpose. While some attention to personal social services

remained, frontline workers were neither recognized as providing these additional services, nor adequately prepared to broker them (Hagen, 1987; Hagen and Wang, 1993).

The organizational culture that had developed under AFDC has been characterized as an "eligibility compliance culture" (Hercik, 1998). Under federal welfare reform and Florida's WAGES program, however, the emphasis has shifted from eligibility determination to assistance in obtaining employment and encouraging self-sufficiency through the development of an integrated service delivery system. The inclusion of varied support services and case management in the WAGES legislation points to the need for staff in the local welfare offices to assume responsibility for managing the array of services needed if welfare recipients are to enter the workforce. Clearly, the professional tasks that need to be attended to at the frontline of Florida's WAGES program have expanded with the demise of AFDC.

Florida's WAGES program portends to be a radical transformation of the eligibility compliance culture that had developed under AFDC. Under Florida's welfare reform legislation there was a shift in frontline responsibilities and emphasis. Frontline case management staff were now expected to communicate to clients the urgency to find employment, while assessing client capacity for an employment-oriented life style and facilitating their transition to that life style. This was to be accomplished in coordination with eligibility and employment staff, something not done in the eligibility compliance organizational culture of AFDC. The question explored in this research is whether local WAGES offices in Florida were able to develop the organizational culture and methods of frontline practice needed to implement the goals of the state's welfare reform legislation.

Research Methods

Florida's welfare reform legislation established a statewide WAGES Board and 24 regional WAGES Coalitions. This study was part of a larger study funded by the WAGES Board and the Florida Department of Children and Families that examined the implementation of welfare reform in Florida. This research was conducted under the auspices of Florida Inter-University Welfare Reform Collaborative. The larger research project was

multi-faceted, examining the experience of the WAGES Coalitions, the role and function of frontline case managers, and the experience of current and former welfare recipients. This article discusses the interviews that were conducted with frontline case managers. It was expected that from the interviews normative expectations regarding case manager roles and responsibilities that had developed under the WAGES program would emerge.

The framework for the interview was developed following a review of the service expectations indicated in Florida's WAGES legislation, and the social work literature discussing the practice functions commonly understood to be within the purview of case managers. An overriding purpose of the interview was to engage case managers in discussions about what normative expectations regarding their roles and responsibilities had developed under the WAGES program. The implementation of a culture-deciphering process required a data collection process that would deal with the fact that cultural norms and values operate outside of our awareness (Jones, 1988). The interview questions were therefore, designed to break through the "world-taken-for-granted" aspect of organizational cultures.

An interview guide was developed by an interdisciplinary team and pilot tested with case managers. The interview focused on the case manager's understanding of their professional responsibilities as a WAGES' case manager. Case managers were encouraged to talk about their perceptions of the activities related to case assessment, and the development and implementation of a case plan. Leading questions were kept to a minimum with probing questions designed to seek clarification of the role of case manager when confronted with a client eligible for public assistance in the reformed welfare system. Open-ended responses were coded to identify themes in accord with accepted procedures for analysis of qualitative data (Sherman and Reid, 1994).

Four regions were selected by the state WAGES Board and the Department of Children and Families for this study. The selection included two rural and two urban-suburban regions, reflecting the geographic dispersion and diversity of the state. Fifty-three percent of the state's welfare population was found in the four regions. A letter of introduction generated by the Florida Department of Children and Families was sent to WAGES Coalition Directors in the four regions. Meetings were conducted

between the research staff and case manager supervisors for the purpose of explaining the project. The supervisors were asked to inform their case management staff of the project and elicit their cooperation. Appointments were subsequently made with case managers for telephone interviews during which they were assured that their responses would remain confidential.

Results

Eighty seven percent (n=62) of the case managers in the four regions were interviewed. At the time of the interview, almost all (97%) had been working as WAGES' case managers for three months or more. Most indicated that their preparation for the position had entailed participation in an orientation (93%) and inservice training (97%). Eighty six percent of the respondents also had previous work experience in the human services field. Ninety percent had a bachelor's degree or graduate study; 58% of whom had majored in a field such as social work, psychology, or counseling.

Goal of case management work

The case managers were working with their clients in a very time-limited context, and one in which the aim was client self-sufficiency. Time limits and preparation for employment are new to welfare assistance, and reflect major elements of welfare reform. The case managers were asked what they perceived to be the "primary goal" of their case management work. Their responses indicate an understanding of the philosophy and overall purpose of WAGES. Almost two-thirds of the case managers (n=40) indicated that their primary goal was to motivate and help clients become self-sufficient. This is illustrated by comments such as:

> . . . assist the client to become self-sufficient before the clock runs out . . .
>
> . . . coaching clients to attaining self-sufficiency . . .
>
> . . . motivating the clients . . . changing their focus on life and giving them a new vision.
>
> . . . encourage participants to seek and attain goals. . . . to leave the world of poverty and enter the world of work [and] self-sufficiency.

Almost half of the case managers (n=29) perceived their work with clients as focusing on the need to assist clients to obtain employment. This is reflected in a sampling of their answers:

> . . . get my clients a job . . . get them to work.
> . . . getting them to work . . . getting them to get a GED or get employed in something they will enjoy . . . some kind of vocation.
> . . . assist clients to complete training and become employable . . .
> . . . get the clients to get the most out of the program so when their cash assistance runs out they have some skills and somewhere to go . . . a career.

A few (n=3) of the case managers' responses focused on the pro forma, bureaucratic nature of their work as being the "primary goal". This is illustrated in the comment, " . . . bring the client in for orientation . . . make sure they are aware of the rules and regulations . . . benefits are privileges."

Information collection and assessment

The case managers were asked to explain the processes that preceded their contact with clients. They indicated that every person applying for public assistance first met with a Department of Children and Families' (DCF) worker who served as a gatekeeper determining whether the applicant was eligible for WAGES. Individuals determined to be eligible were then referred to one of the private WAGES agencies that had contracted with local WAGES Coalitions and DCF to provide case management, job development, and placement services. This WAGES agency subsequently mailed to the client information indicating that they were required to attend an orientation. Following, or in consort with their attendance at the orientation, clients were asked to complete self-report assessment instruments to document their employment and education history, job capabilities, and obstacles to their attaining employment. While the type of forms utilized in different regions varied, a common core of information was sought.

Systematic information collection and assessment is a key feature of case management. It leads to service planning and resource identification that becomes embodied in the case plan. The official forms recorded a broad range of information that was collected about each client. The research interviews sought to

determine whether the case managers recognized the salience of this information to their professional responsibilities in the reformed welfare system. Their responses would be important in judging whether the transition had been made from the AFDC eligibility culture to the "welfare-to-work" and service ethos of WAGES. Case managers were asked to identify the kind of information they found they needed when working with a new client. There were four information areas that a substantial number of the case managers identified: employment history, educational background, family situation, and need for services such as childcare, housing, and transportation. Employment history was identified by 73% (n=45) of the case managers as information they would need for client assessment. This is illustrated by respondents indicating that they needed information about clients' "work history," "social security card . . . pay stubs," "[whether] they are employed," and "why they are unemployed."

Fifty six percent (n=35) of the case managers referred to educational background, alluding to whether clients had completed high school or a GED, as important information needed at the time of assessment. Family situation was identified by 40% of the case managers (n=25) as an important area of information. This was illustrated by case managers indicating that they needed information about "family size," "children and their age," "family support system," and information about "children in household."

The importance of obtaining information about childcare, housing, or transportation service needs was acknowledged by 53% (n=33) of the case managers in the study. This is illustrated by the comment that case managers need to obtain information about "any barriers . . . such as housing, transportation . . . need for child care . . . " Far fewer case managers indicated the importance of obtaining information about other service-related problem areas pertaining to physical/medical, emotional or substance abuse problems (26%), client interests and level of motivation (26%). Only nine (15%) were concerned with the participants' financial background, and one (2%) with clients' criminal history.

Development of case plan

The interviews indicated that meetings were arranged between clients and their case managers to review the information

that had been provided on the assessment forms, and to subsequently develop a case plan. Every client was required to have a case plan (sometimes called a "service plan," "action plan," "individual service strategy," or "employability plan"), signed by the client. This stage of case management is reflected in the establishment of goals and objectives with the client, and the delineation of activities that would lead to the achievement of these goals and objectives.

In order to assess the case managers' knowledge of the role of the "case plan" in transitioning clients off of public assistance, they were asked, "What is the plan's purpose?" Most case managers offered responses that would indicate that they shared an accurate understanding of the general overarching purpose of the case plan. Forty percent (n=25) viewed its purpose as being a vehicle for ending the client's receipt of public assistance. Forty four percent (n=27) viewed the plan as a means of establishing client goals, and how they might be achieved. Case managers noted that the plan was intended to provide a blueprint for the client in their goal of moving off of public assistance. Such expectations were underscored by the following comments concerning the purpose of the case plan:

> . . . a road map to help the client achieve goals while in the program.
>
> . . . enable the client to see an action plan to be become successful-get off of welfare and become self-sufficient
>
> . . . get the client focused so that they will take the many steps to gain self-sufficiency

Any expectation that the case plan was to provide specificity about the steps that needed to be taken, and who would assume responsibility for those steps, was not emphasized in the responses provided by the case managers. Only 23% (n=14) stated that the plan's purpose was to identify barriers to client self-sufficiency, and only 5% (n=3) indicated that the plan identity the services that clients would need to address such barriers. These concerns are reflected in the comments that the plan is intended "to find out what the needs of the client are, how we can best service them" and "to support the client and remove barriers".

Similarly, not many of the case managers saw the plan as providing specificity regarding the client (37%) or the case manager's (12%) responsibilities, and only 8% noted the importance

of identifying legal expectations related to sanctions. Such perceptions are reflected in the following comments:

> . . . [The case plan is a] mutually binding contract . . . [it calls for a] step by step process for the client . . . [it] guides us to have an understanding of how to get a client into a work activity . . .

Implementation of the case plan

The new welfare system imposes time limits on the receipt of financial assistance and support services. Clients are expected to quickly prepare themselves for employment. The case plan is intended to delineate what is needed for a client to overcome obstacles to employment and to become ready for work. The case managers were questioned about their perceptions of their responsibilities, and those of their clients, in reaching the goals delineated in the case plan. When asked what they saw as their responsibilities, the role identified often by most case managers was that of providing positive encouragement and motivation (48%), or working to build a relationship with the client (17%). These case managers stated that their role was to:

> . . . give feedback on progress, encouragement, positive reinforcement . . .
> . . . get on a one-to-one track with them . . . letting them know that I care and will do whatever I can to help.
> . . . try to encourage them and teach them appropriate behaviors.
> . . . try to use motivational speaking and pep talks and try to be personable.

Another frequent role described by the case managers (45%) was that of assisting clients by informing them about WAGES and other community services, and providing referrals when needed. The following statements made by case managers illustrate this view:

> . . . assisting them and providing services they may need . . .
> . . . coordinate . . . to get child care services so clients can get a job and stay employed . . . making referrals timely . . .
> . . . referring to as many appropriate agencies as possible . . .
> . . . prepare clients and . . . make sure they get to their appointments . . .

Only a few case managers (8%) saw their responsibilities in term of compliance with welfare policies. This was reflected

in statements reporting that case manager's responsibilities revolved around "making sure they are complying and doing everything they are supposed to.." and "following-up on the job site to make sure client is working . . . "

There were three major areas identified by the case managers as being the "responsibilities" of clients. The central role of service utilization was again highlighted. Forty-eight percent (n=30) of the case managers noted that it was a responsibility of clients to use the services available within the WAGES agency and provided by other agencies. This is illustrated by the following comments:

> . . . utilize the services provided . . .
> . . . complete the activity given to them by their counselor . . .
> . . . keeping all appointments . . . following through on referrals . . . participating in the program . . .
> . . . you can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink . . . they must take responsibility for themselves . . .

The importance of stimulating motivation and a positive attitude, which had been emphasized as a case manager's responsibility, was indicated as being a client's responsibility as well. Forty percent (n=25) of the case managers focused on the client having the appropriate motivation to reach the goals established for them.

> . . . client has to be motivated to reach any of the goals
> . . . having the initiative and willingness to succeed . . .
> . . . cooperation, attitude, enthusiasm. . . .

Thirty-two percent (n=20) of the case managers identified compliance with case plan obligations and program requirements. The tone of the comments was more bureaucratic and punitive. This is reflected in the comments made that clients are expected to,

> . . . turn in their time sheets . . . fulfilling required hours, reporting any changes (such as) moving, quitting their job . . .
> . . . comply with our criteria of the program . . .
> . . . do what they are told . . . this is a requirement . . .

Discussion

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) mandated that states develop public

assistance systems that are designed to view welfare as time-limited and that transition clients off of welfare. The work expectations embodied in WAGES, Florida's welfare reform legislation, required the development of a case management model of public assistance with individualized attention to clients. The data in this study focused on whether the frontline case manager in Florida's WAGES agencies had been able to develop the expanded professional orientation needed to implement this policy shift. The study was framed in terms of the "organizational culture" of the welfare office, and its impact on the ability of WAGES case managers to carry out their jobs. In response to dramatic changes in welfare policy at the national and state level were the local welfare agencies able to adopt the essential elements of "welfare reform"? If WAGES is to succeed in helping participants make the transition from welfare to work, frontline case managers need to succeed in their new role. The introduction of the "case manager" who goes beyond the realm of the "eligibility technician" is dependent on the normative expectations that are part of the culture of the welfare office. Of concern in this study were the cultural norms regarding the goals of welfare reform, and behavioral patterns related to the roles and responsibilities of the frontline worker in accomplishing these goals. Given the discretion typically assigned to front-line workers in service organizations, the cultural expectations surrounding their job are influential in providing guidance to their professional practice.

It is clear from the interviews described in this study that the beginning of a cultural shift has occurred at the frontline of welfare reform. Few of the case managers interviewed described their primary responsibilities as revolving around questions that typified the AFDC ethos: attending to how much money and economic assets clients have, and whether clients are in compliance with rules and regulations attendant to the receipt of public assistance. In contrast, most case managers viewed their responsibilities, and the intent of their efforts as broader in scope. A two-layered frontline system was established in Florida in which Department of Children and Families' workers play the role of "eligibility technician." This enabled many case managers to engage in more "people changing" transactions. Many case managers perceived the goals of their work as helping clients

work towards getting jobs and motivating clients to progress towards that end. Many also recognized that they were responsible for linking their clients to services both in WAGES and in the community that could facilitate their clients' transition to employment, and for encouraging clients to utilize these services. An emerging organizational culture is portrayed in this study in which many case managers readily identify with the new mantra of welfare reform and perceive their role as multifaceted, and divergent from the traditional eligibility-compliance approach.

The study raises the question, is the glass half full or half empty? The interviews indicate that the shift in emphasis called for by WAGES is limited in terms of what case managers recognized as being the common functions of case management practice. Those interviewed did not all agree about the scope of their responsibilities. There was an absence of consensus about the importance of reviewing clients' employment and educational history and capacity, or clients' need for childcare, housing, and transportation services. Relatively few case managers found it important to obtain information about a client's family situation, or whether a client had physical, emotional, or abuse problems. There was also no unanimity regarding the case manager's responsibilities subsequent to the development of the case plan. Not all case managers perceived their responsibilities as including the role of "service broker," linking clients to needed services, or the role of "facilitator," motivating clients to adhere to the expectations set out in the case plan. In short, the study found an absence of a normative consensus among case managers regarding the common functions usually associated with the role of case manager. While the term "case management" lacks precision, it is commonly seen as including information collection and assessment, case planning, linking clients to services, monitoring of client progress, and when required, client advocacy (Weil and Karls, 1985; Wolk, Sullivan, and Hartmann, 1994). While these functions were noted by a number of case managers, it is clear that not all of the case managers in this study have fully embraced this practice model.

The role ambiguity that surfaced in the interviews may stem from the inter-related pressures facing the case manager. Some of the omissions in case management functions revealed in the

interviews may be connected to frustration with their work assignments. The interviews tapped into a discrepancy between the importance of a multitude of case management functions, and the ability to perform all of them. This is reflected in comments such as:

> [I] have too many things to do and am not able to do anything other than the bare minimum . . .
>
> [I] do not have enough resources or time to serve everybody adequately, and time to adequately keep contact or monitor . . .
>
> My caseload is the largest I have had in 15 years of doing case management in various jobs . . .

What the case managers in this study may have been revealing is the gap between the full breadth of responsibilities a case manager could assume, and what they recognized as being practical and minimally necessary. WAGES stipulates that clients cannot receive assistance for more than 24 cumulative months in any 60-month period, and cannot receive more than 48 months of TANF benefits in their lifetime. A federal incentive funding formula implements this by offering financial benefits to states that reduce the number of welfare recipients. This has been translated into an expectation that within a matter of weeks after a person becomes a WAGES recipient, their case manager will have completed their assessment and case plan, and they will be involved in employment-seeking activities. The design calls for clients to quickly find employment, even while obstacles to sustaining that employment still persist.

This study brings into question the feasibility of this programmatic design. The interviews point to the daunting challenge of performing a full range of case management tasks designed to assess clients' needs and access services, while at the same time rapidly moving clients to the next level of WAGES activity—the job search. Case managers reported caseload sizes that ranged from 39 to as high as 300. Many case managers reported a steady influx of new cases, often on a daily or weekly basis. Case managers also pointed to the challenge posed by the presence of "hard-to-place" clients—clients who presented a multitude of complex obstacles to employment such as those associated with minimal education and the presence of domestic violence, substance

abuse, or sick children in the household. Frustration with this challenge is reflected in the case manager comment, "The clients we now have are at the bottom—are hardest to place."

Conclusion

This study asked whether the organizational culture present in local WAGES offices in Florida had developed to the point where case managers were able to implement the goals and objectives assigned to them. The interviews conducted suggest that some progress had been made to that end, but that it had been incomplete and uneven. Those who hold the position of WAGES' case manager clearly recognized and were guided in their daily work by an understanding of the overriding professional purpose of their work—helping clients recognize the benefits and the necessity of finding employment, and addressing obstacles in their path. At the same time, however, role ambiguity and frustration about job demands among case managers were evident. The constraints of a large caseload, a varied clientele, and the pressure of time may have compromised the expansive expectations of the case manager's job description.

The interviews indicated a need to revisit the job description of the case manager under welfare reform. Close review of how case managers' time is being allocated, which tasks are effectively performed, and the time needed to ably manage the varied cases that present themselves seems warranted. Such scrutiny of the case manager role may be particularly important in light of the emerging problem of "welfare recidivists"—former recipients who have returned to public assistance. While many states have been able to reduce the numbers of persons on their welfare rolls during the first several years of PRWORA implementation, questions about the long term effectiveness of welfare reform are beginning to emerge. Research is needed to determine whether a contributing factor to the "failure" of welfare recidivists has been the nature of the assessment, case planning, advocacy, and case monitoring provided. Are the persons who are recidivating under welfare reform the clients who present multiple, complex problems and obstacles? Do PRWORA case managers need to be able to employ an approach more attuned to the complex obstacles

to employment that clients present? Do case managers need to be able to more closely and consistently scrutinize clients during preliminary assessments and case planning than was described by the case managers interviewed in this study?

It is not uncommon that the implementation of a policy shift as formidable as welfare reform would be accompanied by service delivery models that need retooling and reconfiguration. As Vourlekis (1992) observed,

> ". . . policymakers are often far clearer about the desired outcomes than they are about the mechanism to achieve them. Thus, case management in welfare reform may be an ambiguous and poorly understood process that is hitched to an ambitious set of expectations" (p. 2).

Close examination of the various models of frontline case management is needed to identify models of practice that respond to the mandate to transition persons off of welfare by effectively managing the varying levels of complexity of the obstacles and service needs posed by clients who are required to become self-sufficient.

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