

The Ohio Works First Longitudinal Survey: Interim Site Visit Report From Ten Counties

December 2002



prepared for

**Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Columbus, Ohio**

by

Contents

Executive Summary	i
I. Introduction	1
II. Description of the OWF Evaluation	1
III. The Context: Welfare Reform in Ohio Under PRWORA	3
Eligibility and Program Changes	3
Organizational and Structural Changes	4
IV. Description of Counties Visited	6
Geography and Demographics of Counties	6
Economic Conditions	7
V. Site Visit Themes	9
Case Processing	10
Caseworker Roles	10
Diversion Strategies	11
Time Limit Procedures	12
Intra-Agency Dynamics	14
Caseload Levels	14
Staff Retention	15
Physical Location of Staff	16
Use of Contractors	17
External Relationships	18
County Commissioners	18
Potential Employers for OWF Clients	19
VI. Additional Issues of Interest	20
Client Needs: Transportation and Childcare	20
Funding Changes	20
VII. Summary	21

Executive Summary

In response to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), Ohio implemented Ohio Works First (OWF) in October 1997. Because welfare programs in Ohio are county-administered, ODJFS devolved the responsibility of implementing portions of the OWF program to those jurisdictions. This allowed county job and family services agencies to develop their own approaches for implementing OWF within federal and state guidelines. Ten of Ohio's 88 counties were visited between fall 2000 and spring 2001 to learn about how they implemented the OWF program. This is an interim report that provides an overview of county implementation approaches and will be supplemented during a second set of interviews that will occur in the Fall of 2002.

The ten counties were selected to represent a range of demographic and socio-economic situations. They include four metropolitan counties (Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, and Stark), and six non-metropolitan counties (Clark, Greene, Licking, Scioto, Belmont, and Gallia). Within each of these groupings, the counties present very different demographic and economic profiles that result in unique challenges for managing caseload and promoting self-sufficiency.

The site visits yielded a wealth of information about county operations. This report describes organizational structures and practices that were observed in the counties. In particular, the report highlights and summarizes information relating to four topics or themes:

- Case Processing
- Intra-Agency Dynamics
- Use of Contractors
- External Relationships

These themes were selected because they reflect differences in county approaches to implementing OWF, and may contribute information to a larger study designed to explore whether differences in county practices and service delivery explain differences in client outcomes.

Findings of note include:

- Most county agencies in the study gave special treatment to clients approaching time limits on their OWF eligibility, with some agencies intensifying client contact as early as 18 months in advance of client time limits. Special services were often targeted at helping clients develop job skills, conduct job searches and retain jobs.
- Though OWF caseload levels have declined in most of the study counties, caseworkers felt that their work had actually increased because of the frequency and intensity of the work they do with their remaining clients. Caseworkers reported that "hard to serve" clients requiring extra time and attention are on the rise as a proportion of all cases.

- In most of the study counties, eligibility determination and training and work activities functions were handled by different employees. This allows staff to acquire specialized knowledge but presents communication and case coordination challenges for CDJFS staff, especially in agencies which house these functions in separate facilities or in separate parts of the same facility.
- All counties in the study employed contractors to varying degrees to provide OWF and PRC services to clients. In some instances, contractors provided highly specialized testing and assessment services at the request of agency caseworkers; in others, they performed all of the functions of a work activities caseworker. They often saw clients off-site, away from the CDJFS office, but some worked in agency quarters and were nearly indistinguishable from agency staff.

I. Introduction

In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was enacted, introducing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as a replacement for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. This change restructured welfare programs to emphasize employment, responsibility, and self-sufficiency, and restructured funding as a block grant to allow states more flexibility in the design of their welfare programs to meet local needs. Ohio elaborated its approach in House Bill 408 (HB 408), which established:

- Ohio Works First (OWF), which provides cash assistance and employment and support services for eligible low-income families in order to reduce welfare dependency; and
- The Prevention, Retention and Contingency (PRC) program, which provides short-term cash assistance and services to OWF clients and other low-income individuals to help them obtain and maintain employment, or to meet short term needs that were formerly covered by the Emergency Assistance program.

Ohio's welfare program is administered by the state's 88 counties, which have substantial discretion over the way they implement OWF and PRC. This has led to a wide range of local responses to delivering OWF and PRC services.

With funding from the Department of Health and Human Services and from the state, Ohio's Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) was charged with evaluating OWF. ODJFS contracted with ORC Macro to conduct the evaluation, which is focused on measuring the impact of OWF on increasing self-sufficiency and independence from welfare, and on understanding the mechanisms used to accomplish the results.

II. Description of the OWF Evaluation

To accomplish these goals, the OWF evaluation consists of three basic studies: (1) an outcomes study of individuals who received OWF and PRC services in 2000, (2) an implementation study, and (3) a cost analysis.

- The outcomes study of individual recipients examines the effect of OWF on self-sufficiency and welfare independence. This study uses data from administrative records and a three-wave panel survey of individuals who were receiving cash assistance in both January and June 2000.
- The implementation study examines the way that ten counties implemented and operated OWF and PRC from October 1997 to October 2002. This study uses data from on-site interviews of agency staff in spring 2001 and fall 2002.

- The cost analysis uses financial reporting documents to determine how funds are distributed to counties from the state, and how each county distributed funds across various cost categories.

This report addresses the implementation study, which describes how OWF and PRC were implemented from October 1997 to April 2001. Counties may implement these programs in accordance with local philosophies, conditions, and operational needs. This variation allows comparisons regarding the ways that counties have responded to OWF and PRC and the ways that different operational approaches may promote varying levels of self-sufficiency and welfare independence.¹

Ten counties were selected for the implementation study. Important factors in selecting the sites were OWF caseload characteristics, geographic location, socio-economic characteristics, and preliminary information on program approaches. Listed from most to least populated, the sites selected were:²

- Franklin County
- Hamilton County
- Lucas County
- Stark County
- Greene County
- Licking County
- Clark County
- Scioto County
- Belmont County
- Gallia County

The ten sites were visited between fall 2000 and spring 2001. These visits were aimed at understanding the philosophy, operational procedures, and context of the counties' OWF and PRC programs. The site visits were guided by protocols that identified topical areas for discussion. Interviews were conducted with many individuals at each site. These included the Director and/or Assistant Director of the County Department of Job and Family Services (CDJFS), staff responsible

¹ A second visit to the counties is scheduled for fall 2002, after which changes in their approaches and operations will be charted.

² A notable absence is Cuyahoga County, which includes Cleveland and has a substantial portion of Ohio's caseload. Cuyahoga County is very different from Ohio's other counties in terms of its demographics, issues, and size. Because Cuyahoga County has been studied extensively and its approach to OWF has been well documented elsewhere, examining other counties more typical of Ohio was determined to be a more prudent strategy.

for managing OWF and PRC, casework supervisors, caseworkers, trainers, computer systems personnel, finance directors and, often, contractors which were usually community-based agencies.³

There are two caveats to this analysis. First, the 10 counties selected for the study were selected because of their diverse population size, geographic location, and employment rates. They may not represent Ohio's 88 counties or represent the full range of OWF's diversity. Second, the analysis describes the OWF programs as they existed at the time of the site visits, not through their evolution to reach that state of operations.⁴ At this time, the counties were receiving funding from a State level program called Prevention, Retention, and Contingency – Developmental Reserve (PRC-DR), a one-time source of funding meant to enhance county programs. OWF implementation just prior to and during the site visits was driven by PRC-DR, and county programs might have been somewhat different were it not for these funds.

III. The Context: Welfare Reform in Ohio Under PRWORA

HB 408 created OWF and PRC to address the needs of low-income individuals who are not economically self-sufficient. Two major types of changes to welfare were introduced by HB 408: (1) changes to eligibility rules and program provisions (including the PRC program), and (2) changes to the organization and structure of welfare systems.

Eligibility and Program Changes

OWF meets the needs of individuals who are eligible for cash assistance. It includes cash assistance and employment and supportive services to help individuals and families achieve self-sufficiency. The program differs from the AFDC program it replaced in the following ways:

- The use of self-sufficiency contracts that commit those applying for cash assistance to fulfill responsibilities as a condition of receiving cash assistance. Applicants agree to follow requirements concerning work participation or undertake certain activities to increase their employability. In turn, the contracts describe the responsibilities of the CDJFS, which may include commitment to provide certain services.

³ In total, four researchers visited the sites in teams of two. The teams switched members to eliminate potential bias in observations.

⁴ Although it would be interesting to track the counties' evolution, if for no reason other than to judge the capacity of counties to respond to a major initiative such as TANF, reconstructing and fully understanding events several years after their occurrence is methodologically difficult. Records are not always complete, staff turnover reduces analysts' ability to accurately chart developments, and memories are not always sufficiently reliable. Relatedly, the primary purpose of the process study is to identify program features that can be used as variables in the outcomes study, which requires information about OWF services, procedures, and requirements, not program evolution.

- A 36-month eligibility limit, with the possibility that up to 20 percent of the caseload can be granted a hardship extension for a period of time after the 36-month limit has been exhausted. (Individuals who have been terminated from OWF for using 36 months of assistance, and have remained off the program for 24 months, can be eligible for an additional two years of hardship benefits.)
- Increased participation rates in work activities. At the inception of OWF in October 1997, at least 30 percent of single parents were required to participate for at least 30 hours a week, and at least 75 percent of two-parent assistance groups were expected to participate at least 35 hours a week. Following the federal law, these participation rates have increased over time.
- An earned-income disregard where the first \$250 of income and one-half of the remaining income is not counted in determining the amount of cash assistance.
- A three-tiered sanction process for the failure or refusal to comply with OWF requirements. The first infraction is suspension of OWF benefits for one month, the second is suspension of benefits for two months, and the third is suspension of benefits for six months. In each event, the requirements that caused the sanction must be fulfilled first before the cash benefits are restored.

The PRC program provides additional services aimed at eliminating barriers to self-sufficiency and strengthening family stability. This program is available for OWF clients and low-income families who meet county-specified income requirements. There are two major categories of assistance:

- Hard services include assistance in the form of cash or vouchers for emergency needs, defined broadly as anything that puts the family's self-sufficiency or stability at risk. Attention is given to situations where the individual cannot make housing, automobile, or utility bill payments, with particular attention to problems that could affect someone's ability to obtain or maintain employment. PRC also provides assistance to pay for job-related expenses, such as the purchase of uniforms, special tools, or transportation.
- Soft services support employment, training, and other programs that aim to increase the self-sufficiency of individuals and to maintain the integrity of the family and the welfare of children. Programs in this category can range from job development activities to school-based activities aimed at helping children to avoid issues that may lead to future welfare dependence.

Organizational and Structural Changes

The implementation of OWF at the local level was guided by Partnership Agreements jointly developed by the state and each county. The agreements provide the framework for state/county cooperation in administering TANF and other family service programs. They are in force for each biennial funding period. Other plans developed at the local level, including the community plan,

transportation plan and PRC plan, further elaborate each county's approach to distributing assistance and services.

Incentives and sanctions play a pivotal role in influencing county behavior in the new welfare environment. The Partnership Agreements include performance standards which counties are expected to meet or exceed. Counties receive incentive funds based on the extent to which they exceed the standards.⁵ County job and family service agencies are expected to achieve outcomes related to work participation rates, out-of-wedlock birth rates, and workforce development activities.

The availability of funding through the one-time-only PRC-DR program also had positive effects on CDJFS operations. PRC-DR was responsible for the influx of more than 300 million dollars to supplement PRC funds in state fiscal years 2000 and 2001. Most counties used the bulk of their PRC-DR money to contract with local organizations to provide services to agency clients. PRC-DR money was used to fund a wide range of services, from school counselors, to parenting and money management classes, to job training, job search, and job placement activities.

The relatively sudden influx and amount of PRC-DR funds created substantial management challenges for the counties⁶ with respect to monitoring the performance of contractors. Where evaluation systems were put in place, they were usually set up to measure contractor performance in terms of number of clients served or service units delivered, rather than client outcomes. In reality, most contractor activities went unassessed because counties did not have the staff, lead time, or expertise to establish monitoring systems to evaluate the effectiveness of large numbers of contractors and services.

⁵ In December 2001, ODJFS discontinued issuing incentive funds to county agencies because of budget constraints.

⁶ Scioto County DJFS was an exception, as it opted not to accept PRC-DR funds.

IV. Description of Counties Visited

Although the ten counties selected for the site visits were not selected to be representative of all Ohio counties, they were adequately diverse to allow for the exploration of how OWF was implemented under various local conditions.

Geography and Demographics of Counties

The ten counties represent almost every geographic area in the state (Figure 1), with a concentration of counties in central Ohio. Franklin County lies almost at the geographic center of the state, with Greene, Licking, and Clark Counties either adjacent or close by. Three counties represent different quadrants of the state: Lucas in the northwest, Stark in the northeast, and Hamilton in the southwest. Three other counties (Scioto and Gallia in south central Ohio and Belmont in east central Ohio) border upon the Ohio River and are part of the Appalachian region.

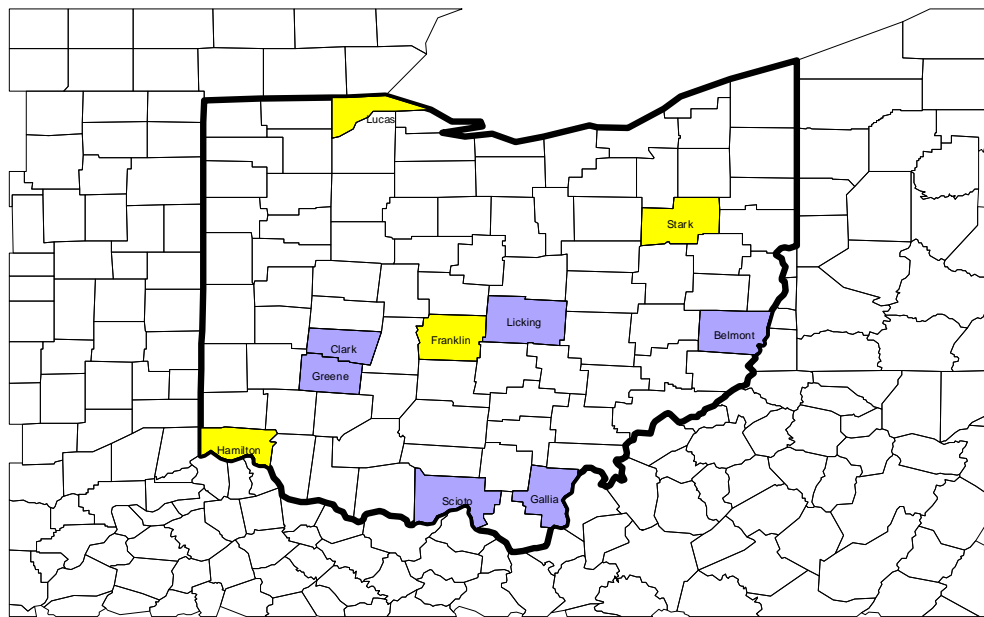


Figure 1: Counties Visited for the Implementation Study (Metro Counties in lighter shade)

As shown in Table 1, of the ten counties in the study, four are metropolitan areas (Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, and Stark). Franklin and Hamilton are the largest counties with more than a million and nearly 850,000 residents, respectively; Lucas and Stark have in the range of 375,000 to 455,000 residents. In terms of population, the next tier of counties is represented by Clark, Greene, and Licking with between 140,000 and 150,000 residents. Scioto (80,000) and Belmont (70,000) are similar in size, and Gallia is the smallest county (31,000 residents).

Poverty ranges widely among these counties. Licking County has the lowest poverty rate (7.5 percent) while Scioto has the highest rate (19.3 percent). Poverty tends to be highest in two of the three Appalachian counties (Scioto and Gallia). Belmont and Lucas Counties represent a second grouping of counties with relatively high poverty rates.

The presence of minorities also ranges widely across the ten counties. Among the metropolitan counties, Hamilton’s minority representation is highest (27 percent) while Stark’s is lowest (10 percent). In the other counties, minority representation is the highest in Clark (12 percent) and the lowest in Licking (4 percent).

Table 1: Demographic Differences Among Counties

County	Population	Population Density (persons per sq. mile)	Pct. Urban	Pct. of Population Under Poverty	Pct. Minority
Franklin	1,068,978	1980	98.1	11.6	24.5
Hamilton	845,303	2075	97.5	11.8	27.1
Lucas	455,054	1337	94.4	13.9	22.5
Stark	378,098	656	85.9	9.2	9.7
Greene	147,886	357	83.0	8.5	10.8
Licking	145,491	212	60.0	7.5	4.4
Clark	144,742	362	75.8	10.7	11.9
Scioto	79,195	129	49.2	19.3	5.1
Belmont	70,226	131	51.9	14.6	5.0
Gallia	31,069	66	22.4	18.1	4.7

Data Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census.

Economic Conditions

Economic conditions in the ten counties vary markedly (Table 2). The unemployment rate ranges from 2.5 percent to just over 5 percent. Among the four metropolitan and the three largest non-metropolitan counties (Clark, Licking, and Greene), only one—Lucas—has an unemployment rate exceeding 4 percent. Generally, the three Appalachian counties (Scioto, Belmont, and Gallia) have higher unemployment rates, with Gallia’s being above 5 percent.

Among all the counties, trade and service industries (including financial services) account for most of the jobs. Also:

- Public Administration employment is more prevalent in smaller than in larger counties. Franklin County is an exception, probably due to the location of the state government there.
- Stark and Clark Counties have nearly a quarter of their jobs in manufacturing. Both counties are home to large manufacturing enterprises. Only Franklin County has fewer than 10 percent of its jobs in manufacturing.
- Gallia and Scioto Counties have a relatively high proportion of individuals working in other industries.

Weekly median household income is somewhat correlated with the size of the county. Among the metropolitan counties, Franklin's weekly income exceeds that of other counties by nearly 8 percent. Among non-metropolitan counties, Greene County has the highest average weekly wages, probably reflecting the presence of a large manufacturing firm. Average wages in Belmont, Gallia and Scioto Counties are almost 30 percent less than in other counties.

Table 2: Economic Differences Among Counties

County	Civilian Labor Force	Unemployment Rate	Pct. Working in Trade, Services & Finance	Pct. Working in Public Administration	Pct. Working in Manufacturing	Pct. Working in Other Industries	Weekly Median Household Income
Franklin	583,723	3.0	70.3	5.8	9.3	14.6	\$821.81
Hamilton	426,552	3.3	68.6	4.0	14.5	12.9	\$787.77
Lucas	226,325	4.1	64.9	3.4	18.3	13.4	\$730.85
Stark	189,161	2.9	60.6	2.9	23.5	13.0	\$765.85
Licking	75,271	2.5	60.6	5.7	17.3	16.4	\$848.54
Clark	71,398	3.7	59.3	5.8	21.2	13.7	\$775.77
Greene	75,499	3.3	64.9	8.9	13.8	12.4	\$935.69
Belmont	30,620	3.8	64.8	5.8	12.9	16.5	\$571.42
Scioto	31,871	4.7	60.9	6.7	13.6	18.8	\$538.62
Gallia	13,398	5.2	63.0	3.5	11.5	22.0	\$580.60

Data Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census.

V. Site Visit Themes

Under OWF, each CDJFS was given the freedom and responsibility to tailor its program to meet local needs, within federal and state regulations. Approaches to OWF implementation could and did vary among counties because of differences in OWF caseload size, employment opportunities, the availability of public transportation and other circumstances.

Differences in county implementation fall into several broad categories or themes that emerged during the site visit interviews. These themes provide a basis for understanding OWF implementation from a variety of perspectives. They include:

- Case Processing
- Intra-Agency Dynamics
- Use of Contractors
- External Relationships

Theme 1: Case Processing

Counties organized staff in various ways to handle eligibility, assessment, and work development tasks; to implement new diversion options; and to respond to new time limit regulations.

Caseworker Roles

Two methods of organizing staff to process cases were observed in the ten counties. The first, total case management, was designed to provide a streamlined approach to the delivery of OWF client services by assigning each client to a caseworker who could address all aspects of the OWF program. This method presented a significant challenge for the caseworker who had to master all aspects of the OWF program, but had the advantage of affording the OWF client with one agency contact person. Total case management was used to diversify caseworker skills while providing a more simplified delivery of services from the client perspective.

The total case management approach was used in Franklin and Scioto Counties:

- Franklin placed all decisions relating to OWF and PRC in the hands of caseworkers who processed all aspects of the clients' eligibility, self-sufficiency contract, and workforce development activities, although the actual delivery of employment and training services was often provided by contractors.
- Scioto County's transition to OWF was a relatively smooth one, in that leadership prior to 1997 fostered knowledge across programs and an atmosphere for creative programming. Caseworkers were trained across JFS programs (e.g., OWF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, PRC) so that clients had one contact person within the agency that could provide them with a wide range of services.

A variant of the total case management approach was witnessed in Belmont County. Caseworkers were divided into two distinct units located in two different locations. The first unit managed clients during the first 18 to 24 months of their OWF tenure. Clients were then transferred to caseworkers in an intensive case management unit as they approached loss of eligibility due to time limits. Both units provided a full range of services but the intensive case management unit was more focused on transitioning individuals into work. Although caseworkers in most counties seemed to intensify their efforts as OWF recipients approached time limits, Belmont was unusual in that it implemented this structurally through the creation of two distinct units, each with its own staff.

The second method, segmented case management, was typified by two sets of OWF workers: those who handled eligibility activities and those who handled training and work-related activities. This approach split the OWF staff into two teams which worked together to provide services to the client. Typically, the eligibility determination activities were conducted first, followed by employment-related training or placement activities.

In most counties employing the segmented approach to case management (Gallia, Greene, Licking, Lucas, and Stark), agency staff performed the majority of the eligibility and employment-related functions. In Clark and Hamilton Counties, however, agency staff executed the eligibility work while outside contractors handled most employment-related activities.

- At the time of the Greene County visit, the workforce development staff was a distinct entity from the eligibility caseworkers even though they were located in the same building. The workforce development staff performed much of the work associated with the OWF self-sufficiency contract and sanctioning.
- The Licking County Department of Job and Family Services had two distinct units that addressed eligibility and workforce development issues. The agency fostered communication between eligibility and workforce development staff by pairing them into teams. An eligibility worker and a workforce development staff member were located in close proximity and worked together to provide service to OWF clients.
- In Lucas County, separate CDJFS workers handled client eligibility and workforce development functions. Income maintenance workers, who work in the “eligibility unit,” handled eligibility functions (including the intake interview), while workforce development caseworkers, who work in the “work activities unit,” handled functions such as assessments and work assignments. After an initial screening, clients made an appointment to meet with an income maintenance worker for an intake interview. Following the intake interview, a subsequent appointment was made with the work activities unit.
- In Stark County, an eligibility caseworker was responsible for eligibility determination and monitoring, and for recommending work assignments, while a coordinating employment specialist was responsible for assigning and monitoring the work and training assignment.

Diversion Strategies

Diversion refers to the process by which an individual is diverted from OWF cash assistance. Agency staff employ diversion when non-OWF services or funding options can address the needs of a client who would otherwise be eligible for OWF, or when a client does not meet OWF requirements. The issuance of PRC funds is a prominent diversion approach in all counties. (It

should be noted however, that all counties allow for PRC assistance to be provided to existing OWF clients.) PRC is intended to provide short-term assistance to overcome temporary needs and thus eliminate the need for long-term assistance. In a number of counties, PRC specialists were involved in determining PRC need during a client's first visit to the agency. In other counties, such need was determined by caseworkers.

- In Clark County, clients who requested help met with special caseworkers who were responsible for assessing needs, determining whether PRC assistance was sufficient to meet those needs, and, if so, the kind and level of support required.
- In Scioto County, diversion from OWF could occur at two points in the application process. Diversion could first occur when a prospective client talked with staff at the front desk to discuss the services the client was seeking. At that point, staff could recommend whether OWF or another program was appropriate to meet the client's needs. Alternatively, clients could be diverted after attending a one-day Job Search session and completing an income maintenance interview if OWF services did not meet their needs.
- In Lucas, Stark, Hamilton, and Licking Counties, PRC was cited as the main form of diversion from OWF. However, staff in these counties also noted that many individuals applying for assistance were deterred when the requirements were specified early on during the certification process.

Time Limit Procedures

In Ohio, the first cohort of OWF clients reached the 36-month time limit in October 2000. Most of the ten counties established special services for clients who were approaching time limits, and some began paying attention to this clientele as far as 18 months in advance of the client's time limit. CDJFS staff or contractors increased their interactions with these clients, typically conducting assessments, revisiting self-sufficiency plans, providing more intensive job search and placement activities, and, in some cases, providing mentoring assistance to eliminate potential barriers to steady employment.

- As noted earlier, Belmont County implemented a casework approach that applied greater attention to individuals approaching time limits. Caseworkers were divided into two groups, located in two different offices. The first group managed clients in the first 18 to 24 months of their OWF tenure. Clients were transferred to the second group for more intensive case management in the last 12 to 18 months prior to the loss of eligibility due to time limits. This second group had fewer cases and was less involved in eligibility activities than the first group, although they still spent about 70 percent of their time on eligibility. A contractor provided one-on-one mentoring services in which a mentor was assigned to a particular

client. This service provided intensive interaction that was aimed at assisting the client with issues that can impede self-sufficiency.

- Greene County initiated a program called Stepping Stones that intensively worked with OWF clients who were still on cash assistance after 22 months. The Stepping Stones unit consisted of one supervisor and two caseworkers who targeted the individual needs of ongoing OWF clients.
- In Stark County, individuals who were within two years of their time limit were assigned to a special jobs unit. The unit was largely focused on helping individuals become employable and finding and maintaining employment. Eligibility was the responsibility of the primary caseworker who remained with the case throughout the client's tenure.
- In Hamilton County, a contractor provided intensive, individually tailored services to clients approaching time limits.
- In Licking and Gallia Counties, a "hardship extension meeting" was held with clients approximately three months before their time limit. In this meeting, workers discussed with the client what would be necessary to obtain a hardship extension.
- In Lucas County, workers conducted an "exit interview" with clients shortly before the time limit was reached, in order to make sure that clients understood that assistance would be cut off.

In all counties, there were specific, detailed criteria for judging time limit extension requests. Some counties had special processes to deal with extension requests and cases granted time limit extensions. Others followed up with cases that were terminated due to time limits.

- In Licking County, there were weekly meetings with clients who were granted hardship extensions.
- Lucas County had a special extension unit that helped extended cases find alternative forms of assistance.
- The Scioto County DJFS established 20 criteria on which hardship extensions were reviewed. Agency staff indicated that they liberally approved hardship cases in instances where the client did the tasks requested by the CDJFS. For those who did not apply for a

hardship extension, the agency did an assessment of Food Stamp status, household income, and, occasionally, staff members from the agency visited the home to determine that the children were safe.

- Stark County also attempted to follow-up with individuals who left OWF due to time limits. This effort was aimed at ensuring that children were receiving appropriate care.

Theme 2: Intra-Agency Dynamics

Caseload levels, staff retention, and the physical location of staff within the agency are issues that may impact OWF implementation.

Caseload Levels

Caseload responsibilities have remained at a level that is at least comparable with those prior to OWF. With the decline of OWF caseload levels, it was expected that caseload burdens would ease somewhat. However, caseload was cited as a universal problem, with individual case managers being overloaded not so much by the caseload itself but rather by the increase in frequency and extent of activity. The self-sufficiency contract has imposed some additional requirements on caseworkers. The frequency of Food Stamp re-certifications and re-determinations of Medicaid eligibility has also increased the workload of caseworkers, according to staff members who were interviewed.

There seem to be various reasons for the perception of increased workloads.

- In Lucas County, caseworkers reported that their workload has increased because the requirements for processing each case have increased.
- In Hamilton County, workers reported that in contrast to the pre-OWF period, each case now requires more time and people are typically asking for more kinds of services. They also reported that more cases are “hard to serve,” which increases the stress and difficulty of dealing with the clients.
- Workers in Licking County also reported that it takes more time to deal with the “hard to serve” cases, which they say have been on the rise as a proportion of all cases. Caseworkers reported that cases have become more complicated because there are a lot of re-certifications due at different times for different services. Also, it is very difficult to follow all of the rules that differ widely among programs (e.g., different forms of verification are required for different services).

- In Belmont County, there was an issue of caseload disparity between the caseworker group providing intensive services for those approaching time limits and those providing services during the first 18 months of clients' OWF participation.

Staff Retention

Maintaining knowledgeable staff was cited as a goal in virtually all counties. In most of the interviews, it was found that many individuals (at the caseworker and management level) have had lengthy tenures with the program that spanned AFDC, Ohio Works, and OWF. In some cases, the caseworkers' job tenures exceed twenty years. The reasons for individuals remaining with CDJFS include: (1) a commitment to helping individuals in need, (2) the pay and benefits, and (3) the attraction of good retirement packages. However, there were some situations where staffing and recruitment were an issue.

- Franklin County offered an early retirement buyout, resulting in a large staff turnover. This meant that current staff dealt with larger caseloads while new staff members were recruited and trained. Adding to this issue was the decentralization initiative which created five opportunity centers across the county, requiring that staff adapt to new facilities and situations. During the visit, staff indicated that the agency had almost recovered from the buyout.
- In Stark County, where staff performing eligibility work were differentiated from staff doing case management work, there was a constant issue in retaining staff responsible for performing eligibility work. The eligibility work was viewed as less attractive by many individuals than workforce development activities. This reportedly led some individuals to transfer out or quit the agency altogether.
- In Lucas County, some staff said that retention of caseworkers was high. As evidence of this, staff cited the fact that it currently takes 23 years to achieve line supervisor status because of the seniority of many caseworkers. Other staff reported that turnover is high, especially among young workers, who in some cases feel overwhelmed by the workload.
- In Hamilton County, caseworker retention was reportedly a problem in the past, but it has improved recently. In 2000, more than half of the new caseworkers quit before one year of service, while in 2001, 71 new workers were hired and 63 are still on the job. Retention was said to improve recently because of pay raises, reduction in job duties, and employment advertisements that more accurately describe the nature of the work.

- Greene County reported difficulty with eligibility staff turnover, but did not think it was connected specifically to OWF. Rather, the eligibility position was considered by some caseworkers to be stressful and to involve a substantial amount of work and responsibility. Since other employment opportunities exist in Greene County, some staff decided to pursue other employment options.

Physical Location of Staff

Agencies had a variety of physical set-ups that housed eligibility and workforce development workers. In several counties (Belmont, Gallia, Greene, Lucas, and Stark), the OWF staff was housed in separate facilities such that the eligibility and workforce development staff were not in easy proximity to one another. In these cases, separation sometimes hindered communications among different groups of caseworkers. In other counties (Clark, Franklin, Hamilton, Licking, and Scioto), staff were housed in nearby physical locations.

- Prior to OWF, different divisions of human services in Hamilton County were separate in terms of management, staff, location, and communication. This was seen as a major problem. Therefore, around the time OWF began, different human service divisions were combined into “integrated service business units” that were under common supervisors and located in the same building. Reportedly, this has increased communication and understanding between different divisions, and shared cases can now be discussed.
- In Licking County, different divisions of human services are reported to work well together. A committee was formed that had the responsibility of helping different divisions understand one another and there was a weekly meeting involving workers in different divisions. Licking County was unique in that workforce development and income maintenance workers were paired and worked side by side, frequently working together to provide service to OWF clients.
- In contrast, Greene County’s income maintenance and workforce development staff were located in the same large building but were not often in proximity of one another. In fact, clients used separate entrances to visit these two components of the agency. As a result, communication between these two staffs was just being established at the time of the visit.
- In Stark County, the DJFS is located in several buildings, creating physical separations between the eligibility workers, who are housed in older buildings, and the employment specialists, who are housed in a newer, renovated facility, three miles away. Because these two types of workers share responsibility for cases, it is necessary for them to communicate. The physical separation has made it more difficult for these workers to interact.

- In Belmont County, the DJFS has a main office in a facility located in the central part of the county and another, newer facility in the eastern, more populated portion of the county. The newer facility houses a group devoted to intensive case management of clients within 12 to 18 months of their time limit. Separation has created a perceived disparity in workload and duties and has resulted in some ill feelings among workers.
- The Lucas County DJFS was unique in its physical separation of administrative staff from front-line caseworkers. All workers who had no direct client contact (including the high-level administrators) were located in a building several miles away from the buildings that housed the workers who handled direct client contacts.

Theme 3: Use of Contractors

While caseworkers in all counties were involved in eligibility determination and monitoring client progress and compliance with OWF requirements, training and workforce development activities were often provided by contractors. Belmont, Gallia, Greene, Licking, and Stark Counties used both caseworkers and contractors to perform workforce development tasks. Clark, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, and Scioto Counties used contractors primarily, and some contractors were based on-site in the CDJFS office.

The counties' heavy reliance on contractors allows the CDJFS to avoid difficulties regarding hiring and training agency staff to perform these kinds of functions, and ensures that services are provided by entities specializing in their content and delivery.

- The Licking County DJFS had workers who specialized in workforce development. These caseworkers conducted work history and employability assessments at the time of initial screening; an employability assessment was mandatory in order to be able to receive OWF cash assistance. More in-depth employment-related assessments as well as education and training services were provided by contractors.
- In Clark County, the caseworkers handled the eligibility activities, including maintenance of the self-sufficiency contract, while on-site and off-site contractors handled the job development activities. In particular, one on-site contractor was involved in the assignment and monitoring of these activities. This contractor had worked with the DJFS prior to TANF and worked almost seamlessly with caseworker staff.
- Although Franklin County contracted for employment and training services, agency caseworkers were responsible for monitoring and coordinating client receipt of these services.

- In Hamilton County, nearly all client services were contracted except for eligibility determination and other administrative functions. A major role in the workforce development function was played by an on-site contractor that conducted assessments for job readiness and training needs. Individual client work plans were then developed based on these assessments.
- In Lucas County, OWF clients were sent to a “work activities” caseworker who assigned work activities based on assessment questionnaires, work history and preferences expressed by the client. In addition, carefully planned, extensive employment services were available through local contractors. Contractors took an active role in assessing clients’ employability and work-related needs, helping them to obtain work, and following up with them after they got a job.

Theme 4: External Relationships

All county agencies must interact with other community members in order to serve the TANF population. Relationships with county commissioners and area employers are particularly important to the CDJFS.

County Commissioners

County commissioners have become key players in CDJFS decision making. Each Ohio county has three elected commissioners with responsibility for governance in the county and who were responsible for developing the Partnership Agreement with the state. The relationship between the county commissioners and the CDJFS may affect the kinds of programs that the department develops, and across the ten counties, the involvement of the county commissioners with the CDJFS varied considerably. In six of the counties that were visited (Belmont, Franklin, Greene, Hamilton, Licking, and Lucas), county commissioners were involved to a great extent, while four other counties (Clark, Gallia, Scioto, and Stark) had less interaction with their county commissioners.

When county commissioner involvement in agency matters is reported as high, agencies indicate that one or more commissioners take an active interest in agency issues and offer support for the CDJFS. This is often typified by scheduled meetings with the agency director.

- Belmont County had a high level of involvement from one county commissioner. This involvement included active participation in senior staff selection and assistance in plotting the direction of the agency.

- In Hamilton, Licking, and Lucas Counties, the county commissioners were described as having a great deal of influence over CDJFS operations, especially with respect to how funds are spent, but also with regard to the general vision or philosophy of the agency. In these counties, agency staff noted that one certain commissioner took a particular interest in the CDJFS and tended to specialize in CDJFS issues.

Some CDJFS offices indicated that their relationships with the county commissioners have been variable since OWF began.

- In Stark County, the county commissioners have become increasingly involved in agency matters. The staff in Stark County reported that for a number of years, the county commissioners did not directly involve themselves with the agency.
- Some counties, like Clark County, have had some success involving their county commissioners by providing them with information about services offered and by scheduling visits to the agency.

Potential Employers for OWF Clients

Many counties work directly with area employers. Job development teams were present in many counties and have a responsibility for making contact with employers.

- In Hamilton County, more than 20 employers came to the CDJFS to interview clients because of the tight labor market. The Hamilton County DJFS was active in making contacts with employers; for example, it provided special recognition for employers who hired a number of OWF participants and it sponsored a weekly focus group breakfast meeting with local employers.
- In Licking County, employers were reported to be very cooperative in working with the CDJFS. Workforce development caseworkers often call local employers in order to get clients placed into jobs. CDJFS caseworkers elicited many participants for a recent job fair by calling employers that they personally knew. One local employer offered a 6-week job training program that included training in basic work skills, customer service skills, and computer skills. The CDJFS paid for transportation to the training while the company covered the remaining costs.
- In Stark County, a monthly “JOBS” activity calendar is maintained for the agency. Employment recruitment meetings and informational seminars are held on an ongoing basis to encourage OWF client - employer interactions.

VI. Additional Issues of Interest

In each of the ten counties visited, several issues were raised repeatedly by agency staff as having a major impact on OWF implementation, though no significant variation among counties was found in the treatment of these issues. Reliable transportation and child care were cited as nearly universal client needs, while funding changes provided the counties with flexibility to meet local needs as well as management challenges. These issues are discussed briefly below.

Client Needs: Transportation and Childcare

Lack of transportation was a commonly cited problem in all counties, both urban and rural. At each county visited, caseworker staff discussed the issue of transportation and the role it played in OWF work-related requirements. As OWF mandated that participants attend training and work activities, it also required that transportation to these locations be available. All ten counties attempted to address the transportation needs of their OWF clients in one way or another. All provided clients with public transportation vouchers. Several counties also used PRC funds to purchase or maintain cars for clients, while others contracted with taxi or van services to transport clients.

Childcare was mentioned as a prominent factor affecting OWF implementation nearly as much as transportation. The topic of childcare was raised because most OWF clients need safe and reliable childcare in order to fulfill their training and work-related OWF requirements. Many counties indicated that there were several childcare options available to OWF clients, but these were often not easily accessible by the transportation means present. Agency staff also indicated that evening childcare was particularly hard to obtain.

Funding Changes

Under OWF, ODJFS allows the counties to select how they receive TANF and other funds. Counties can choose to receive funds from the separate program allocations or from two kinds of combined allocations. Consolidated Funding Option 1 consolidates the following separate allocations: (1) Adult Protective Services (APS) Allocation; (2) County Child Care Allocation, (3) Federal Social Services Allocation, (4) Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET) Allocation, (5) Income Maintenance (IM) Control Allocation, (6) Refugee Resettlement Social Service (RRSS) Allocation, (7) State Operating Allocation and (8) TANF Allocation. As the Ohio Administrative Procedures Manual indicates, this option allows the county to “focus on providing services to needy individuals [as a generic class] rather than staying within the separate allocations.” Consolidated Funding Option 2 consolidates only the state funding sources (allocations 1, 5 and 7 above).

During the visits, county agencies repeatedly expressed their enthusiasm about the ability to use a consolidated allocation. The consolidated funding arrangement was considered to be a major administrative benefit of OWF. It provided the counties with flexibility to meet emergent needs and it reduced the amount of time and effort that they previously expended on maintaining accounting

categories. All ten counties chose the first option described above, which provides counties with one revenue source for many CDJFS programs.

VII. Summary

OWF and PRC have evolved since their initiation in 1997. At the state level, the integration of human services and job services into a combined department has influenced program administration at the local level. The effects of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) are still emerging through the human services system. The availability of additional funds through PRC-DR allowed a substantial expansion of services.

The overall result of these program changes and Ohio's state-supervised, county-administered model for administering job and family service programs, is that counties are implementing OWF in a variety of ways. This report describes apparent patterns or themes in county-level OWF implementation that emerged during visits to ten counties in the spring of 2001.

Casework services to clients tended to be organized and delivered in one of three ways. Some counties trained their caseworkers to be generalists who managed all aspects of their clients' case. Coordination of services and monitoring client compliance with OWF requirements was seldom a problem with this total case management approach. Other counties segmented the case management process into eligibility determination and work activities functions, creating or contracting with specialists in each area. Still others, created special units to work intensively with clients approaching time limits.

In all counties, caseload levels and staff retention were important topics. Although OWF caseload levels have dropped in most counties, caseworkers still report that their workload is high, because of the frequency and intensity of the work they do with their remaining clients. The physical organization of many agencies also affected their functioning. Communication and case coordination between co-workers was sometimes hindered by their location in separate buildings or separate parts of the same building.

All counties employed contractors to varying degrees to provide OWF and PRC services to clients. In some instances, they provided highly specialized testing and assessment services at the request of agency caseworkers; in others, they performed all of the functions of a work activities caseworker. They often saw clients off-site, away from the CDJFS office, but some worked in agency quarters and were nearly indistinguishable from agency staff.

Community relationships were also integral to the functioning of county agencies. CDJFS relationships with their county commissioners and local employers were especially important. Some

counties enjoyed ongoing, productive relationships with their county commissioners while others experienced less involvement. All counties courted local employers to some degree in an effort to develop job training or placement opportunities for clients. CDJFS attempts to involve employers in agency activities included the sponsoring of breakfasts, focus groups, and job fairs.

This first site visit report provides an overview of the major issues and approaches in the ten counties visited. The second set of site visits, expected to occur in the fall of 2002, will further explore the variables discussed above and also examine how the counties have changed in the meantime.