

Wages Work!

**An Examination of New York City's
Parks Opportunity Program (POP) and Its Participants**

by Sondra Youdelman with Paul Getsos

A Research Project by

Community Voices Heard

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About the Authors

Sondra Youdelman is the Public Policy and Research Director of Community Voices Heard. She specializes in welfare, workfare and transitional jobs programs and policies. She has a Masters in Public and International Affairs from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School.

Paul Getsos is the Executive Director of Community Voices Heard. He has worked for 12 years on economic justice organizing, welfare and work issues, and is a co-founder of Community Voices Heard.

Community Voices Heard

Community Voices Heard is a membership organization of low-income individuals, mostly women with experience on public assistance, working together to build the power of our families, our communities and low-income people. We are working to accomplish this through a multi-pronged strategy which includes community organizing, public education, public policy work, coalition building, leadership development, training low-income people about their rights, political education and direct-action issue campaigns. We are led, directed, run and being built by low-income people ourselves. While we were founded by women on public assistance to impact on the welfare system, we now focus on economic justice. We broadly define this to be multi-issue, and thus must include concerns related to welfare, education, our children's schools, job training, living-wage jobs, housing, economic development, and other important community issues. From our start in 1994, we have grown to a membership of over 8,000 families in 2004.

The logo for Community Voices Heard, consisting of the letters 'CVH' in a bold, white, sans-serif font on a black rectangular background.

Community Voices Heard

170 East 116th Street, Suite 1E
New York, NY 10029
212-860-6001
www.cvhaction.org

Fighting for our families!! Fighting for our lives!! Fighting for OURSELVES!!

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Executive Summary

The Parks Opportunity Program (POP) is the largest public sector paid transitional jobs program in the country. When initiated in March of 2001, nearly 3,500 New York City welfare recipients, who were approaching or had passed their five-year federal time limit on public assistance, were offered 11 ½ month paid positions in New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation.

The POP Program, along with other Transitional Jobs Programs in New York City, represented a significant shift away from forcing welfare recipients to perform unpaid workfare assignments (known as WEP) toward paying people a wage for working in city agencies on a transitional basis.

This report looks deeper into the experiences of the POP workers. Community Voices Heard (CVH) initiated a survey of 200 former POP participants, examining their experiences both in POP and WEP. Their responses, in addition to findings from other transitional jobs research, welfare to work studies, and documents generated by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and Human Resources Administration, tell an important story about the value of transitional jobs and the policy and programmatic challenges yet to be addressed.

POP participants, unlike WEP workers, earned a wage between \$9.38 and \$12.50 an hour for 40 hours a week. Four days a week they worked in City parks. One day a week they attended a Job Assistance Center (JAC) or participated in the Parks Career Training (PACT) program. JAC and PACT were to offer them a variety of job readiness, job search activities and/or education and training opportunities.

Unlike WEP workers, they had City job titles and were District Council 37 union members. They accrued vacation and sick leave, like other salaried City workers. They also paid into Social Security, paid taxes and were eligible for the state and federal Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC).

The POP participants replaced unpaid Work Experience Program (WEP) participants in the Parks, and performed jobs critical to keeping New York City Parks clean and maintained. They contributed immensely to the functioning of the City, and saved Parks Department funding as well.

Earning a paycheck transformed the way participants felt about work and their desire to gain long-term employment. It also increased their monthly income, improved their quality of life and built their sense of self-esteem. They learned the respect, demands, and challenges that come with real jobs. In these regards, POP was a marked improvement over WEP.

However, limitations of the program are also apparent. Poor employment outcomes suggest that the POP program might better incorporate lessons learned from other traditional transitional jobs programs such as support services to address barriers to employment, and intensive job placement and job retention services coupled with education and training.

This report uncovers lessons learned from this large-scale experiment and sets forth recommendations for improving POP in the future.

Major Research Findings

Finding 1: Wages are an Important Component in Motivating Welfare Recipients to Move Off of Welfare

A. Wages Matter

Survey respondents specifically pointed to the benefit of certain program aspects that changed the way they felt about work and their desire to gain long-term employment. Of those surveyed, 97.6% said that earning a paycheck made a difference. Participants felt much better about themselves earning a wage in POP (87.9% feeling above average) than they did doing unpaid workfare in WEP (22.4% felt above average).

B. The POP Program Motivated Participants to Want to Leave Welfare

Of those that completed the program, 98% said they would have liked to keep working in a full-time job. Nearly all (96%) of respondents said they felt better than they had while receiving public assistance. A similar number (92.9%) of POP participants responding felt their quality of life had improved while in POP due to the money they were earning and improved self-esteem. Of those surveyed, 79.1% were actively looking for work after program completion. Those that were not had childcare issues (40%), were in school or a training program (26.7%), or had health limitations (13.3%).

Finding 2: Parks Opportunity Program Workers Did Real Work Needed for the City

A. POP Workers Did Work Critical for the City

POP Workers held City titles such as City Seasonal Aides (CSAs), City Park Workers (CPWs), Park Enforcement Patrols (PEPs), and Playground Assistants (PAs). They maintained the City's 1,700 parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities by cleaning and landscaping the parks, repairing facilities, staffing recreation centers, assisting with office administration, providing security at facilities and events, and more.

B. POP Workers Were Often Asked to Work Overtime

The importance of the role that POP workers played for the New York City Parks Department is reflected in the fact that 61.2% (60) of the workers surveyed were asked to work overtime during their course of employment. Of these workers, close to 70% were asked to work overtime between 3 and 10 times.

Finding 3: The Parks Opportunity Program Improved the Lives of Most Welfare Recipients Participating in the Program

A. POP Workers Had More Monthly Income than Welfare Recipients

At a wage of \$9.38/hour, a POP worker earned \$19,510/year (\$23,506 with Food Stamps and the EITC) as opposed to less than \$9,000/year for a family on welfare (with Food Stamps). 89.9% of those surveyed had more monthly income (even after taxes and deductions) during POP than they had while solely receiving public assistance. Moving beyond their state of previous crisis, 36.4% of them were even able to save money. Participants were eager to maintain the stability and well-being associated with earning wages at this level.

B. POP Workers Saw Their Quality of Life Improve

Of those surveyed, 92.9% felt that their quality of life had improved in POP. Responses pointed to people's increased economic security and the positive family spillover effects. Participants were able to pay the bills and often have a few dollars left over at the end of the month. They could buy things for, and do things with, their family that they were unable to do prior to participation in POP.

C. POP Workers Gained Greater Self-Esteem

Of POP respondents, 87.9% said they felt above average (good or terrific) about themselves while participating in POP. Only 22.4% of them felt so positive while in WEP. They commented on their new feelings of independence and their rising self-esteem. Many mentioned that their children felt proud of them, and they felt proud of themselves, for being able to provide for their families.

Finding 4: The Parks Opportunity Program Prepared People for Work Better than Unpaid Workfare/WEP

A. POP Workers Gained Skills On the Job

Of POP workers surveyed, 70.7% responded that they had learned new skills on the job. The percentage was higher still for City Park Worker titles (77%). Training was generally done on the job. Of those surveyed, 94.1% said that they had been trained on the job while working and 61.2% learned new skills from their supervisors. The vast majority of respondents (76.9%) said that the training was similar across all POP workers. In contrast, only 39.2% said they had gained skills while participating in the Work Experience Program (WEP).

B. A Variety of New Skills Were Learned

The bulk of new skills learned or practiced were based in the following areas of the work: equipment usage (71.4%), maintenance/cleaning (48.6%), painting (44.3%), and landscaping/horticulture (31.4%). A smaller group cited other newly learned skills, including security (11.4%), clerical/administration (7.1%), customer service (5.7%), recreational coordination/planning (5.7%), and driving (2.9%).

Finding 5: POP Program Model Fails to Incorporate Critical Elements Typical of the Most Effective Transitional Jobs Programs

A. Work Supports Were Neither Fully Accessible Nor Sufficient

Of those surveyed, 92.9% had their cash public assistance cases closed within a month of when they started their jobs, requiring access to work supports to supplement the wage of \$9.38 an hour. Inconsistent access to these supports meant that, while almost all survey respondents' cases were closed, only 68.7% received other types of benefits to help make ends meet while in the program. Participants felt that the following additional supports would have been helpful: increased Food Stamps (55.7%), expanded Medicaid access (34%), better rental assistance (13.4%), more childcare funds (12.4%) and supplemental cash assistance (6.2%). Based on the Self-Sufficiency Standard and Calculator of NYC, a family of 4 living on the POP wage would likely have a monthly shortfall of \$1,942 (difference between their income and their expenses) without work supports.

B. Job Search and Employment Services Were of Poor Quality and Education and Training Was Limited

Overall, only 50% of POP participants found themselves better equipped or skilled to get a job due to their JAC and PACT job services participation. The bulk of services offered to participants focused on job readiness and job search instead of education and training. Participants considered the services offered only slightly above average in quality. 91% felt that the job readiness/job search assistance could have been improved. 84.4% felt that additional training would have further helped them to get jobs post-POP.

C. POP Program Failed to Address Individual Barriers to Employment

Among participants currently unemployed, a variety of individual barriers to employment were mentioned: lack of GED (45.8%), lack of education/certification (34.9%), lack of job experience (31.3%), lack of childcare (30.1%), and more. Many of these barriers hit Latinas harder than African-Americans: 43% of Latinas surveyed cited lack of English proficiency as a serious barrier, 54% a lack of GED, 43% a lack of education/certification, and 46% a lack of job experience. Additionally, those lacking high school diplomas or equivalencies found these education-related barriers to be their most prominent.

D. Program Length is Insufficient to Achieve All Stated Goals

All POP workers felt they could have benefited from a longer transitional jobs program. 49% said that an ideal length would be 2 years, 21% said a year and a half, and 30% said one year. This was regarded as important to help people stabilize their financial circumstances and also advance their skill sets through on the job experience and additional training.

Finding 6: POP Failed to Connect Most Participants to Paying Jobs, Thereby Forcing Many to Return to Welfare**A. Program Design May Have Resulted in Limited Post-Program Placement**

Only 15.5% of respondents were employed at the time of the survey. A slightly higher percentage (22%) had held at least one job since POP. This may be attributed to the difference between the skills they obtained on the job and the jobs available in the market. Additionally, critical program elements that are often present in other transitional jobs programs with higher post-program placement rates were missing or of a low quality in POP (such as case management, on-the-job mentoring, placement services, etc.). This is likely responsible for some of the poor employment outcomes of POP.

B. High Unemployment Rates Put Hard-to-Employ Population at Further Disadvantage

Individuals lacking post-program employment cited the lack of jobs available in community (80.7%), pay not being enough to support a family (42.2%), and lack of jobs available in a particular occupation (34.9%) as community-wide barriers to employment. Participants completed the program during a time when NYC and the rest of the country were amidst a recession with a high unemployment rate and weak economy. The unemployment rate for NYC residents was at an average of 8.2% in 2002 as compared to 5.7% in 2000. It was higher yet for individuals with less than a high school education (9.7%), for Non-Hispanic Blacks (11.0%) and for Latinos (9.6%). For single mothers in NYC with less than a high school education, characteristics common to most POP workers, unemployment was at an astounding 19.3% in 2003 and the percent employed a low 39.4%.

C. When in Need, Unemployed Program Leavers Frequently Returned to Public Income Support Programs

Most POP participants wanted to stay off of welfare permanently, and stressed this in every conversation. This, however, was not possible for many. After completing POP, those that still did not have employment turned to the unemployment benefit system for their survival. 85% of respondents accessed unemployment benefits at some point. The great majority (79.1%) were actively looking for work throughout, but the intersection of the economy and their low education and skill levels meant that jobs were hard to secure, particularly without needed assistance and supports. Over half (57.8%) had already returned to cash assistance when surveyed.

Transitional Jobs Program Recommendations

1. A Variety of Positions Should be Offered in Multiple City Agencies and Not-for-Profits

While Parks positions provide certain opportunities, individuals are limited in the skills learned on the job. Additional opportunities in a variety of fields could match the diverse interests and backgrounds of participants. Ideally, skills learned and practiced in the transitional job should reflect changes and growth in the labor market.

2. Links to Long-term Employment Must be Provided

The employment outcomes of POP suggest that more needs to be done to ensure the effective outcomes apparent in other transitional jobs programs. Enhancing job search, as well as job placement and retention services, could directly address this issue.

3. Training and Education Opportunities Need to be Available

In order to boost people's competitiveness in the job market, transitional jobs programs should be structured to allow participants to enhance their qualifications through multiple education and training options. This is critically important when the potential workforce lacks a high school degree or the equivalent.

4. Program Length Should be Extended

An ideal program should support transitional employment for up to a two-year period; this time and flexibility are important for reasons of stabilizing participants' economic circumstances, for enhancing participants' skill and education level, and for meeting the particular needs of the varied individuals in programs.

5. Diverse Backgrounds of Participants Must be Considered

Any program that will truly be able to boast success must meet each participant where he or she is and assist each individual in getting to where they want to be. A "one size fits all" approach will fail. There must be enough options and flexibility in program design to meet the varied backgrounds, needs, and interests of each participant.

6. Access to and Scope of Work Supports Need to be Expanded

Programs should facilitate low-wage workers' access to additional supports, and policies should expand their scope. Transitional job programs should assist participants in obtaining all the supports for which they are eligible in order to reinforce the move off of welfare and support job retention; they should also provide people with information of the different supports they are eligible for upon program completion.

We definitely did REAL work. Because of POPs workers, the parks are much cleaner, safer, the children can play and we're bringing the community back to our parks. We've done everything from cleaning gyms and men's locker rooms to doing outside and inside maintenance. We've mowed lawns and cut grass. We've planted thousands of bulbs. We've painted all of your park gates and benches. You don't pick up your dog poop...we pooper-scoop. You name it, we do it! If we did not clean for one week, how would your parks be? The garbage would be full and running over. There'd be glass all over and the parks would be unsafe. Who would clean the leaves and the snow?

– Constance J.

Introduction

In 2001, Rosa A. - who dreams of being a doctor, Maura G. - who wants to be a secretary, and Countess H. - who aspires to be a Social Worker, were three of the 3,495 people sent to work in New York City's new welfare-to-work program. All three women, who are mothers receiving public assistance from the federal welfare program Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), took part in the country's largest public sector transitional jobs employment program for people on welfare - the Parks Opportunity Program (POP), a New York City Transitional Jobs Program, which placed welfare recipients in paid positions working in a majority of the city's 1700 parks and recreation centers.

All of these women, and others like them, wanted to work and move off of welfare. They sought education, training, and job experience so they could find permanent employment and take care of their children. When the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) asked them to work in a new welfare-to-work program, they did so, happily. They were promised a paying job with training and assistance to help them move off of welfare.

While working, they did a commendable job helping to maintain New York City's massive parks system. They made sure parks were open and available to community residents, took care of children in after-school programs, and kept facilities like pools, tennis courts and recreation centers clean and safe to use.

While these women - and thousands like them - worked for the city, the programs that were to help them move successfully off of welfare had mixed results in helping these women transition from welfare to work. The POP program had a positive impact in improving the lives of these women, increasing their income, giving them self-esteem and pride in work, and also had a positive impact on their families and the people who used the city services where they worked. It also taught these women skills and gave them work experience that motivated many to seek employment once the program was over.

However, the program did not live up to the expectations or the needs of the participants in giving them the education and relevant training they would need once they left the program. Education was lacking, and training in skills outside of the Parks Department was rare.

This report will show that the Parks Opportunity Program was a mixed success. It proves to be a very effective large-scale public works program that was able to put thousands of unemployed people, many with little employment experience, into paid employment. These people were working at real jobs, doing important work for New York City and its residents. They did such a good job, they were asked to work overtime and the New York City Parks Department advocated for extensions of the program.

In the tradition of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), POP was able to service a large number of people in need and put them into work doing critical jobs for the city. In addition, these jobs were union jobs with good wages and benefits. But, as a transitional jobs program that effectively moves people from welfare to work, the program had mixed success. Without individualized assessment, comprehensive services, and effective career development and training, the program failed to live up to the needs of its participants. It is a failure that is even more pronounced in an economic climate where jobs are scarce and competition among workers is fierce.

Transitional Jobs Programs Nationally

Transitional jobs are time-limited, publicly subsidized jobs that combine real work, skill development, and support services to aid hard-to-employ populations in their path to unsubsidized employment. Most existing programs focus on the welfare population, but some are serving broader populations including refugees, ex-offenders, public housing residents, and individuals with disabilities. Transitional jobs placements are typically in public or nonprofit organizations. Workers in such programs earn wages, like other workers, and often have access to additional support services (such as childcare, transportation, and work clothes), job mentors, job search assistance, concrete education and training and job retention services. The programs effectively help individuals gain employment.

A 2002 study conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. showed 81-94% of individuals completing programs found employment. Five of the longest running programs include Advancement Plus in St. Paul, Community Jobs in Washington State, Community Jobs Program in San Francisco, Transitional Community Service Jobs in Chicago, and Transitional Work Corporation in Philadelphia. As of May 2001, there were approximately 40 programs nationwide that serve at least 3,500 individuals at any given time (www.transitionaljobs.net).

The NYC Parks Opportunity Program (POP) added another 3,500 individuals in just one program. In comparison to other programs nationally, POP served more individuals at any given time, paid them a higher wage (to meet higher living costs in NYC and prevent displacement of union workers), had them working for more hours, and provided them with longer transitional job placements.

Research Design

Community Voices Heard began its exploration into the Parks Opportunity Program at the start of the program in March of 2001. Staff members spoke with POP participants at their work sites, in their job search centers, at organized job fairs, and one-on-one in their homes. Many of these workers also attended regular meetings that functioned as focus groups, revealing both their feelings about the program and their experiences within it. Contact with well over 1000 POP participants was made, often multiple times. Based on anecdotal information from these findings, CVH moved forward to implement a more comprehensive analysis of the POP program. An in-depth survey instrument was then crafted with the help of these POP workers with whom the organization had regular contact.

The survey questioned respondents about their personal background, history prior to POP, and program placement process. It then moved on to their experience during POP: at the job site and the job services site, in relation to their salary and work supports, and their quality of life during participation in the program. Finally, it closed with questions regarding their experience after POP, their current situation, and their general program feedback. The full survey instrument is attached as Appendix B.

CVH hired four surveyors to administer the 10 page survey to a random sample of former POP workers during the late summer and early fall of 2003. Community Voices Heard chose the random sample from a pool of 3,403 (of the total 3,495) obtained through our outreach and organizing work. The list of 3,403 was put in alphabetical order based on last name and every 17th person, for a total of 200, was chosen to be included in the sample.

The survey resulted in a 50% response rate. Of the two hundred participants included in the sample: 101 were surveyed, 36 had moved, 13 were unknown at their given addresses, 12 people refused to participate, 2 people were unable to complete the survey due to personal conflicts (pending lawsuits and health issues), and 1 person turned out to be a non-participant. Thirty-five individuals had multiple home visits attempted, but were never found at home. The short time frame of the survey collection, and the great distance between many of the homes, meant that some homes were never approached and other homes were approached once but never again.

100 women and 1 man were surveyed. Ages ranged from 25 years old to 55 years old, with an average age of 38. Race/ethnicity was self-identified as: 54 African-Americans/Blacks, 42 Latinas/Hispanics, and 2 Whites. The educational background of the respondents was quite varied, though the majority (57%) had less than a high school education. Of the rest, 9 had GEDs, 28 had high school diplomas, 4 had college diplomas, and 1 had a graduate diploma. The average household size of the respondents was 4, with themselves as the single adult family member.

**DEMOGRAPHICS OF GENERAL NYC FAMILY ASSISTANCE (TANF)
POPULATION COMPARED TO THAT OF POP SURVEY SAMPLE**

	NYC TANF PA Population * (As of Nov. '01)	POP Survey Sample (Participants '01; Surveyed Fall '03)
Gender		
Female	85%	100%
Male	15%	+ 0%
Ages		
18-24 Years	19%	0%
25-44 Years	52%	79%
45-64 Years	28%	22%
65+ Years	2%	0%
Ethnicity		
African-American/Black	42%	54%
Latino/Hispanic	49%	42%
White	7%	2%
Unknown	2%	2%
Other	1%	0%
Education		
Less than High School	49%	57%
HS / GED / Beyond	50%	42%
Unknown	1%	1%

* TANF profile information taken from NYC Public Assistance FACT SHEET. This demographic information excludes the Phase I POP workers. It is used here to demonstrate how the POP Survey sample group compared to the general PA population.

+ POP survey sample included 100 women and 1 man.

NYC Transitional Jobs Program History and Context

In 1996, the federal government passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Then President Bill Clinton wanted this federal welfare legislation to “end welfare as we know it”, and that it did. Rules governing assistance for people with children shifted from providing an entitlement to those in need to time-limited assistance and to prioritizing work activities over education and training.

At the time that the federal law was enacted, New York City already had a longstanding work program in place, the Work Experience Program (WEP). Welfare recipients “worked off” their benefits through mandated unpaid labor in various City agencies and not-for-profits. The new federal law with increased work requirements gave the go-ahead for rapid expansion of this program. At its peak, over 40,000 individuals participated in WEP.

As the City expanded its program, discontent among participants grew. Workers were frustrated with working for the city for no pay, next to well-paid union members. In 1999, Community Voices Heard, a membership organization of low-income New Yorkers, initiated a research project to uncover this hidden workforce. The report, *The Work Experience Program (WEP): New York City’s Public Sector Sweatshop Economy*, documented the critical work that workfare workers were doing for the City as well as the displacement of formerly unionized positions. [For a more detailed discussion of displacement, see Appendix A.]

Community Voices Heard initiated a campaign to transform the Work Experience Program into a paid transitional jobs program. In contrast to workfare, where participants work in exchange for benefits, transitional jobs programs provide a salary and the opportunity to receive education and training throughout the term of employment. Such programs are often funded by federal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Need Families) and Welfare-to-Work dollars, and can be designed to stop the clock on the federal five-year welfare time limit.

In March of 2000, CVH members, along with District Council 37 and the Ad Hoc Coalition for Real Jobs, were successful in organizing to get the NYC Council to pass the Transitional Jobs Program (Local Law Number 14), which was to create 7,500 paid transitional positions in the public and not-for-profit private sectors over a period of three years. The Giuliani Administration, however, refused to implement the program. CVH initiated an organizing campaign and legal challenges to pressure the City to create the jobs. Finally, in March of 2001, the Human Resources Administration (HRA) set up the Parks Opportunity Program (POP).

Phase I of POP on which this report is based, created 3,495 year-long positions, from March 2001 to April 2002, in the Department of Parks and Recreation. Jobs had a wage of \$9.38 to \$12.50 an hour, depending on job title, and were to last for 11 ½ months. They were union positions under District Council 37.

What is POP?

The Parks Opportunity Program (POP) is New York City's largest paid transitional jobs program. The Human Resources Administration (HRA) contracted with the Department of Parks and Recreation to create and run the program. Beginning in March/April of 2001, the Parks Department was able to hire up to 3,500 workers referred to them from the welfare system through HRA. POP workers in the first phase of the program were hired for an 11 ½ month period by Parks to work as City Seasonal Aides (CSAs), City Parks Workers (CPWs), Parks Enforcement Patrols (PEPs), and Playground Assistants (PAs).

Similar to all welfare participants obtaining employment, POP participants' welfare cases were closed and they were eligible for transitional benefits (Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Childcare). In gaining a City job and title, though temporary, they received the same benefits of union workers. They were DC37, Local 983 members, accrued sick leave and vacation time, and were eligible for overtime pay and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). POP workers were paid for 4 days of work at the job site and 1 day of job services activities (job readiness, job search, training, etc.) provided to them by the Parks Department through either the Job Assistance Center (JAC) or the Parks Career Training Program (PACT).

As of 2003, POP workers retain their status as welfare recipients and are no longer members of the union. POP participants have a new title, Job Training Participant or JTP, and receive a lower wage for doing the same work as their predecessors.

General job responsibilities included a variety of maintenance tasks and some landscaping; a smaller number of positions involved driving, security or recreational duties. The formal program was supposed to include 8 hours weekly of job search, training, and/or education time.

Midway through the initial phase of the program, the City threatened to cut the program duration to 6 months. Next, it attempted to outsource the program

administration to a private temp agency (TempForce) and lower the wage by almost \$2 an hour. CVH members, POP workers, and District Council 37, Local 983 successfully organized to prevent this from happening. Phase II of the Parks Opportunity Program (in operation during the latter half of 2002), while keeping the wage levels constant, limited participants to 6 month positions. Another 3,500 New York City welfare recipients were offered these POP jobs.

With over 6,700 participants, POP was by far the biggest and best-paid transitional jobs program run by the City of New York. In addition, concurrent with Phase I of the Parks Program, about 300 workers were placed in the Department of Transportation (DOT). Most of these workers maintained the Staten Island Ferry and parts of the Bronx highways. This program was started as a year-long program like POP but, citing budget cuts, the city cut workers' terms of employment. As a result of persistent organizing and a successful lawsuit, they were allowed to finish their terms in Phase II of the Parks Program.

Additionally, there have been some public sector placements administered by private temporary agencies. The Human Resources Administration (HRA) contracted with TempForce to place individuals in City agencies, including HRA. Most of these positions were of a clerical nature. Through this route, positions were not unionized and workers under this contract earned lower wages of between \$6.50 and \$7.50 an hour.

There are also private sector Wage Subsidy Program positions, created through a State Department of Labor administered program. State funds go to

intermediary organizations that then set up job contracts with private sector employers. The first 3-12 months of the workers' wages are paid for through the program, with the hope that the employer will decide to keep the workers on permanently after the subsidized trial period.

While one can argue about the relative merits of each of the programs in operation, they all provided workers with a wage for doing their work and the dignity that went along with receipt of the paycheck. Yet, tight fiscal times and subsequent budget cuts at the state and city levels are leading to the elimination of many of these programs. The TempForce contract ended and was not renewed. The Governor's Executive Budget proposed no financing for the continuation of the Wage Subsidy Program.

Other programs are being reduced rather than improved. Phase III of the Parks Program (begun in 2003) is a good example. Despite doing the same job as workers in Phases I and II, current participants only earn \$7.50 an hour (\$1.88 less than before) and no longer have union member status. A new City title, Job Training Participant (JTP), was created to accommodate this downgrade and positions are 6-months in duration, leaving even less time for education and training.

At the same time that resources are being withdrawn and programs weakened, the federal government is proposing increasing work hours and work participation rates for state welfare programs. These changes would necessarily increase state costs without additional federal funding.

What is WEP?

The Work Experience Program (WEP) is NYC Human Resources Administration's (HRA) version of workfare. For welfare recipients that are "employable" but unable to obtain full-time paid positions on their own, they are made to "work for their benefits" – giving work hours to the City in turn for receiving public assistance.

WEP workers are generally assigned work placements for 3 days a week. On their other 2 mandated days, most are sent to an Employment Services Placement (ESP) Program site to participate in job readiness and job search activities. A smaller number of recipients are sent to substance abuse treatment programs or education and training. WEP assignments in New York City have tended to be in City agencies (Parks, Sanitation, HRA, NYC Housing Authority, to name a few). ESP sites have tended to be private non-profit or for-profit agencies contracted by HRA, including Wildcat, America Works, FECS, NYANA, etc.

At the peak of WEP in New York City 40,000 welfare recipients were in WEP assignments at any one moment in time. According to HRA statistics at the start of 2004, the number of individuals "engaged" in WEP was approximately 19,000. WEP workers are not considered "workers" by the City. They have neither sick leave nor vacation time, and they are ineligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and other supports traditionally available to workers.

New York City, like welfare districts across the country, will have to decide how best to implement the changes. Saving dollars by cutting corners in the short-term will fail to pay off in the long run. Those that remain on the welfare rolls will need more, not less, support to successfully transition off public assistance. In New York State, individuals that time out of federal assistance are eligible for state and locally funded public assistance for an unlimited period of time. Costs saved in the short-run, in the form of fewer supports, could mean greater public assistance costs over time.

Profile: Marilyn Bezear

In all, I was working WEP for 2 years...Sitting there knowing that other people were getting a salary and I was doing the same work that they were doing – faxing, Xeroxing, typing, etc. – after a while, it just came to a point that I was feeling frustrated.

It was coming up to my five-year time limit. I went to 16th Street for some kind of appointment and while I was there I overheard someone talking about the jobs in the Parks Department. When they told me it was a paying job, I decided I would like to try it. They placed me in a park on Broadway and 125th Street – Claremont Park.

I was a City Seasonal Aide. Basically, most of my job consisted of cleaning bathrooms, doing garbage pick-up, and raking and picking up leaves. The hardest part of the job was when it snowed outside; we had to take shovels, shovel the snow and make sure that the paths in the park were clear for pedestrians. The job was hard but it was worth it, because the pay made me feel so much more self-sufficient. I felt good that I was able to support my daughter, my family better....

When I started the POP program, they took my Food Stamps, they took my regular benefits within 2 months time. They had told us that we were going to have it for 3-4 months, but they took it between 1 and 2 months. They gave me six months of Medicaid, but after 6 months, they cut me off and gave my daughter Child Health Plus. They said I was making too much to receive Medicaid. So, I had no health care for the duration of the time in the program.

[But,] I made ends meet. I opened a bank account for the first time. I had my check going through direct deposit, and I was even able to save a little money for my daughter's education.

The skills I learned in the Parks Department were good because I was able to later use them on my resume toward getting future jobs. With the WEP assignment it was different. It belittled me. One time I had my WEP assignment on my resume, but I took that off. Employers just didn't want to see WEP experience, they want job experience....



I've had four jobs since the job in the Parks. I did telephone surveying, I was a cashier, I did demos and customer service. Most of these jobs came through temp agencies, because this was the only way at the time that I was able to support myself. A job would start, but then it would end at the end of 2-3 months and I would go to another job. Most of these paid like \$7 an hour....

[Now,] I'm trying to support my family on \$9 an hour, 20 hours a week. It's not working too well. I receive Food Stamps, but that still doesn't cut it. I'm trying to make ends meet and do the best I can. It's hard, but I keep trying...I'm still looking for permanent work that pays more than what I'm making now.

Major Research Findings

Finding 1: Wages are an Important Component in Motivating Welfare Recipients to Move Off Welfare

A. Wages Matter

When asked to choose the two best things about being in POP, people felt strongest about: being off of public assistance (90.9%) and getting a paycheck (77.4%).

It felt good receiving a paycheck, instead of working for free. – Olga S.

Survey respondents specifically pointed to the benefit of certain program aspects that changed the way they felt about work. These included earning a paycheck (97.6%), having a job title (96.2%), having a supervisor (83.8%), and having a clear work plan (87.5%). The fact that a POP job is a real job with a paycheck, unlike WEP, made people far more excited about it.

What makes this program so much better than WEP is that we get a paycheck that we EARN every two weeks. That paycheck is what really gave me the drive to go out to work every day.
– Robin M.

Of those surveyed, 88.8% said that they would repeat POP because of the salary, liking work, and feeling motivated. In contrast, only 58.3% of those surveyed said they would do WEP again, in large part because they felt they would have no other choice.

B. The POP Program Motivated Participants to Want to Leave Welfare

I like to work. Getting up every morning...I had something to look forward to. I was finally off welfare.
– Geraldine B.

Survey responses show that welfare recipients want to work and earn a salary.

After completing the Parks Opportunity Program, 98% of those surveyed said they would have liked to keep working in a full-time job. Nearly all (92.9%) said they would have liked to keep working in a full-time permanent Parks job.

Unfortunately, a great majority of respondents (84.5%) were not employed when surveyed.

Yet, the drive to look for work was still there and going strong. 79.1% were actively looking for work and had applied to an average of 10 jobs each. Those that were not currently looking had childcare issues (40%), were in school or training programs (26.7%), or had health issues (13.3%).

98% of those surveyed said they would have liked to keep working in a full-time job. 79.1% were actively looking for work and had applied for an average of 10 jobs each.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN POP AND WORKFARE/WEP

	PARKS OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM (POP)	WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM (WEP)
Hourly Wage	\$9.38 - \$12.50	\$0.00
Salary	\$19,510 - \$26,000	\$0.00
EITC Eligibility	Yes	No
Cash Benefits	\$0.00	\$8,252 (average family of 4)
Duration of Position	11 ½ months	3 months – 3 years
Job Title	City Seasonal Aide (CSA) City Parks Worker (CPW) Park Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Playground Assistant (PA)	None
Union Status	District Council 37 Member	None
Sick Leave	Accrued	None
Vacation Time	Accrued	None
Clear Work Plan	Yes	None
Received On-the-Job Training*	76.9%	19.9%
Learned New Skills On-the-Job	70.7%	39.2%
Job Search	Job Assistance Center (JAC) Parks Career Training (PACT)	Job Assistance Center (JAC) Parks Career Training (PACT) Employment Service Provider (ESP)
Education & Training	Occasional	Rare
Felt Good About Self	87.9%	22.4%

** WEP figure here is based on results of a WEP worker survey from an earlier CVH report: "The Work Experience Program (WEP): New York City's Public Sector Sweatshop Economy". All other WEP figures cited in chart are based on questions asked of former POP workers related to their prior WEP experience.*

The desire to find employment is closely related to the positive experiences individuals and families had while in the Parks Opportunity Program.

I felt better about myself and this was transmitted to my family. – Celeste M.

My kids began to look up to me. They can now say, "Mommy has a job. She goes to work at 7AM every day." Now that I'm working...they are impressed with me. I'm happy now. I smile much more. – Robin M.

Similarly, their confidence in their abilities to get unsubsidized jobs (an essential component of leaving a positive impression during an interview and, in turn, securing employment) had increased. While only 60% of respondents felt confident while in WEP, 78.1% felt confident after POP.

Survey respondents reported an increased ability to juggle work and family, the ability to hold down a long-term job, and newly acquired skills and experience, as factors in their increased confidence.

I had a long-term job on my resume. – Janet N.

I had new skills. Parks made me more responsible, made me feel better about myself, so I felt that I would land a job. – Lakisha F.

The great majority of Parks Opportunity Program participants enjoyed working, felt better about themselves while working, and wanted to continue working. While in the program, their lives showed marked improvement and the improvement inspired a desire for a long-term shift from welfare to work.

Profile: Virginia Robles

Welfare sent me to the Monterey Welfare Center. I was there for 3 years working in WEP [NYC's workfare program]. I was doing everything – filing, answering phones, sending mail out, sorting mail coming in, etc. My supervisor was trying to hook me up in there and they told her they weren't hiring any WEP people. So...I decided to move on. Three years working without pay was enough!

I went to welfare and asked for the POPs job. My friend had received a letter about the jobs and I decided to get one. I wanted to get paid. They [welfare] sent me to Bronx River. They gave me my own playground with 3 other girls. We cleaned the park, taking graffiti out, picketing up leaves, cleaning the bathrooms, and making sure they were open in the summer. This job was GREAT – I was getting PAID! I was excited to get the check. It was much better than working for WEP – not getting money. Because, when you get your check in your hand right there...I was thinking about my kids. Every time I was getting paid, I could give stuff to my kids...



Virginia Robles with her son Eneriel Davila (age 14).

For me, POP was a good program. It helped me a lot....I like to work when I'm getting paid. Seven days a week I'll work. I don't care. Saturday. Sunday. If I get paid....YES...I'll do it. WEP, though, that's not worth it. For what? \$231 every two weeks. My family, we can't all survive on that....I don't feel comfortable when everyone else around me is getting their checks and not me.

Finding 2: Parks Opportunity Program Workers Did Real Work Needed for the City

I cleaned the bathrooms; wiping down the toilets, cleaned glass, mopped and kept it sanitized for people to use. I also raked, cut grass and painted benches. I made the Park clean and safe for the community. The community welcomed me, with open arms. They gave me a key to the park, and I was responsible for the entire park. Every morning, the community people would walk by and tell me thank you for cleaning the park.
– Lizabeth W.

The POPs program was great because I was working for the city doing important things in the park....I worked in Security and I helped out with special events at the Recreation Center; making sure people are in the right place for the event and have identification. I patrolled the parks, making sure parks users don't come in with liquor or bottles....we are needed in the park....All the kids would come after school, and I would check to make sure that the kids belonged there and I made sure the park was safe for children in the after-school program.
– Norma W.

A. POP Workers Did Critical Work for the City

POP employees performed a wide variety of functions within the Department of Parks and Recreation. Work assignments included indoor and outdoor maintenance, driving, recreation and playground assistantships, clerical, fix-it, horticulture and security.

Of those surveyed, 82.8% had the title City Seasonal Aides (CSAs), 13.1% were City Park Workers (CPWs), 2.0% were Park Enforcement Patrols (PEPs), and 1.0% were Playground Assistants (PAs). They worked in Parks (85.9%), Recreation Centers (7.1%), Playgrounds (4.0%), and Pools (1.0%).

The work at Parks sites was varied. Tasks included maintenance/cleaning, painting, landscaping/horticulture, recreational coordination/ planning, clerical/ administration, security, customer service, driving and more.

WORK DONE BY POPs AT PARKS	
Maintenance/Cleaning	89.9%
Painting	77.8%
Landscaping/Horticulture	51.5%
Recreational Coordination / Planning	23.2%
Clerical/Administration	19.2%
Security	14.1%
Customer Service	13.1%
Driving	8.1%
Other	6.9%

Parks Opportunity Program workers helped keep the 1,700 City Parks and Recreational Facilities clean, safe, and maintained for the rest of the City's residents.

It makes me feel good to know that other people see the quality of work that I do and that it is appreciated by my co-workers, supervisors, and people from the community. One of my biggest fulfillments comes from seeing the kids that participate in the events at Von King and the love and appreciation they show for the work that we do as CSA/POPs. We are a team that works hard and takes responsibility in the work that we do.
– Marva R.

B. POP Workers Were Often Asked to Work Overtime

The importance of this work is also reflected in the fact that 61.2% (60) of the workers were asked to work overtime during the course of their employment. Of this percent, the great majority (almost 70%) was asked to work overtime between 3 and 10 times.

Workers were generally compensated for their overtime work, but in a fairly inconsistent way. Most (about 80%) were paid time and a half (hourly wage x 1.5),

others were given comp hours (4 hours off for 8 hours worked overtime), others a combination (some time off, some extra pay), and some worked overtime for the same rate as their normal hours (\$9.38/hour to \$12.50/hour, dependent on position). When people were paid extra, the bonus amount was rarely distributed to them on time. Even with these inconsistencies, though, most agreed to work overtime whenever asked.

Finding 3: The Parks Opportunity Program Improved the Lives of Most Welfare Recipients Participating in the Program

A. POP Workers Had More Monthly Income than Welfare Recipients

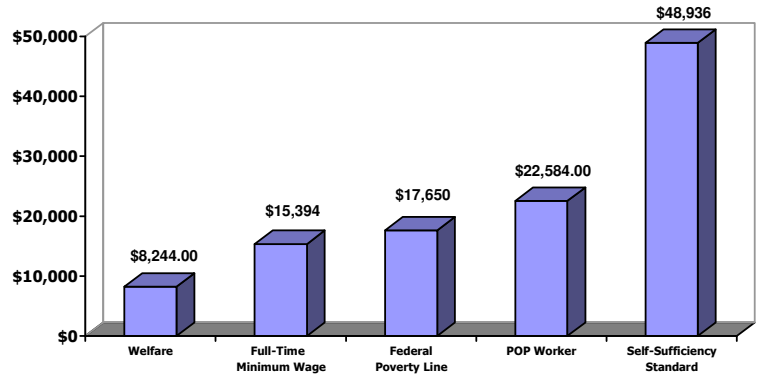
Of those surveyed, 89.9% had more monthly income (even after taxes and deductions) during POP, than they had while solely receiving public assistance.

Of those surveyed, 89.9% had more monthly income during POP. Of them, 36.4% were even able to save money.

Moving beyond their state of previous crisis, 36.4% of them were even able to save money. Participants wanted to maintain the stability and well-being associated with the increased earnings.

On average, a family of four would have seen their monthly income increase from \$687.70 cash benefits on public assistance to \$1625.87 (pre-taxes) while in POP. This represents a doubling of their income: from \$8,244/year with public assistance or \$19,510.44/year in POP. Additionally, upon filing taxes, POP workers would have been eligible at year-end for approximately \$3,888 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$916 in Child Tax Credits. Such families, while living on public assistance benefits, would have been barely surviving at 47% of the federal poverty level (\$17,650 for a family of 4 in 2001), but would have surpassed the federal poverty level while in POP.

POP Worker Income Compared to Other Benchmarks
Based on Family of 4 in 2001



Full time minimum wage and POP Worker categories include Earned Income and Childcare Tax Credits. Self-Sufficiency Standard is based on what a family of 4 in Brooklyn would need to earn to cover all their expenses. [See next page for explanation of Self-Sufficiency Standard.]

B. POP Workers Saw Their Quality of Life Improve

Of those surveyed, 92.9% felt that their quality of life had improved in POP. Responses expanding on this pointed to people's increased economic security, rising self-esteem, and the positive family spillover effects.

I could buy groceries, pay full rent, buy shoes and clothes for the kids...I felt GREAT!

– Virginia B.

Participants were able to pay the bills and often have a little left over. They could buy things for, and do things with, their family that they were unable to do prior to their participation in POP. They commented on their new feelings of independence. Many mentioned that their children felt proud of them, and they felt proud of themselves, for being able to provide for their families.

C. POP Workers Gained Greater Self-Esteem

While 87.9% of POP respondents said they felt above average (good or terrific) about themselves while participating in POP, only 22.4% of them felt so positive while receiving public assistance and participating in WEP. In expanding on why they felt so good, responses included the following:

TERRIFIC!

Getting a check every two weeks after all the years on PA. How do you think I'm going to feel?!?! - Arlene Q.

GOOD!

I really felt good; like an adult. I could bring money home and take care of my family. - Lakisha F.

What is the Self-Sufficiency Standard?

The Self-Sufficiency Standard for the City of New York was created by the Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement in September 2002. The self-sufficiency standard sets out to determine what a family would need to earn in order to meet all of their most basic needs. It calculates the basic costs of living given certain assumptions, and incorporates cost variations based on geographic location and family composition.

The components of the standard include the following costs: housing (taken from HUD Fair Market Rents), childcare (based on rates set by the Market Rate Survey conducted and analyzed by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services), food (taken from the USDA Low-Cost Food Plan), transportation (in NYC, an unlimited monthly Metro card), health care (including the employee's share of insurance premiums based on State of NY Office of Health statistics and out-of pocket health care costs from the National Medical Expenditure Survey), and miscellaneous (a category that includes essentials such as clothing, shoes, paper products, household items, personal hygiene items, and telephone).

The standard does not include recreation, entertainment, or savings. To put the standard in context, and demonstrate the disconnect between typical wage rates and self-sufficiency, the standard is compared to other benchmarks, including the POP wage, on the chart. A self-sufficiency wage for a family is necessarily far above the minimum wage. One can also use the Standard and the Calculator to model the impact of subsidies on monthly costs and the self-sufficiency wage, and to determine the benefits for which one is eligible given a particular wage rate. This demonstrates the important role that subsidies play for low-wage workers trying to make ends meet. (www.wceca.org)

Finding 4: The Parks Opportunity Program Prepared People for Work Better than Unpaid Workfare/WEP

A. POP Workers Gained Skills On the Job

Learning new skills was a major part of participants' experiences, with 70.7% of POP workers responding that they had learned new skills on the job. The percentage was even higher for those with City Park Worker (77%) titles.

Training was generally done on the job. Of those surveyed, 94.1% said that they had been trained on the job while working. 76.9% said that the training was similar across all POP workers. 61.2% had the new skills taught to them by their supervisors.

These figures are particularly interesting when contrasted with the percentage of individuals that felt they had learned new skills on the job in their previous WEP assignments. Out of the 158 WEP assignments carried out by the former POP workers (76.2% of POP workers surveyed had previously done at least one WEP assignment), only 39.2% (62) said they had learned any new skills on the job.

The low skill learning in WEP was also revealed in an earlier report put out by Community Voices Heard. *The Work Experience Program (WEP): New York City's Public Sector Sweatshop Economy* (2000) documented that only 19.9% of WEP workers in the Parks said they received regular training at their worksites, and just over ten percent (11.1%) reported receiving training in the use of maintenance equipment.

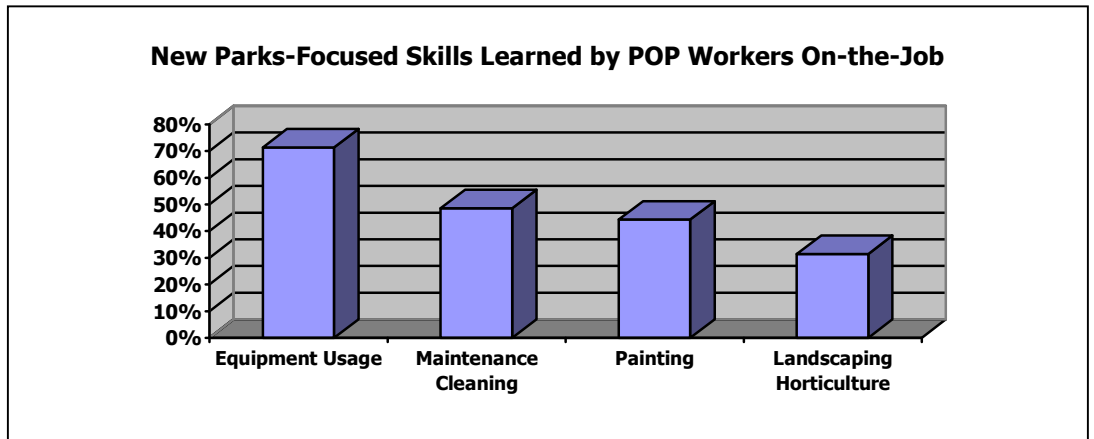
The training transmitted and skills acquired on the job were clearly of a higher level in the Parks Opportunity Program than those in the Work Experience Program.

POP workers had good experiences in terms of training and development at the job site. Of those surveyed, 72.2% considered POP to have been a useful program. An even higher percentage, 88%, said that they would do it again if given the chance.

B. A Variety of New Skills Were Learned

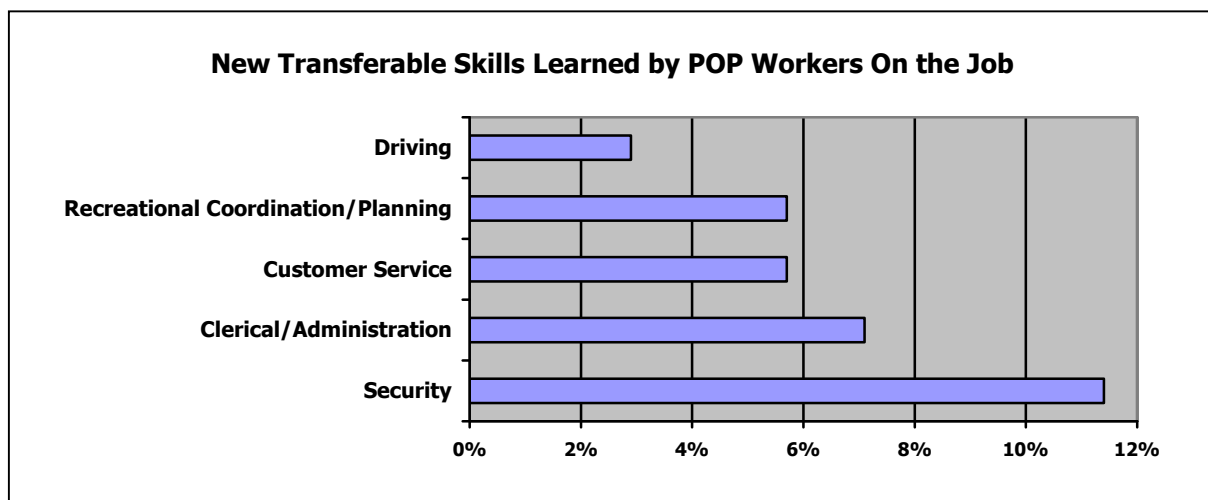
The bulk of new skills learned or practiced were based in the following areas of the work: equipment usage (71.4%), maintenance/cleaning (48.6%), painting (44.3%), and landscaping/horticulture (31.4%). Maintenance and cleaning skills learned focused on leaf raking and bagging, and snow shoveling and salting. Landscaping and Horticulture skills learned included grass cutting, tree trimming, and planting.

Some POPs workers, however, were also trained in less Parks-specific and more transferable, skills. These other newly learned skills included security (11.4%), clerical/administration (7.1%), customer service (5.7%), recreational coordination/planning (5.7%), and driving (2.9%).



Clerical and administrative tasks learned included record keeping, computers, filing, and reception.

Skills learned by participants were those important to their particular Parks positions. Their experience prepared them well for similar positions in the Parks and/or other maintenance-focused work. This same model of successful on-the-job training could likely be utilized similarly for other position types if a variety of placements (and not Parks only) were available.



Finding 5: POP Program Model Fails to Incorporate Critical Elements Typical of the Most Effective Transitional Jobs Programs

A. Work Supports Were Neither Fully Accessible Nor Sufficient

Work supports, knowledge of them, and easy access to them, are essential for success during a transitional jobs program and after an individual has transitioned to unsubsidized employment.

Upon entering the Parks Opportunity Program, 92.9% of participants had their cash public assistance cases closed (70% within the first month of starting work). However, 68.7% received other types of benefits to help make ends meet while in the program. Even with a wage of \$9.38 an hour and up, additional supports were clearly necessary.

I was working and depending on myself, but my family life didn't change much because I still didn't have enough money.
– Margaret A.

Based on the self-sufficiency calculator, an average family of 4 in New York City has monthly expenses of \$3,568 (see chart). An adult wage earner would need a salary of \$42,816 (or an hourly wage of \$20.27) to meet the most basic needs without public assistance, including rent, utilities, childcare, food, transportation, and healthcare. With an annual income of \$19,510.44, even a POP worker earning \$9.38 an hour could not be expected to cover all their expenses on their own. Rather, without additional work supports, such a family would have a shortfall of \$1,942 per month.

Critical Elements of Transitional Jobs Programs

Mathematic Policy Research, Inc. published a study in April 2002, *Transitional Jobs: Stepping Stones to Unsubsidized Employment*, which looks deeper into six wage-paid transitional employment programs nationwide. All programs had five key elements in common: their primary participants were TANF welfare recipients, they emphasized quick placement into jobs, jobs were wage-paying and temporary in nature, they monitored and supported participants' progress at the job site, and they required at least 30 hours per week in combined work and additional skill-based activities. All programs attempted to offer as much variety in work placements as possible so that participants had a chance to match their work to their interests.

In addition to the paid work component of the transitional jobs program model, the most effective programs nationally provide a comprehensive set of supportive services before, during and after the placement. These include assessment, education and training, support and supervision on the job, supportive services (such as transportation and childcare), and job search and job retention services. Existing programs vary, however, in the resources they use to address barriers to employment, the amount of additional skill-based training they provide beyond the job placement, and the degree to which they help participants obtain unsubsidized jobs and assist them in retaining them.

The Parks Opportunity Program provided good paying subsidized jobs to participants. Participants reported, however, a lack of other elements of the typical, and most effective, transitional jobs model. No variety of work placements was offered to participants, provision of supportive services was sporadic, access to skills-building education and training was poor, and job placement services were deficient.

SHORTFALL OF INCOME VS. EXPENSES FOR TYPICAL POP WORKER FAMILY ASSUMING NO WORK SUPPORTS <i>1 Adult, 1 teenager, 1 school age, 1 preschooler</i>	
Housing + Utilities	\$830
Childcare	\$1,200
Food	\$600
Transportation	\$71
Health Care	\$617
Miscellaneous (telephone, cleaning supplies, personal hygiene, laundry, household items, clothing, etc.)	\$250
TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES	\$3,568
Necessary Self-Sufficiency Annual Salary to Meet Expenses	\$42,816
POP Worker Monthly Salary (Pre-Taxes and Without Benefits)	\$1,625
POP Worker Annual Salary (Pre-Taxes and Without Benefits)	\$19,510
Annual Shortfall (Annual POP Salary minus Annual Expenses)	-\$23,306
Monthly Shortfall (Monthly POP Salary minus Monthly Expenses)	-\$1,942
<i>Self-Sufficiency Standard and Calculator for NYC, www.wceca.org.</i>	

However, despite the clear need for additional supports to make ends meet, not everyone received the benefits for which they should have been eligible. Survey respondents indicated the following rates of receipt for each of these work supports: Earned Income Tax Credit (88.3%), Medicaid (81.9%), Food Stamps (64.7%), Childcare (45.6%), Rental Assistance (27.9%), Cash (13.2%), Child Support (7.4%), and other (5.9%).

The reasons are unclear why individuals received supports at such different rates. Eligibility varies for each type of support.

However, based on income, it is likely that every participant should have been eligible to receive the Earned Income Tax Credit. Medicaid, Food Stamps, and Childcare are all part of the Transitional Benefit package in New York State. Different rates of benefit receipt suggest that these supports were not consistently accessible to participants. In addition, while participants may have been eligible to receive a benefit, some supports, such as housing and childcare, have run out of resources and have long waiting lists.

The next chart shows how critical these extra supports are for a family's ability to reduce or overcome their shortfall between monthly expenses and income. Assuming receipt of all work supports for which this typical family should be eligible, one's expenses could be reduced from \$3,568/month to \$1,494/month.

With these supports, coupled with extra cash from the Earned Income and Child Care Tax Credits, families might have had some money to spare to save for emergencies, buy school supplies for their kids, or save for their children's college education. However, take away one of these and families are forced to cut back: go without a phone, skimp on food, risk eviction from their apartments, and resort to poor quality childcare.

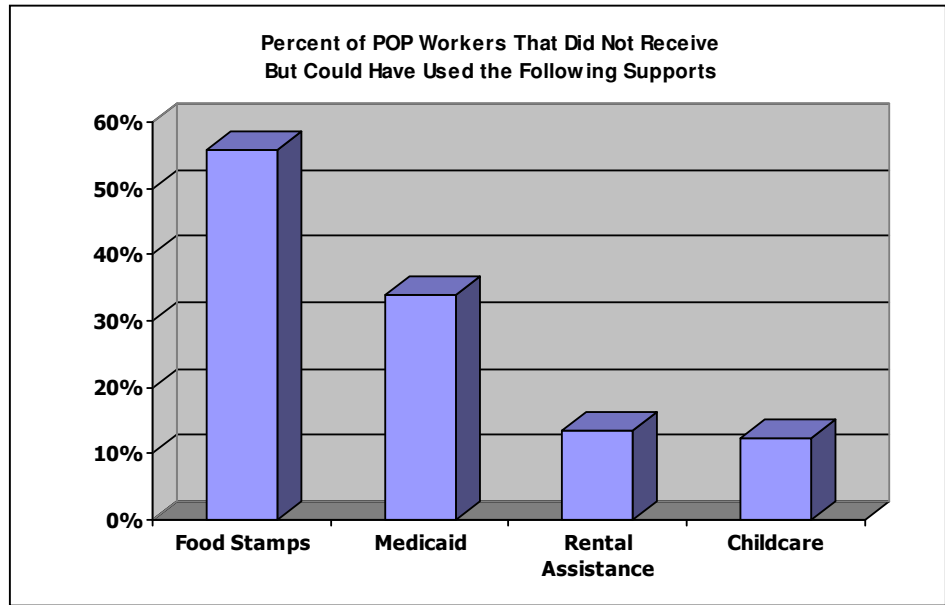
REDUCED BURDEN FOR A TYPICAL POP WORKER FAMILY WITH ALL WORK SUPPORTS		
<i>1 Adult, 1 teenager, 1 school age, 1 preschooler</i>		
Housing + Utilities	\$517	This assumes that family is receiving rent subsidies (Section 8, Jiggetts, public housing, etc.) up to the point that their rent payment is only 32% of their salary.
Childcare	\$20	This assumes childcare costs of \$1200/month are covered by ACD and a \$5/week co-pay.
Food	\$492	This assumes receipt of \$108/month in Food Stamps.
Transportation	\$71	The adult must pay for his or her own Metrocard. This does not include transportation needs of children.
Health Care	\$0	This assumes coverage by Family & Child Health Plus.
Miscellaneous (telephone, cleaning supplies, personal hygiene, laundry, household items, clothing)	\$250	Miscellaneous expenses of a family of this size are generally higher than \$250, but we are assuming no recreational and/or emergency expenditures.
Taxes	\$144	At \$19,410 per year, this family would pay this amount in monthly Federal Income, Payroll, and State & City Taxes.
TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES	\$1,494	Total Expenses and Taxes
Necessary Annual Salary to Meet Expenses	\$17,928	Total Annual Salary needed to cover yearly expenses, assuming all aforementioned work supports are in place.
POP Worker Annual Salary	\$19,510	POP worker Annual Salary (pre-taxes), assuming an hourly wage of \$9.38.
Monthly Surplus	\$131	Monthly POP Salary (\$1,625) minus monthly expenses, assuming receipt of all supports for which one is eligible.
Child Tax Credit	\$916	Amount this family would be eligible for from the Child Tax Credit at year-end.
Earned Income Tax Credit	\$3,888	Amount this family would be eligible for from the Earned Income Tax Credit at year-end.
TOTAL YEARLY INCOME	\$22,584	Figured as annual salary minus annual taxes paid, plus EITC and CTC.
<i>Self-Sufficiency Standard and Calculator for New York City, www.wceca.org.</i>		

The hardships faced by low-income, full-time workers in 2001-2002 are demonstrated in results of the Community Service Society of New York's "Unheard Third" survey, which surveyed 600 low-income, full-time working New Yorkers. When asked whether they themselves or any member of their families had experienced specific hardships during the course of the year, 14%

said they had not gotten or postponed medical care/surgery, 13% were unable to fill prescriptions, 16% received meals from family or friends due to lack of money, 10% went hungry, 9% used meal programs or food pantries, 27% fell behind on their rent/mortgage, 18% had their utilities cut off, 6% moved in with others, and 2% had to stay at shelters.

Unfortunately, because of inconsistent access to much-needed supports, many of the POP families suffered similar hardships. Even if individuals were to receive all the work supports for which they were eligible, the self-sufficiency standard does not include building for the future - saving, investing in education, and planning for retirement.

And, even though many participants received some of the aforementioned income supplements, when asked in an open-ended question what additional assistance would have been helpful, many responded with the same categories: Food Stamps (55.7%), Medicaid (34%), Rental Assistance (13.4%), Childcare (12.4%), and additional cash assistance.



Some received less than they needed to live comfortably, some had been denied benefits outright, others were ill-informed about what they would be eligible for and were, therefore, ill-prepared when reality set in.

They just closed it [my PA case] and I didn't find out until I got a letter saying my rent was overdue.
 - Jenny G.

The Human Resources Administration and the Parks Department clearly needed to do a better job of both informing participants about the additional benefits for which they were eligible (both inside and outside the welfare system) and facilitating their access to them. Such "case management" is a critical element of transitional jobs programs. In other programs nationally, case managers in the transitional jobs programs (in this case, staff at JAC and PACT) cooperate with TANF case managers (in this case, staff at HRA) to ensure access to supportive services. Better coordination between participating agencies in the POP program might have led to improved access for participants.

Wages Desired to Make Ends Meet

When asked what wage POP workers felt they needed to support their families, the average cited was \$11.00 per hour (with some individuals saying they needed as much as \$20/hour). The wages deemed necessary for supporting families were higher than the \$9.38 they were receiving, and far more than the current minimum wage of \$5.15.

According to the NYC Self-Sufficiency Standard (the amount of money a family needs to be economically self-sufficient), however, a family of 3 (one adult with one preschooler and one school age child) would need a wage of between \$20 - \$23/hour (depending on borough of residence) in order to cover all expenses.

This did not mean, however, that they were unwilling to accept lower wages. When asked what wage they would accept, respondents mentioned a smaller amount: the mean now falling to \$8.00 per hour. However, given the high costs of living in New York City, a strong package of work supports is critical in order to survive on this lower wage.

B. Job Search and Employment Services Were of Poor Quality and Education and Training Was Limited

In the Parks Opportunity Program, assistance in obtaining unsubsidized employment was offered through two different programs run by the Parks Department: the Job Assistance Center (JAC) and the Parks Career Training Program (PACT). JAC and PACT function as the job search and/or education and training component of the program. These two entities serve both WEP and POP participants.

According to Parks documents:

Each [JAC] center offers intensive workshops in such topics as resume writing, interviewing techniques, customer services skills, time management, budgeting, introductory computer skills, and typing.

Parks Career Training (PACT) provides intensive skills training, job placement services, and employment counseling...PACT workers are deployed in one of five training areas: clerical, custodial, fix-it, horticulture, and

security. Trainees attend classroom workshops in computer literacy, graffiti removal, plant identification, pest control, basic electrical and plumbing skills, floor care, and sheet rock installation, among others. They have the opportunity to attend weekly on-site classes in basic education, GED preparation, and ESL.

Of those surveyed, 91.9% were released from work for 2-8 days a month to attend a JAC or PACT program. 51.1% of respondents attended JAC and 44.3% attended PACT. Services were offered to participants in an inconsistent fashion: some were sent two days a week (16.3%), some one day per week (50.0%), and others two days per month (26.7%).

Reviews of the services offered, individuals' access to them, and the quality of them were mixed. When asked overall whether they found themselves better equipped or skilled to get a job at the end of receiving the given job services, only 50% said yes.

The survey responses indicate that the bulk of services received by participants focused on **job readiness** (time, behavior, hygiene, dress, etc.) and **job search** (workshops: resume-writing, interviewing, where to find jobs, etc.; activities: sending out resumes, going on interviews, etc.). English as a Second Language training was provided, but other training services were received on a limited basis.

SERVICE / TRAINING TYPE	PERCENT RECEIVED
Job Readiness	87.5%
Job Search Workshops	88.6%
Job Search Activities	61.4%
Job Retention Services	11.4%
English as a Second Language (% based on those in need)	50.0%
Adult Basic Education (% based on those in need)	11.0%
GED Preparation	10.9%
Drivers License Preparation (% based on those without)	12.3%
Commercial Drivers' License	3.5%
Civil Service Exam Prep	2.3%

The focus on employment, to the exclusion of education and training, is particularly distressing given recent findings on how education and training contributes toward successfully moving people from welfare to work. The most successful programs – in terms of promoting a sustained increase in employment and earnings – are those that offer a “mixed strategy”, including job search but coupled with education and training. Karin Martinson and Julie Strawn of the Center for Law and Social Policy highlight this linkage in their report, *Built to Last: Why Skills Matter for Long-Run Success in Welfare Reform* (April 2003).

The evaluation that leads to this conclusion is that of the random-assignment research carried out by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation in their *National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies* (NEWWS). Of the 11 programs studied, one showed results which far surpassed the others. This program increased average five-year earnings by 25% and the average number of quarters employed by 21%. The key factors that set this program apart from the others studied was the use of both job search and education and training, and the emphasis on holding out for a good job, not just the first available job. It also had a mixed strategy for matching program participants to initial activities: individuals that had ample education and training were sent directly to job search; those that could benefit from education and training were first sent to gain skills. This Portland, Oregon program deviated from the more typical “one-size-fits-all” approach and found its success in doing so.

A large percentage of the POP participants could benefit from training and education, if basic education is closely linked to job training. Again, in Portland, participants without high school diplomas participating in basic education activities had larger increases in their long-term earnings and self-sufficiency if they *also* participated in job training or other postsecondary programs. Those who participated in both basic education activities *and* job training had an additional \$1,542 (47%) in earnings in their third year of follow-up (Martinson and Strawn, 2003). Yet, for many people, the POPs program neither offered the opportunity to pursue basic education nor the opportunity to pursue additional concrete skills-based job training. This was especially true of the Latina population.

Some of the more focused education and training options offered by JAC and PACT were not offered as frequently to Latinas as African-Americans. Only 35% of Latinas that could have benefited from a GED were offered a completion course compared to 55% of African-Americans. Again, 49% of African-Americans were offered Driver's Prep classes and 22% Commercial Drivers License Training compared to only 36% and 3% respectively of Latinas. Also, fewer Latinas (5%) than African-Americans (9%) were offered Civil Service Exam Prep.

Some of the more focused education and training options offered by JAC and PACT were not offered as frequently to Latinas as African-Americans.

research does not necessarily point to the exclusive provision of ESL services as being the most effective approach. In another CLASP study, *The Language of Opportunity: Expanding Employment Prospects for Adults with Limited English Skills* (August 2003), a look at successful programs points us in a different direction.

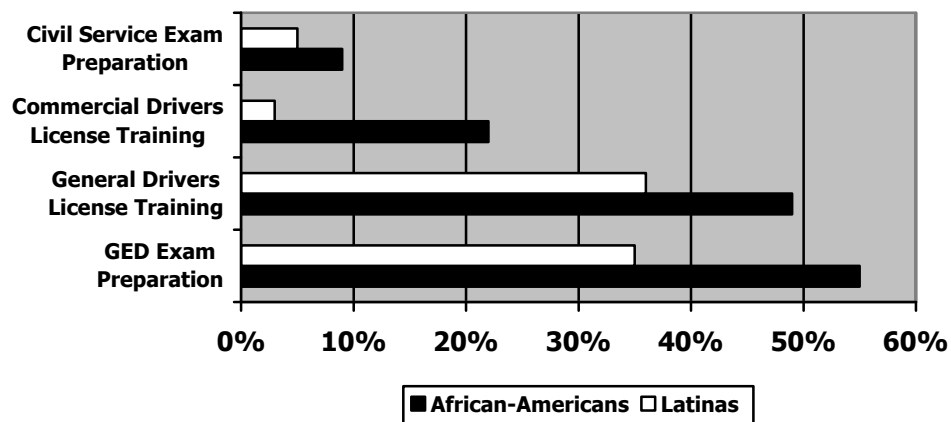
One of the most successful programs at moving Limited English Proficient (LEP) participants into good paying jobs was that of the Center for Employment and Training (CET) in San Jose, California. This program started individuals in job

training immediately, and integrated English language, literacy, and math instruction into the job training. A random assignment evaluation of this program demonstrated that participants increased their earnings by 45% more than the control group over a 2 1/2 year follow-up period.

It is possible that the smaller percentages of Latinas offered certain options over African-Americans is due to the fact that many Latinas were considered to be in need of English as a Second Language first. While the need for English proficiency is clear,

training immediately, and integrated English language, literacy, and math instruction into the job training. A random assignment evaluation of this program demonstrated that participants increased their earnings by 45% more than the control group over a 2 1/2 year follow-up period.

Percent of Individuals (By Race/Ethnicity) Offered Particular Types of Job Services



This approach was considerably more beneficial for participants than the more typical sequential approach, like that seemingly employed within the Parks Opportunity Program.

A high 91% of survey respondents felt that the job readiness/job search assistance they were offered could have been improved.

They sent us for interviews and there were no jobs. They threw your application in the garbage. They could have sent us to jobs that actually exist.

– Virginia R.

We repeated the same things over and over again. They never sent me out on job searches.

– Jane R.

Over three-fourths of survey respondents (85.4%) felt that additional training would have further helped them to get jobs post-POP.

Some of these services were not offered at all or only offered to small numbers of individuals. There is definitely a disconnect between what people want/need and what they are offered/received.

Training needs to have more options. Different people need different training based on their skills and experience.

– Countess H.

Given that education and training are essential to securing jobs, it is not surprising that the limited education and training offered to POP participants (many with low levels of education) was regarded as a drawback of the program.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL	
Computer Training	73.2%
Driver's License Training	52.4%
GED Preparation	37.8%
Civil Service Exam Training	36.6%
Vocational Education	30.5%
English as a Second Language	13.4%
Professional Training	11.0%
Landscape/Horticulture Training	7.3%
Basic Education	4.9%

While participants' education and skill levels were adequate for working in the Parks, they were not gaining more marketable skills in JAC and PACT. Had full-time, long-term jobs been available for many of them in the Parks, the training they got on-site might have been sufficient. This is particularly true considering so many participants (92.9%) would have liked to stay in their jobs. However, this was not an option. In fact, few (6.9%) were even given a chance to take preparation courses and work toward passing the Civil Service Exam. The limited education and career-track training offerings, and the perceived low quality of services, in JAC and PACT were to become a more obvious shortcoming of the program as POP participants entered the highly competitive recession job market.

While participants' education and skill levels were adequate for working in the Parks, they were not gaining more marketable skills in JAC and PACT.

C. POP Program Failed to Address Individual Barriers to Employment

While most POP workers were able to successfully hold down their POP job for the entire 11 ½ months and complete the program, many continued to face a variety of individual and societal barriers to employment.

Of participants currently unemployed, survey respondents acknowledged the following individual barriers to their employment:

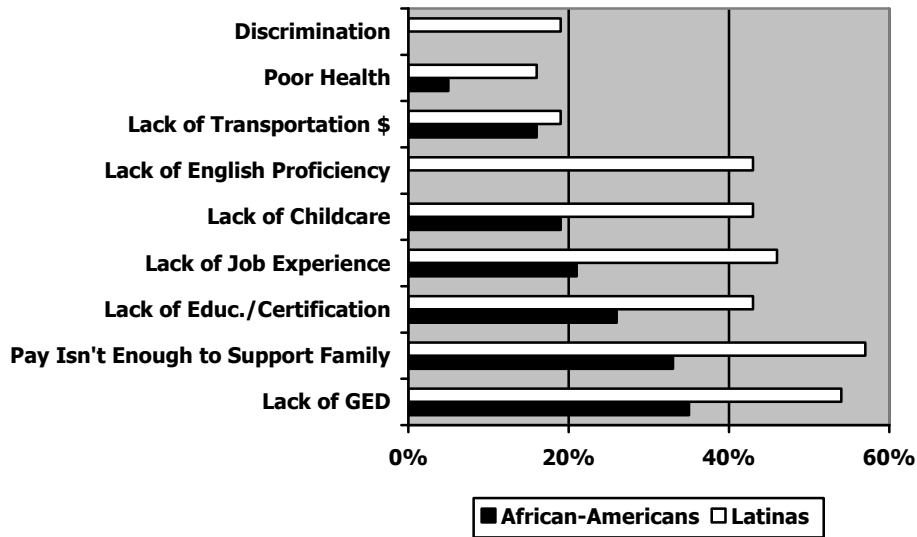
INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT CITED	
Lack of GED	45.8%
Lack of Education / Certification	34.9%
Lack of Job Experience	31.3%
Lack of Childcare	30.1%
Lack of English Proficiency	20.5%
Lack of Transportation Money	16.9%
Poor Health Condition	9.6%

A slightly deeper look reveals differentials in the disadvantages that people face in the labor market. For those lacking a high school diploma or GED, this was the most consistently mentioned barrier to employment – with 80% of that group citing their lack of GED as a barrier. Given that this group with less formal education needs to rely on other elements

of their background to market themselves for employment, the non-high school graduates also saw their lack of job experience as a greater disadvantage (35%) compared to the high-school graduates and GED holders (26%). Perhaps because this group is likely to be eligible only for jobs with the lowest wages, a higher percentage of non-high school graduates (48%) than high school graduates and holders of GEDs (29%) mentioned pay not being enough to support their families.

There were also disparities between ethnic groups. Consistently across categories, Latinas cited each barrier at a higher level than African-Americans. Discrimination, low pay, and lack of childcare are referred to here as individual barriers and in a later section are looked at for their structural elements. Given the difference based on race/ethnicity as evident in the chart, one might conclude that there are individual remedies (such as English language enhancement, concrete skills-building, connection to childcare services, etc.) that might assist people in overcoming the barriers as well as possible policy changes.

**Individual Barriers to Employment By Race/Ethnicity
(% of POP Respondents that Noted Category as Barrier)**



After completing the Parks Opportunity Program, many that still did not have employment (85%) turned to the unemployment benefit system for their survival.

Given that participants had not received the education and training necessary to propel them into living wage employment during the JAC and PACT program, and given that the recession we were amidst made it unlikely that they would all find jobs instantly, this would have been a good time for providing additional services to help people address their barriers and better prepare them for the labor market.

Unfortunately, no support was given to POP workers who had completed their program period. According to those surveyed, only 10.3% received a letter from HRA telling them about additional job search/placement services and/or education and training available to them

upon completion. It is not surprising, therefore, that at the time of the survey over half (57.8%) had already returned to cash assistance.

It is important to note that the New York State welfare law of 1997 created a separate state-funded welfare program (Safety-Net Assistance Non-Cash) for individuals that time out of family assistance. Individuals in New York State that are still in need of assistance beyond five-years have an option that is not available in many other states. However, this support should not substitute for resources and efforts to expand access and availability of work supports and address barriers to employment.

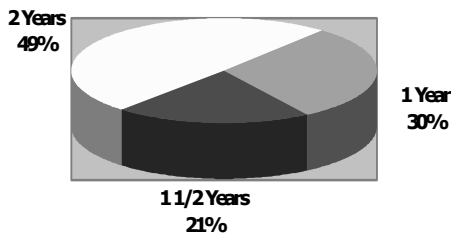
D. Program Length is Insufficient to Achieve All Stated Goals

The amount of time I was on the job was not enough to gain the experience I needed to get another job. The jobs need to be longer.

– Norma W.

Survey respondents questioned the appropriate length of the program. When asked what the actual length of a transitional job people felt they would need before being able to get jobs on their own, people tended to say a longer amount of time than had been offered was necessary.

Ideal Length of Time for Transitional Job



The extra time can help stabilize a participant's finances and improve the ability to complete education or training courses and certifications that can be useful in the labor market. Particularly for those with lower skills, it can take a significant amount of time to complete *both* basic education and job training – the combination of which pays off more than basic education alone, as mentioned earlier.

To gain proficiency in English (assuming it is one's second language), to pass the GED exam (assuming one has a low reading level and has forgotten all previously learned math), or to obtain a vocational certification takes time -

especially when one is juggling this with the additional requirements of work and family. And, given that individuals would be better suited for the labor market with BOTH English proficiency AND a vocational skill, or BOTH a high school equivalency AND a vocational skill, longer than a year is a necessity.

The extra length would also help participants perform more effective job searches. The first 6 months of the program tends to be a life shift for the majority involved. Participants need time to learn to juggle work and family, address previous personal barriers to employment, and settle into budgeting one's paycheck and expenses. Next, there is the time needed to focus on the education and training aspect of the program – improving and expanding one's skill set for the labor market. And finally, once obtained, there is the need to conduct the job search – targeted at one's area of interest and new skill set.

Additionally, demonstration of ability to maintain a long-term job after a considerable amount of unemployment is critical to marketing oneself as employable. The longer length of time of employment on one's resume can be a strong asset in the job market.

Finally, program sites can greatly benefit by longer-term placements. Multiple sites are more likely to see the value in taking on transitional workers if they can be assured that the workers will be on site for a substantial amount of time beyond their training period. Perpetually having a new workforce to train makes accomplishing necessary work tasks quite difficult for employers; being able to reap the benefits of a newly trained workforce, on the other hand, is appreciated.

Profile: Jessie Lyons

A few years back I was sent to do WEP at a food pantry. The place I was working in decided to hire me part-time. But, public assistance said I wasn't working enough hours of WEP....So, either I could do WEP full-time or get my case closed. Obviously, I did WEP.

I was under the impression that they [the welfare agency] would support me doing a part-time job, but it wasn't that way. So, PA sent me to the Parks as a WEP worker. I was there for 2 ½ - 3 months. Then they called me back to PA and told me I would be in the POP program. I was doing the same thing; I just got paid now and had a uniform. Other WEP workers didn't....

During the program, we went to JAC or PACT; I was in JAC. We went there 3 times a month – every other Tuesday...I got my 2nd job through JAC. They knew what I was experienced in, had interest in. I was looking for clerical work or whatever; I wasn't choosy. When the Parks job was over, I was only home for 2 weeks – hadn't even gotten unemployment – and they called me for an interview.

That was with HRA. I've been with them ever since. I'm a Clerical Associate. I do office work: use the fax machines, personal computer, answer phones and direct calls. I work in Central Files. I deal with all the case records and correspondence. I transfer papers and file everything.

We make \$8.62 an hour. I'm a temp worker through Paywise. In May, I'll have been there for 2 years. We don't get any benefits: no sick days, no holidays, nothing. I still get Food Stamps because of my grandson. He gets Medicaid; my daughter and I get Family Health Plus and Child Health Plus.

HRA lost its contract with Paywise. My last day is April 8th. So, I'm already sending out my resume. I'm sure I'll find another job; it's just a matter of time.



Finding 6: POP Failed to Connect Most Participants to Paying Jobs Thereby Forcing Many to Return to Welfare

A. Program Design May Have Resulted in Limited Post-Program Placement

Only 15.5% of those surveyed were employed when the surveys were taken. A slightly higher percentage (22%) had held at least one job since POP. While still a much higher post-program placement rate than that of the unpaid workfare program, in which none of the surveyed individuals had obtained jobs after participating, the placement results were limited.

As of May 9, 2003, JAC and PACT Job Placement Summary Reports had documented a total of 583 placements into unsubsidized employment. It is unknown whether these placements are of POP workers from Phase I, Phase II, or a combination. Phase I of the POP program started in March 2001, toward the end of FY01 (7/1/00 – 6/30/01) and ended in April 2002, toward the end of FY02 (7/1/01 – 6/30/02). Using the number of POP participants in Phase I as the population, the overall placement rate according to JAC and PACT would only be 17%. Considering these placements probably involve some Phase II POP workers, the real rate is potentially even less.

The number of placements and average wages of placements from each program by fiscal year (FY) break down as follows:

The types of jobs ranged from public sector (Groundskeepers, NYCHA; Custodial Associates, Department of Citywide Services; Clerical Associates, Department of Parks and Recreation) to private (Registered Nurses, Long Island Jewish Medical Center; Security Officers, Doar Security; Receptionists, Paywise; Custodians, TempForce).

As shown in the chart, PACT consistently placed individuals in higher paying jobs than JAC. As mentioned earlier, the PACT program tended to be more skill-building oriented than the JAC program. PACT claimed to focus more on career training, whereas JAC set out to simply assist in job search. According to POP workers with whom we had contact, none knew why they were placed in JAC versus PACT. But, clearly, the wage outcomes were better in one program than the other. A deeper look into the varied approaches of the two programs is merited. Should the different wage outcomes be based on the different levels of training offered, and not on the different abilities with which participants entered one program or the other, this could be further proof that concrete job training pays off.

JAC & PACT PLACEMENT NUMBERS & AVERAGE WAGES				
	FY 01	FY 02	FY 03	TO DATE
JAC	1 \$7.39/hr	83 \$7.95/hr	167 \$8.32/hr	251
PACT	9 \$8.82/hr	127 \$9.20/hr	196 \$10.11/hr	332
TOTAL PLACEMENTS	10	210	363	583

Critical program elements that were missing or of a low quality in POP, and are often present in other transitional jobs programs with higher post-program placement rates, may be responsible for some of the poor employment outcomes of POP. These include more formal screening and assessment at the start of the program (in order to be able to better match participants with the services they need), intensive case management with low advisor-participant ratios (so that there is someone available for support and guidance throughout program participation and during the transition), job skills training (education and training in addition to job search alone), job placement assistance (with personal job developers that do more than simply prepare your resume for you), and job retention assistance (that provide services and support for a period of time while the individual moves to unsubsidized employment).

The low placement rate may also be attributable, in part, to the difference between the skills participants obtained on the job and the jobs available in the market. Participants had few opportunities without jobs opening in the Parks Department, and with the majority of skills obtained being very Parks-specific. Little was done in the program to match skills learned on the job with skills needed in the labor market. This was compounded by the fact that the off-the-job training provided by JAC and PACT failed to provide participants with the additional skills or advanced education levels necessary to improve participants' marketable skills.

B. High Unemployment Rates Put Hard-to-Employ Population at Further Disadvantage

Individuals lacking post-program employment mentioned certain societal barriers as keeping them from obtaining jobs. These included the following: lack of jobs available in community (80.7%), pay not enough to support a family (42.2%), and lack of jobs available in a particular occupation (34.9%).

SOCIETAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT	
Lack of Jobs Available in Community	80.7%
Pay Isn't Enough to Support Family	42.2%
Lack of Jobs Available in Occupation	34.9%
Lack of Childcare	30.1%
Discrimination	8.4%

These widely experienced barriers, point to the need for both policy and program changes. Job creation and wage enhancing strategies (such as increased access to, and expansion of, the EITC), along with work supports, such as increased childcare, are critical. Two of the more frequently cited societal barriers were related to a lack of jobs in participants' communities and occupations. In addition to job creation strategies, program design should include a diversity of program placements that better match the local economy and available entry-level, career ladder positions.

An additional challenge faced by participants was their completion of the program during a time when NYC and the rest of the country were amidst a recession – with a high unemployment rate and weak state of the economy.

The U.S. economy entered a recession in March 2001. The unemployment rate for NYC residents was at an average of 8.2% in 2002 as compared to 5.7% in 2000. It was higher yet for individuals with less than a high school education (9.7%), for Non-Hispanic Blacks (11.0%) and for Latinos (9.6%).

The proportion of single mothers with paid employment declined in 2001, 2002, and again in the first six months of 2003. The unemployment rate for single mothers climbed from an already high 6.9% in 2000 to 9.4% in the first half of 2003. In NYC in 2003, the unemployment rate for single mothers was 10.1%, with those with less than a high school education considerably higher at 19.3%.

In 2001, an average of 74.5% of single mothers held jobs; this declined to 73.5% nationally in 2002, as POP workers exited the program. In 2003, the time when the survey was conducted and many former POP workers were still looking for jobs, the situation was even bleaker for single mothers in New York City – with only 62.1% employed.

For those with less than a high school diploma, the situation was even more challenging: in 2001, only 52.7% of single mothers with less than a high school diploma held jobs and in 2002, only 51.1%. And, in NYC in 2003, single mothers with less than high school education, the majority of POP participants, were employed at a low rate of 39.4%. (Figures based on *Community Service Society tabulations from the Current Population Survey*.)

C. When in Need, Unemployed Program Leavers Frequently Returned to Public Income Support Programs

Most POP participants wanted to stay off of welfare permanently, and stressed this in every conversation. This, however, was not possible for many. After completing POP, those that still did not have employment turned to the unemployment benefit system for their survival. 85% of respondents accessed unemployment benefits at some point. The great majority (79.1%) were actively looking for work throughout, but the intersection of the declining economy and their low education and skill levels meant that jobs were hard to secure.

At the time surveyed, 67.7% were receiving public assistance. Most were receiving Food Stamps (90.6%) and Medicaid (91.9%). Over half (57.8%) of these individuals had already returned to cash assistance. Of those that were not receiving assistance, 42.9% said they were not thinking of reapplying; many were depleting their newly accumulated savings in order to avoid the return.

Profile: Kathleen Carter

I liked the job because I liked the pay. The pay was great. I could pay the rent, Con Edison, telephone and cable all with one check. The next week I was able to buy a living room set, buy my kids clothes, etc....We could go to the store and buy things we needed; we could go out at times. I had the money. The Parks job made me want to work. It makes you feel good about yourself. It brings up your self-esteem.

[At my POP job] I had a supervisor. I had to let him know that I'm an adult, just like him, and he can't disrespect me. Even with welfare, I noticed that when you go inside the centers, they have a tendency to belittle you because you're on welfare. A lot of them came from welfare and they've forgotten where they came from...

Once I got the jobs in the Parks Department, I started to demand more of myself. Once I got the job, I didn't want to go back to welfare. To this day, I don't want to go back. I'm struggling now, but that's okay. Things will get better. They can't get any worse.

If you put people in a Park and give them a paid job, you'd be surprised at how many people will not go back to welfare. Their self-esteem goes up; they want a job.

[Now] I got a security job that's going nowhere....I make \$6.25 an hour for me and five kids....[this after] a 25 cent raise in January. \$6.25. This job has no benefits at all. If I could go back into the Parks, making the same thing I was making, \$9.38 an hour, that'd be good. I could live off that. I could really do justice with that.



Conclusion

The creation of the Parks Opportunity Program (POP) in New York City in the spring of 2001 was commendable. The shift that the Human Resources Administration (HRA) made away from unpaid workfare and toward paid transitional employment was a positive one, for the city and for welfare recipients. The city got a new large-scale workforce, and program participants got *real* work experience. Participants received job titles, performed critical tasks, worked with supervisors, received union benefits, and, most importantly, earned paychecks.

Receipt of a good wage changed the way participants felt about work, in a way that unpaid “work experience” never had. A good wage in a real job also improved people’s lives, better than workfare did. Their income increased, their lives improved, their self-esteem soared. They gained confidence that they could juggle work and family, and they enjoyed doing so. The feelings stimulated and circumstances created by earning a wage for their work were ones they wanted to hold onto. In this sense, the program was a success. Participants did not want to rely on public assistance anymore. However, few moved into long-term employment after the program. With inadequate case management, limited access to education and training, and poor quality job placement services, the program fell short of providing the comprehensive package that has made other transitional jobs programs successful.

The Parks Opportunity Program, Phase I, was an excellent public sector jobs program. It employed large numbers of individuals in good paying city jobs.

The POP program was one part of a multi-pronged effort by New York City’s Human Resource Administration to put people into over 10,000 transitional jobs working in New York City public agencies. It provided critical work for the City and paid off in positive community improvements.

However, as a transitional jobs program, POP failed to provide participants with the comprehensive supports that are indicative of smaller “boutique” programs. Specialized services, individual assessment and job services, and basic education and training for jobs outside the Parks Department were lacking and inconsistent. While the women participants in the program gave of themselves to the City, the City failed to work, in return, for the women.

It is our belief that what is needed is a fusion of the excellent large-scale living wage paying public jobs initiative with the positive elements of the higher quality transitional job support elements provided elsewhere. The Parks Opportunity Program was a step in the right direction, but critical improvements can and must be made in the program if it is to move beyond simply being a good *temporary* jobs program and toward an effective *transitional* jobs program. There are substantial upfront costs to establishing such a quality program. Wages, support services and training require a large financial commitment. However, the short-term and long-term benefits make it worthwhile. Such programs allow for work to be done that is critical to the community. They transform participants from recipients of public assistance to

providers of public assistance. They train a set of individuals to fill in labor market needs. And, when done properly, they connect people that have long been disengaged from the workforce to sustained employment. With all this in mind, we recommend movement forward in the improvement and expansion of paid transitional jobs programs with living wages, real jobs, union representation and excellent education and training components, in New York City. POP should be improved to build on current benefits and address challenges to more effectively ensure long-term economic success for participants.

Transitional Jobs Program Recommendations

1. A Variety of Positions Should be Offered in Multiple City Agencies and Not-for-Profits

In order to match the diverse interests and backgrounds of participants, and increase the chances that program participation actually sets one on a path toward long-term employment, transitional job programs should offer positions in a range of career paths. For instance, a job with the Parks Department for one interested in landscaping and horticulture, a job with the Housing Department for one interested in a career in maintenance, a job with the Board of Education for one interested in a profession in education, a job with the Health and Hospitals Corporation for one interested in medical professions, etc. Diversity of job type, and not only agency, is critical.

2. Links to Long-term Employment Must be Provided

The goal of a transitional jobs program is ultimately to move participants to long-term, unsubsidized employment either in the public or private sector. In order to facilitate employment in the public sector, it is essential that transitional positions not be the only positions available in any given job type or agency. For example, if people are being trained for maintenance work specific to parks, some similar long-term positions need to be open in that same training agency or in the larger job market. Saturating one particular job title and agency with transitional positions, thereby eliminating any permanent positions for those completing the program, defeats the purpose of the program. Skills learned and practiced in the transitional job should represent ones that are transferable to particular career paths, ideally ones in growth sectors. Additionally, enhancing job search as well as job placement and job retention services is necessary to promote critical connections to long-term employment.

3. Training and Education Opportunities Need to be Available

In a competitive economy, skills and credentials become more and more important for securing and retaining employment – especially living wage employment. Transitional jobs programs should be structured to allow participants to enhance their qualifications to better position them for the job market. For some this will mean taking English as a Second Language, for others obtaining their GED, a certificate in nursing or one in computer programming, or maybe passing the Civil Service Exam. Educational opportunities must exist from the start of the program to take advantage of time available. People should be met where they are at, asked what they desire, and offered a variety of options to help move them forward.

4. Program Length Should be Extended

An ideal program would support transitional employment for a two-year period. This time is important for reasons of both stabilizing participants' economic circumstances (being able to pay off debt, get comfortable paying bills, and save some money) and for enhancing participants' skills and education level (learning English, obtaining a GED, and completing a vocational skill certification). Individuals without stable financial situations will quickly encounter obstacles to retaining employment, such as eviction, lack of childcare, and no transportation money. Additionally, advancement of skill and education level takes time. Education and training programs that will truly add value and marketability to an individual require an investment on the front end. This extended time would also be appreciated by program placement sites that benefit from being able to work with a trained workforce for a longer period of time.

5. Diverse Backgrounds of Participants Must be Considered

Surveyed participants, and the larger pool of program participants and welfare recipients they represent, come from varied backgrounds. They have a range of ages, educational levels, language fluency, job experience, and career interests. Any program that will truly be able to boast success must meet each participant where they are and assist each individual in getting to where he or she wants to be. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot be utilized. There must be enough options and flexibility in program design to meet the varied backgrounds, needs, and interests of each participant.

6. Access to and Scope of Work Supports Need to be Expanded

Programs should facilitate low-wage workers' access to additional supports, and policies should expand their scope. The self-sufficiency standard is well above the minimum wage, and the disconnect is even more extreme for families in New York City. Unless we are ready to raise the minimum wage to a living wage, and hold companies accountable for providing adequate wages to their workers, we must be prepared to have government provide low-wage workers with the supports necessary to survive. This necessitates both the expansion of existing work supports and the facilitation of people's access to them. Transitional jobs programs should assist participants in obtaining all the supports for which they are eligible, and also in providing people with information about the different supports they are eligible for upon program completion. Receipt of worker supports available both during and after the program should be triggered automatically upon program start and program completion.

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Appendix A: Transitional Jobs Programs and Displacement

Securing living wage jobs for participants is the ultimate goal of transitional jobs programs. For this to be possible, a commitment to non-displacement is critical. If previously existent quality positions are eliminated or reduced as a result of an influx of transitional employees, a conflict of interest arises. In such circumstances, the workers themselves are swapped, one group losing while the other benefits. The sought for value added to workers is cancelled out.

The Work Experience Program (WEP) in New York City has often been criticized as a program that promoted displacement, something that is not only detrimental to workers across the board, but is also against City and State law. According to an Independent Budget Office report (November 1, 2000) spanning fiscal years 1991 to 2000, the number of full-time City Park Workers/Maintenance in the Department of Parks and Recreation dropped from 2,025 to 728 as the number of unpaid WEP workers rose from 173 in 1991 to 2,125 in 2000. These WEP workers were performing routine maintenance and clean-up tasks that had previously been done by unionized City employees.

While part of the reduction in City employees might be the result of normal attrition, it is clear that most of this reduction was displacement. The City benefited as park conditions improved along with increases in the number of WEP participants, and

the Parks Department benefited in being able to replace its labor force with WEP workers from the Human Resources Administration's program, rather than paying for its own workers.

The movement for paid Transitional Jobs Programs in New York City was an effort to not only provide good opportunities to welfare recipients, and pay workers what workers are due, but also an effort to beat back this problem of displacement. When Community Voices Heard, DC 37, Fiscal Policy Institute, the Ad-Hoc Coalition for Real Jobs and the National Employment Law Project developed the original Transitional Jobs Bill, they included clear anti-displacement language in the bill, provided workers with basic workers rights, and called for collective bargaining

SHIFTING WORKERS AND TITLES IN THE PARKS				
	FY '91	FY '00	FY '02	FY '04
City Park Workers/ Maintenance/Climbers/ Pruners (DPR FT Positions)	2,025	728	984	850
WEP Workers (Participants doing work of City Park Workers for DPR)	173	2,125	1,471	446
POP Workers (Phase I)* (Program on which report is based; Most with same DPR FT Titles)	0	0	3,382	0
POP Workers (Phase III) (Latest program with lower paying title of Job Training Participant)	0	0	0	2,496
TOTAL	2,198	2,853	5,837	3,792

SOURCE: NYC Independent Budget Office, based on New York City FMS & DPR data.

** POP worker numbers based on a Department of Parks & Recreation figure from Dec. 2001.*

agreements in the public sector to be respected. There were also provisions included that called on the City to pay equal wages to transitional employees, so that a lower wage scale would not create a budgetary incentive to the City for displacement.

Phase I of the Parks Opportunity Program is an interesting case in this regard. The displacement that DID occur had already happened through WEP prior to its implementation. At the time they were hired, POP workers themselves, paid \$9.38 an hour and holding City titles and union status, were actually filling unfilled positions and contributing to a net increase in jobs. WEP worker numbers in the Parks were drastically reduced, from 2,125 in the Parks in FY 2000 to a mere 446 as of December 2003 (NYC Independent Budget Office). The improvement relative to the earlier situation was clear. Unfortunately, this trend reversal away from unpaid labor and toward good-paying union positions, did not last long.

After the first two POP program cohorts completed their terms, the third group, though performing the same tasks as the first two, were given a new City title, had their wage reduced, and their union title stripped. Again, one saw a type of displacement of one City title by another.

It is critical that transitional jobs programs are cognizant of the displacement issues at hand - especially when dealing with public sector placements. The New York City experience leads one to conclude that paid transitional jobs programs are a definite advantage over unpaid work experience programs, but that measures need to be taken to avoid displacement even within the paid program scenario.

The best way to do this seems to be a combination of involving unions in program development, keeping the wages of transitional workers at the same level of other workers doing their same work, diversifying worker placements across numerous agencies so that no one agency finds their entire workforce replaced by the transitional workers, and maintaining full-time permanent positions regardless of all else – so that displacement does not occur and that transitional workers finishing their transitional periods actually have the opportunity to move into full-time permanent positions as they become available.

Appendix B: Program Costs

According to the July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002 Cooperative Agreement between the City of New York (HRA) and the Department of Parks and Recreation, \$62,859,000 was allocated for running both the WEP and POP programs in the Parks. The contract allowed for up to 2,000 WEP placements and up to 3,500 POP placements, but budgeted for salaries for only 2,000 POP workers. \$37,000 was allocated for 367 field supervisors (\$13,579,000); supervisory staff was responsible for both WEP and POP workers. Estimating an average wage of \$22,000 per paid POP worker, the total POP salaries for 2,000 workers was calculated as \$44 million. However, with the actual 3,500 on the job, the workers' salaries would have cost closer to \$75 million. It is unclear if additional money was requested from HRA by the Parks Department, or if funds were found internally.

The contract also included Administration costs of \$2.3 million and an OTPS budget of \$3.25 million. The renewal contract for 2002-2003 was for a higher \$80 million, with a little over \$2 million of the \$80 million in milestone allocation (paid out only as predetermined milestones, such as placement in unsubsidized jobs, are met). Worker salary estimates were lowered to \$20,000 and the Administration costs were eliminated.

Given that predicted contract amounts and actual costs are difficult to reconcile with the limited information at hand, it is impossible to calculate the cost of program administration per individual. Overhead costs would clearly be split by WEP and POP workers, and for accurate

determination of program costs one would need to both subtract saved welfare costs (since if unemployed, individuals would have been receiving cash assistance) and deduct monies that the Parks Department would have spent for supervisors regardless of whether they were POP workers or other City workers doing the job.

Additionally, it is important to note the offsets produced by both the taxes paid by the workers and the extra federal and state funds injected into the economy. In addition to the regular increased income that the workers had, they were also eligible for the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits. Considering an average of \$3,888 in EITC per family participating, \$13.2 million in such tax credit money came to the City from the Federal and State governments. Additional federal funds came to families in the form of Child Tax Credits and Child Care Tax Credits. These additions are only slightly offset by the reduction in Food Stamp benefits due to earnings (a reduction of about \$2 million).

