

Applied Research in Child Development

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Welfare reform

As PRWORA's first implementation cycle draws to a close, what have we accomplished and what remains to be done? To address persistent welfare dependence among those least ready to work, we may need to do more than find people jobs. We may need to help them develop a sense of identity as workers and teach them to balance multiple roles. The Pathways Case Management System, developed at Erikson Institute by the founder of the nationally recognized welfare-to-work program Project Match, seeks to do just that.

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Welfare reform, the next phase

THE NEED TO APPLY THE LESSONS

OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

BY SUZANNE L. WAGNER AND
DARIA ZVETINA

The debate over the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), which changed the face of welfare as we knew it, was heated, to say the least. Conservatives argued that the bill—and the time limits and work requirements it imposed—would help families to move out of welfare dependence. Liberals contended it would force more and more families still deeper into the trenches of poverty. As the debate over the 2002 reauthorization of PRWORA gets under way, a wealth of research is emerging to shed light on the accuracy of these predictions.

A bold social experiment

By and large, welfare reform has been successful at moving a large percentage—approximately 50 percent nationally—of dependent families off the rolls. In addition, this transition has resulted in income gains for some families, principally those in the second-lowest fifth of the income distribution (Greenberg 2001). In tandem, we have seen a significant decrease in child poverty,

particularly for African American children, for whom poverty is at its lowest rate ever (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Preliminary research on the impact of welfare-to-work programs suggests that children are, in general, not harmed by their parents' shift from welfare to employment. In some cases, the shift even appears to have a modest salutary effect on children's development and achievement, particularly when the welfare-to-work program couples services with additional financial supports to ensure the working families an income above the federal poverty level. For example, a national study of eleven employment-based welfare and antipoverty programs found that children whose families received earnings supplements consistently showed higher school achievement than children in program control groups (Morris et al. 2001). In some cases, the children also demonstrated more positive social behavior and had fewer behavior problems and better overall health. (It is important to note that the vast majority of this research focuses on preschool and elementary school children. To date, scant attention has been paid to the impact of the welfare-to-work → [continued on page 3](#)



Frances Stott, Ph.D.

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Many have asked why Project Match, the community-based employment program from which Pathways was developed, is affiliated with Erikson Institute. After all, Erikson is a graduate school in child development.

On one level, the answer is surprisingly simple: in striving to reweave the lives of welfare recipients into the fabric of society, Project Match contributes to a significant improvement in the lives of children and families.

Of course, we are proud to house a program that has earned—and continues to earn—national recognition for its quality, innovation, and efficacy. A 1988 winner in the Innovations in State and Local Government Program of the Ford Foundation and Harvard University, Project Match was honored in 2000 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Families Count program, which recognizes organizations that are working on behalf of poor families and children in the United States.

Equally important, Project Match is the very model of applied research, one of the three pillars—education, applied research, and advocacy—upon which Erikson rests. Through systematic tracking of participants' employment patterns over several years or more coupled with careful observation of program implementation, Project Match has built an inductive understanding of the welfare-to-work process from the perspective of welfare recipients themselves, as well as the public systems facilitating this process. The lessons learned have informed Project Match's day-to-day practice and vice versa. This dynamic, inductive method over the past 16 years has generated a wealth of original and empirically grounded findings and new approaches that are now being tested around the country.

The practical and field-based information developed by Project Match will contribute to the country's understanding of one of the most complex and controversial public policy issues that affects poor children and families: What happens to parents and their children when work is required in exchange for government assistance or when government assistance is no longer available?

Finally, Project Match belongs at Erikson Institute because it embraces complexity. Like all of the other research conducted under the aegis of Erikson's Herr Research Center, Project Match takes a social, interpersonal, *and* developmental approach to understanding. It recognizes the difficulty of life transitions, balancing the role of parent with that of worker. It is concerned about the whole family, children as well as parents.

In fact, when we consider Project Match's structure, philosophy, methods, aims, and achievements, we cannot imagine it residing anywhere else.

transition on adolescents and infants, two groups that may be particularly vulnerable to adverse consequences.)

Despite these encouraging signs, significant questions and issues remain that have important ramifications for reauthorization. First, there is widespread recognition that PRWORA's successes have occurred during a very robust period in our economy. How will current welfare recipients and those who left the rolls when the economy was flush fare during the inevitable economic downturn? Some would argue the downturn has already begun, and in some areas applications for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are on the rise. In addition, it is apparent that while incomes have increased for families in the second-lowest fifth of the distribution, most of those families have not yet succeeded in rising out of poverty (Greenberg 2001).

There is also evidence that families in the bottom fifth of the income distribution have not fared well. Research suggests that the bottom 20 percent of families have actually sustained a decline in income since 1994, owing to the fact that gains in earnings have been offset by greater losses in benefits (Greenberg 2001). Moreover, there is growing evidence that trading welfare for steady employment is a process rather than an event (Herr and Halpern 1991); relatively few of those who leave welfare achieve stable employment at the outset. For example, a study of former welfare recipients in Illinois found that only 37 percent were continually employed during the first six to eight months after their departure (Anderson et al. 2000).

Helping those still on the rolls

Those families who did not make the transition into the labor market during the favorable economy are another concern. Toby

Herr, founder and director of Project Match and senior research associate at Erikson Institute, believes that the families still on welfare will be a focal point of the TANF portion of the reauthorization discussion. "A critical issue concerns what states should do about those families who, for whatever reason, are not leaving the rolls and moving into the workforce," says Herr. Their circumstances and needs may force adjustments to several key tenets of PRWORA: time limits, work requirements, and the 20 percent caseload exemption provision.

As the bill currently stands, families are permitted to access TANF cash assistance benefits for a maximum lifetime aggregate of 60 months, or five years, with states granted the latitude to reduce this lifetime limit still further, a privilege many have exercised. At the same time, states are permitted to exempt up to 20 percent of their TANF caseloads from the time limit. But is that going to be enough?

Many believe that the mass exodus from the welfare rolls that occurred during PRWORA's first implementation cycle consisted of those who were the most "job ready." The individuals who remain on the rolls, the reasoning goes, are more difficult to employ, thus raising questions about whether a majority of them can be effectively moved into the workforce before their time limits expire.

The prevailing thinking has been that these welfare recipients are the most troubled—dragged down by addiction or other mental or physical health problems, domestic violence, low educational attainment, poor work histories—and there is some research to support this view (Danziger and Seefeldt 2000). As a result, for recipients who don't find employment through the required up-front job search, welfare agencies currently try to identify the problems that are preventing them from getting a job. This process usually involves a cursory

screening administered by a welfare worker without expertise in the problem areas (Kramer 2001). If specific problems are identified, the recipient is referred to appropriate services to "cure" the problems, thereby enabling the individual to successfully enter and stay in the labor market.

Herr refers to this screening/treatment model as the "barriers to employment approach," and she questions its efficacy. Problems such as substance abuse or domestic violence may not be revealed during the typical screening. If they are, they may not be as readily and successfully treated as welfare agencies assume. Herr also points to emerging research that raises doubts about whether the presence of such problems actually prevents welfare recipients from working. A recent study by the Urban Institute compared people on welfare in 1997 and 1999 (Zedlewski and Loprest 2000). Between the two years, the welfare rolls declined by a third. One would expect that those on the rolls in 1999, several years after the initiation of welfare reform, would be more likely to have barriers to employment. In fact, researchers found a high incidence of barriers among recipients in both years; they also found that welfare recipients with barriers, even multiple barriers, were more likely to be working in 1999 than 1997.

These and other similar findings are beginning to undermine the assumptions on which the barriers approach is based, yet the approach continues to dominate in welfare-to-work programs nationwide.

A developmental approach to overcoming welfare dependence

If the barriers approach—while providing necessary treatment for problems such as substance abuse and domestic violence—does not in fact facilitate the transition from welfare to work or lessen welfare dependence, the answer may lie elsewhere.

Another approach has been developed by Toby Herr. The Pathways Case Management System, currently operating at sites in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, New York, and Tennessee, draws on Herr's long experience working with welfare recipients through Project Match. Like Project Match, Pathways views the problem of long-term welfare dependence through a human development lens and is structured accordingly.

The developmental approach recognizes and addresses what Herr calls the underlying "psychosocial" component of long-term welfare dependence. When a welfare recipient signs up to take the GED exam, for example, and then doesn't show up at the testing site on the scheduled date, is it always because he or she couldn't find a babysitter or had no bus fare, or is it sometimes fear of failure?

When a welfare mother is silent about an abusive relationship, does her silence always mean she doesn't want help, Herr asks, or is she sometimes afraid that the information will ultimately be used against her—perhaps her caseworker will fail to keep the information confidential?

The very poor have little control over critical elements of their day-to-day lives: where they live, who their neighbors are, what schools their children attend, who their children socialize with, and much more. Welfare recipients who fail to take the initiative to change their lives when assistance is offered may refuse help because they like the way things are, but people who embrace the developmental approach would argue that it is much more likely that these recipients refuse help because nothing in their lives thus far has convinced them that they can actually alter their life circumstances through their own efforts.

The Pathways Case Management System provides a structure and tool set that state and local welfare agencies can use to address welfare dependence. Pathways

incorporates an appreciation for psychosocial phenomena such as trust, mastery, and control. Programmatically, this means offering welfare recipients (1) a supportive environment to talk about their day-to-day lives, not just in the role of potential worker but as parent, relative, partner, and so on; (2) some level of choice with regard to how they meet the work requirement each month; (3) a broad enough array of activities from which to choose so that there is always something at which they can succeed; (4) assistance to keep taking on more complex and higher-level activities as soon as the prior competencies have been mastered; and (5) recognition for incremental progress.

Pathways has four components: an activity diary, a monthly group meeting, a computerized tracking system, and a set of accepted procedures and rules for agency staff that are adapted to the local setting. (For an in-depth look at the Pathways experience, see "Sarah's first Pathways meeting.")

The six-page activity diary that Pathways participants receive each month includes space for up to four different activities a participant must commit to doing. A central part of the diary is the menu of

activities, some of them countable toward the federal work requirement and some of them not. The menu of activities includes standard work-prep activities such as job-readiness classes, job search, or community work experience as well as treatment activities such as substance abuse treatment, domestic violence counseling, or therapy. It also includes parent/child activities (e.g., taking children to extracurricular activities), personal and family activities (e.g., going to medical appointments, taking a child to speech therapy), housing and financial activities (e.g., finding a Section 8 apartment, clearing a debt), or other types of activities that, when structured around a schedule and monitored, can serve as steppingstones to economic and social stability, as well as personal development.

The centerpiece of Pathways is the mandatory monthly group meeting run by a three-member team of welfare caseworkers and employment workers. Each participant gets fifteen minutes to review his or her prior month's plan (which is recorded in the activity diary) and to negotiate a new plan for the coming month. The new plan builds on recent accomplishments and changing circumstances; it also combines

Welfare news online

Project Match | www.pmatch.org

Information on Project Match and the Pathways Case Management System; descriptions of research reports and other publications and instructions for ordering them.

The Welfare Information Network | www.welfareinfo.org

Updated several times a week, this site is a clearinghouse for general information, policy analysis, and technical assistance.

The Center for Law and Social Policy | www.clasp.org

The center conducts policy research and advocacy and publishes newsletters and periodic updates on new policy developments affecting the poor.

Northwestern University/University of Chicago Joint Center for Poverty Research | www.jcpr.org

A national academic research center, JCPR offers online policy briefs, working papers, and newsletters on issues related to poverty in America.

countable and uncountable activities in order for individuals to fulfill the federal work requirement. (See “A conversation with Toby Herr.”)

The technological backbone of Pathways is a computerized tracking system that captures information from the activity diaries and monthly group meetings. The system generates a cumulative record of each person’s plans, successes, and setbacks each month. Staff use these data at case review meetings to gauge participant progress and inform decision making. Each participant receives an easy-to-read copy of her or his own cumulative record.

The final component is the system of rules and procedures that are adapted to local settings and guide Pathways operations. This component includes protocols for running meetings, policies for sanctioning participants, and guidelines about which agency staff, aside from Pathways staff, should attend monthly case reviews (e.g., child welfare staff).

The application of a human development perspective to the problem of welfare dependence—and the adoption of the four program components that comprise the Pathways Case Management System—require a culture change at the agency level. As it stands, most caseworkers assess and address only those client needs for which services and supports are available through the network of programs linked to the welfare agency. Where there is a match—there is an approved substance abuse program, for example, and the recipient has a substance abuse problem—the client gets plugged into the program. This approach leaves many needs unidentified and unaddressed, however. The Pathways System, in contrast, allows caseworkers to address whatever needs are raised by the client or identified by the caseworker and to use resources both within and outside the network. Also, most welfare workers are

trained to work with external variables and systems: providing transportation to the GED test site or safe haven to a victim of domestic abuse. Pathways demands that welfare workers develop the capacity to understand and relate to welfare recipients as individuals.

The challenge of changing the agency culture has led Herr and her Pathways team members Jo Dunham, Becki Sander, and Cheryl Stoneking to spend more time focusing on organizational development issues in the agencies that have adopted Pathways and to create training materials those agencies can use to support culture change.

Evaluation of Pathways’ effects is just beginning. Policymakers, program administrators, and the public are used to judging welfare programs solely by their effects on welfare recipients. If the underlying premise of Pathways is correct, however, the first noticeable effects of the program will be found within welfare agencies. If welfare dependence is a human development issue, those working on the frontlines to eradicate welfare dependence—caseworkers, employment specialists, and the like—must think and act differently.

The Erikson researchers studying Pathways have begun to look for these changes. Among the important evaluation questions being asked are, Do staff at the agencies that have implemented Pathways believe they know more about their participants than before? Has Pathways increased the breadth and number of local resources they use? Has it improved coordination of services within and across agencies, as well as within the service provider community at large?

If the answer to these questions is yes and Pathways has changed agencies and staff, researchers will expect to find corresponding changes in welfare recipients. Only after researchers evaluate change at the agency level will they be able to ask the fundamental questions they set out to

answer: Does Pathways help welfare recipients become employed and stay in the labor market? And do those who don’t become employed remain engaged with the welfare system and in meaningful, productive activities that improve their lives and the lives of their children?

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Sarah's first Pathways meeting

BY TOBY HERR AND
SUZANNE L. WAGNER

Sarah, a fast-moving, curly-haired white woman in her early thirties, arrived at her first Pathways meeting ten minutes early. She signed in, took a seat at the table, and quickly took stock of the situation. She flipped through the brightly colored booklet she found in front of her—the Pathways monthly activity diary—and swiveled around to read the three large poster boards on the wall: I DID MORE THAN I PLANNED, I FULFILLED MY PLAN, I DID LESS THAN I PLANNED.

Promptly at 9 a.m., the Pathways group leader welcomed the eight welfare recipients and began by reviewing how the monthly meeting works: Each person gets fifteen minutes to talk and develop a monthly employability plan, everybody's plan will be different, no one can reveal something about another person in the group unless the person divulges it first, and so on.

Because it was her first meeting, the group leader asked Sarah to tell the group a little about herself—her family, her work history, her goals. “I have three daughters, ages fifteen, ten, and eight,” Sarah began. “Unfortunately, most of my time is spent on my oldest one. She's taking up a lot of my time. It takes an hour each way to get her to school and back. And I have a custody court date for her next month. Wait, I have two court dates.” A nod from the group leader was all the encouragement Sarah needed to keep going. “And my

youngest daughter is acting out a lot. Her teacher sends her home a lot. But my fiancé is great. He isn't working now, which is hard because of money, but it means he can watch the kids.”

When asked how long she'd been on welfare, Sarah said it had been three years. To fulfill her TANF work requirement, she'd been assigned to a work experience slot at the welfare agency itself, where she did clerical work; she was also required to do job search activities each month. Curious as to why Sarah had not found employment yet, the group leader probed by asking what kind of job she was looking for. Her answer revealed a genuine interest but also the degree of her insecurity and her tendency to fall back on excuses: “I want to go to auto mechanics school, because that is what I like best, fixing cars. Last Thursday my job counselor took me to a garage, but I was so nervous I couldn't even put air in the tires. I am so focused on what everyone thinks. My job counselor also had me apply for a job at an auto parts store, but they discriminate against women there, so that's why I didn't get the job.”

Following the threads of participants' conversation is something Pathways staff are trained to do, in order to weave together a monthly plan from those threads that end up leading somewhere. With Sarah, the group leader decided to follow the interest in auto mechanics by asking whether Sarah had looked into training programs at the local community college. “Yeah, but it didn't work out,” Sarah replied. “The class has already started. I could sit and observe, that's all. Anyway, they don't tend to take women in the program. They don't like women auto mechanics.”

Hearing confusion and evasion in Sarah's reply, the runner, a pivotal member of the Pathways team, decided it would be helpful to call the community college. This team member's job is gather critical information—such as names, addresses, and phone numbers—during the monthly meeting to facilitate creation of the monthly plan. By having a runner who immediately takes care of such details for participants, Pathways reinforces the message “Your clock is ticking, there is no time to waste.”

While the runner was out, the group leader began to “nail the plan,” to help Sarah prioritize among family, work, training, and other concerns and begin to take control. The monthly diary has space for up to four activities, and Sarah was asked which area of her life she wanted to start with. Without skipping a beat she said, “My oldest, Holly. I need to get her into a new school, but the principal where I want her to go is saying she can't go there.” Sarah couldn't explain why the principal was saying this, nor did she have any idea as to how she might clarify or resolve the situation, but with help from the group she came up with a concrete and constructive first step: “Call the principal today, August 7, and make an appointment to see him and see him by next Thursday, August 14.” And that is exactly how Sarah wrote it in her monthly diary.

By then the runner had returned to the room. Like many welfare recipients with complicated lives, Sarah had somehow gotten her fears and facts entwined. The run-

ner had found that there were openings for the next auto mechanics course, beginning in six weeks; Sarah appeared to be eligible; the welfare agency might cover her tuition; and, yes, another woman had already enrolled. So Sarah's second activity for the month detailed when and where she would go to enroll.

For her plan, Sarah also agreed to follow up on two job leads another participant gave her during the meeting and to meet with Family Services (the appointment was set up during the meeting by the runner) about counseling for her youngest daughter, who'd been acting out.

Small steps all, but intended to keep nudging Sarah forward.

Sarah's second Pathways meeting

Sarah was very fidgety at the second meeting, so no one was surprised when the group leader asked if she wanted to go second. "I did more than I planned," she blurted out. "I did more than I planned. I got a job and am working and will start auto mechanics school in September." She didn't even finish explaining before she jumped up to sign the poster board: **I DID MORE THAN I PLANNED.**

The job was at night, part-time, on an assembly line. "Boring," said Sarah, but she was obviously proud that she got it on her own. And everything was in order for her training program. She'd also met with the

I did more
than I planned

principal where she wanted Holly to go to school, though it looked as if she had been right that Holly couldn't go there. She'd taken Holly to the pediatrician for a long-delayed physical as well, because Holly, she explained, "is always tired and pale."

Sarah looked at her activity diary to jog her memory. Oh, yes. She had also gone to the appointment at Family Services about counseling for her youngest, and that was in place, too, except for some paperwork.

Sarah's new plan built on her accomplishments of the past month and the challenges still ahead: continuing with her part-time job, following another avenue in regard to Holly's schooling, preparing for the two custody hearings, completing the counseling paperwork, and—the part Sarah was most excited about—buying the books for her auto mechanics program.

Sarah's third Pathways meeting

Sarah's third Pathways meeting was her last. A month later she moved to another town over the county line, a county whose welfare department doesn't do Pathways. By moving, however, Sarah got closer to Holly's school and to her job. Through the grapevine, the news is that she is also sticking with her auto mechanics program. While Sarah's participation in Pathways was short, it seems to have given her the jump start she needed.

Is Sarah's Pathways experience typical? Yes and no. Sarah is atypical in that she hit the ground running. For the average partici-

pant, false starts and setbacks are the norm. In just a few short months, Sarah was able to create a road map for leaving welfare and get en route: If she completes her training, which looks promising, she will have the skills to earn a living wage and to get off welfare and stay off.

Sarah is typical in regard to her personal and family life, however. Her troubled children, her unemployed fiancé, her lack of self-confidence—all could derail her down the road. The truth is, even for welfare recipients who have a good shot at a decent job, it is the past that makes it so hard to have a future.

A conversation with Toby Herr

Erikson alumna Toby Herr, M.Ed., is founder and director of Project Match and a senior research associate at Erikson Institute. Herr's introduction to the problems of those dealing with multiple socioeconomic challenges came during her seven-year tenure as a fourth-grade teacher at Jenner School, in Chicago's Cabrini-Green neighborhood. After earning her master's in 1982, Herr returned to Cabrini-Green, this time as a researcher, part of a Northwestern University team evaluating the Ounce of Prevention's first wave of teen parent programs in Illinois. Herr launched the community-based employment program Project Match in 1985. The program, originally affiliated with Northwestern University, coupled Herr's interests in urban poverty and child development with her desire to combine direct service and research. The development and 1995 launch of the Pathways Case Management System, which is designed for state and local welfare agencies, is a logical outgrowth of Herr's work.

What led you to create the Pathways Case Management System for state and local welfare agencies?

Over the years, people had enthusiastically agreed with the principles of Project Match's community-based employment model, particularly the potential of nontraditional welfare-to-work activities—such as taking children to scheduled appointments—to serve as steppingstones to self-sufficiency, but there was no movement to integrate these principles into large government programs. So we took on the task of research and development ourselves, creating and field-testing materials and protocols that could be used by the welfare system. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and later on the MacArthur Foundation, provided seed funding, and eventually our efforts yielded the Pathways Case Management System. Following the welfare reform act of 1996, interest in our approach grew, as agencies began to seek out new ways of working with increasingly disadvantaged caseloads.

How is the Pathways System different from the community-based program?

People come to the community-based program—West Haven Project Match—of their own free will, often on the recommendation of friends or family. In contrast, individuals in Pathways are required to participate. If they don't meet the welfare agency's requirements, they will lose part or all of their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grant unless they can prove "good cause." This is a significant difference, but we support this type of mandatory element because we believe that many people are motivated best by a balanced combination of carrots and sticks.

There is also a difference in the groups served by the programs and the period of service. At West Haven Project Match, any-

one in the community can get assistance, whether they're on welfare, off welfare, male, female, already employed, or never employed. And they can keep coming back for services for as long as they need them.

In contrast, Pathways is only for welfare recipients, and as soon as they're off welfare, they're out of Pathways. So there's



no ongoing involvement as they try to live without welfare. If people end up back on welfare, they come back to Pathways, but the continuity in service of the community-based program just isn't possible in the context of a welfare agency.

The programs are united in their basic principles, though. In both programs, you focus first on the concerns that participants themselves raise, then move on. Also, both programs help participants learn how to balance multiple roles, such as worker, parent, partner, daughter. That's the hallmark of successful participants: balancing all these roles.

The concept of helping participants balance multiple roles seems different from the approach many programs take.

Most programs have adopted what we call the "barriers to employment approach." The thinking behind this approach goes like this: Some welfare recipients leave welfare for work and others do not because

the latter have problems like depression or violent relationships, which must be dealt with before they can work. This rationale shapes what services are offered and how they are sequenced.

But the fact is that most people outside the welfare population with these types of problems do work. We believe that what distinguishes the successful workers from the unsuccessful ones is a strong work identity.

Most adults have a consolidated work identity, meaning that when things go wrong in their personal life, they don't quit their job to deal with the problem. For most adults, the worker role is as internalized as the parental role and other roles, but for many of our participants, as soon as something goes wrong at home, work is the first role that gets jettisoned.

But what does this mean in terms of practice? It means, in part, that personal problems should be tackled simultaneously with work-prep activities. You can never become a steady worker if you can't handle personal problems and a job at the same time, because life is never free of stress and obstacles.

For those who aren't ready for the real world of work, there are many countable TANF activities—such as supported work

and community service—that can be easily combined with personal and family well-being activities, most of which don't currently count under federal standards, unfortunately, but which states can choose to incorporate to help people learn to balance roles.

Over the course of Project Match's history, you've amassed a significant amount of longitudinal data on families making the transition from welfare to work. What key ideas have you drawn from your research and experience that policymakers should consider as they contemplate reauthorization of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act?

I would want policymakers to focus on the 60-month lifetime limit on receipt of TANF and on the work requirement—the two most dramatic changes for welfare recipients. There is probably going to be a push, at least from some liberals, to get rid of the time limit. They will argue that the people who are going to hit the time limit are the least able to work and therefore will have no means of support without welfare. I am worried about this too, but getting rid of the time limit is not the solution.

Congress needs to recognize the subtle but critical role the time limit plays in communicating the message that welfare is temporary—a principle of the 1996 welfare reform that most Americans agree with. *Temporary* is an abstract concept, but the time limit makes it concrete and real. It can be translated into a finite number and crossed off on a calendar. In fact, you can walk into welfare offices around the country, even Head Start programs,

community health centers, and other programs for low-income Americans, and you'll hear the mantra "Your clock is ticking." The time limit has turned the policymakers into the bad guys and allowed many people who work with welfare recipients to say what they have always longed to but didn't know how: "You can't rely on welfare, you need to take responsibility for your life." If you take the time limit away, that message will be lost.

On the other hand, there are millions of families that risk losing their grant because their time will run out before they are self-supporting. The 20 percent exemption from the time limit each state is allowed is not adequate to cover this group, and people who are playing by the rules should not be penalized just because Congress didn't get the formula right.

Clearly Congress needs to increase the exemption rate, but then there is still the problem of how we define playing by the rules—that is, how we define the work requirement. Federal law requires that people receiving TANF either work or participate in approved work-prep activities, but those approved activities alone, as I've just explained, often aren't enough to help the most disadvantaged welfare recipients do what they need to do: develop a strong work identity and learn to balance multiple roles. And for some welfare recipients, the approved activities are just too big a step to begin with.

With reauthorization, I'd like to see Congress consider making a whole new range of personal and family activities countable toward the work requirement, like taking kids to Little League or speech therapy or being active in a community group or tenant association—the types of

activities we already include in Pathways and often combine with the countable work-prep activities. They can be structured in ways that make them verifiable for the work requirement.

Getting it right will require a balancing act. Congress should do nothing to undermine the ideas that welfare is temporary and that something is expected in exchange for a grant. At the same time, it must rework the social contract so that welfare recipients can hold up their end of the bargain through developmentally appropriate activities that represent a good faith effort and are tangible indicators of progress.

Liberals predicted that the 1996 welfare reform bill would harm poor children, though the first wave of data suggests that for the majority of children this has not occurred. Should we be optimistic or is there still reason for concern?

The answer is "yes" to both. I think that the majority of children have not been harmed by welfare reform, though new research suggests that children under one and adolescents are particularly vulnerable.

While children of all ages are important in Pathways, we have tried to give special consideration to these two age groups. For example, in Pathways sites in New York State, mothers with children under one are still required to come to their Pathways meeting each month, although they are not required to do anything work-related. Instead, their monthly plans include well-baby appointments, parent-infant classes, mother's postpartum appointments, and so on. The idea is to shift the obligation from going to work to "doing for your child."

Figuring out how to support adolescents is a much harder nut to crack. We train Pathways staff to ask parents about

teen children, to bring resources for them to the meetings, and whenever possible to include enrollment of children in extracurricular activities in the monthly plan. We learn at the meetings that many children are already failing in school, or in trouble with the law, or worse.

The overarching question that must be asked is, Which of these social problems should Congress expect welfare reform to fix and which should it expect other social institutions to tackle, like education, housing, or law enforcement?

When you hear the stories mothers share at the Pathways meetings, you realize that millions and millions of children in this country have sad, troubled lives, and no one is taking responsibility. I can't believe that mothers of three- and four-year-olds are already being called to school. I was in a Pathways meeting last month where five of the six women recounted gruesome details of recent domestic violence.

Congress decided to end welfare as we knew it because welfare dependence rankled society. Now it's time to tackle the condition I call childhood sadness. A good start would be to make ending family violence and school failure as popular today as ending welfare dependence was five years ago.

News from the Herr Research Center

Research update

In November 2000, senior research associate **Kathleen Kostelny** presented “Child Soldiering: Developmental Needs” and “Holistic Interventions and Child Soldiers: Prevention, Reintegration, and Community Development” in Tokyo as part of Children and Armed Conflict, a workshop and symposium examining the reintegration of former child soldiers into the postconflict community. The events were hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Search for Common Ground, Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development.



Sharon Syc



Barbara Bowman

In January, **Professor Sharon Syc** and Erikson writing tutor **Carrie Nepstad** presented “Helping Babies and Toddlers Grow and Develop” at the annual conference of the Chicago Association for the Education of Young Children.

In March, **Professor Aisha Ray** participated in a panel discussion—“How to Help Our Children Celebrate Who They Are”—at a symposium sponsored by the Chicago Board of Education at the Field Museum in Chicago.

Also in March, **Sharon Syc** presented “Brain Development and Sensory Processing From a Life Span Perspective” with College of DuPage associate professor Sarah Patton as a part of Erikson’s Faculty Development Project on the Brain. The presentation attracted childcare providers, directors, nurses, and architects who design childcare centers.

In April, **Professor Jon Korfmacher** participated in two events at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) in Minneapolis. As a member of a panel made up of representatives

“Harder Than You Think: Determining What Works, for Whom, and Why in Early Childhood Intervention Programs,” **Jon Korfmacher’s** look inside the black box of intervention, is part of the Herr Center’s Occasional Paper Series. Also due out in the series is **Barbara Bowman** and **Carol Horton’s** survey of early childhood teaching assessment, **“Child Assessment Practices in Early Child Care and Education Programs.”** To request copies of either paper, contact the Office of Communications, 312.755.2250, extension 2268.

from schools participating the Harris Professional Development Network, **Korfmacher** talked about challenges and strategies in developing infant mental health training programs. **Korfmacher** also presented “The Helping Relationship and Engagement in Early Childhood Home Visiting” as a part of a paper symposium that addressed the need to engage families in early childhood home visiting programs.

Professor Robert Halpern also participated in the April SRCD meeting. His presentation, “Exploring the Role of After-School Programs in Promoting Low-Income Children’s Literacy,” discussed what kind of literacy activities schools incorporate into their after-school programs and what challenges some schools face when implementing more innovative after-school literacy programs. **Halpern** takes up these issues at length in his upcoming book, tentatively titled *Making Play Work: The History of After-School Programs for Low-Income Children*, due out in summer 2002.

Another faculty member in attendance at SRCD was **Aisha Ray**, who coled a discussion on research and policy issues in father involvement and child well-being. **Ray** also presented a paper she coauthored entitled “‘Being There for my Child: African American Fathers’ Perspectives on Fathering

in Inner-city Communities” for a symposium on the role of fathering in children’s lives

Ray presented “African American Fathers’ Perspectives on Fathering in Inner-city Communities: Sources of Stress” at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Seattle, where Erikson doctoral students **Ann Masur** and **Jennifer McCray** presented “Assessing Diverse Cognitive Profiles of Young Children in the Classroom” on behalf of the Project of Learning and Teaching Assessment System, an initiative led by **Professors Jie-Qi Chen** and **Gillian McNamee**.

In May, **Kathleen Kostelny** presented “Armed Conflict, Children’s Rights, and Ethics of Intervention: Challenges for Education and Development” at the Conference on Ethics, Culture, Development, International Law and the United Nations in Havana, Cuba. In that same month, **Kostelny** presented “Psycho-social Emergency Assistance for War Affected Children” in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In June, **Aisha Ray** participated in a research roundtable on low-income fathers and families and a spotlight forum on fathers, families, and child development within low-income populations at a meeting for the National Association for → [continued on page 12](#)

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the Education of Young Children's National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development in Washington, D.C.

In June, **Professors Robert Halpern** and **Fran Stott** began a series of in-depth focus groups with Latina mothers participating in Project Hope in Little Village. Project Hope is a community based affiliate of St. Anthony Hospital and provides services to at-risk children and their families. The focus groups, known as Caregiving Consensus Groups (Gilkerson and Stott 1997), are designed to give staff a systematic way to gain insight into the thoughts of the families they serve. For Project Hope, **Halpern** and **Stott** are focusing on such topics as the meaning of a "good enough parent" in this community, the supports and stresses in their lives, goals for their children, and ways in which the program can help them reach goals such as preparation for school.

Professor Linda Gilkerson, codirector of the Unmet Needs Project, and doctoral student **Cynthia Lashley**, along with collaborators from the University of Illinois at Chicago, just completed a statewide survey of more than 270 infant/toddler programs. The survey found that staff perceive that 16 percent of the children in birth-to-three programs have social-emotional behavioral issues; 40 percent of childcare programs have had to ask a family to withdraw their baby or toddler because of these issues. Those programs that have specially trained staff or consultants reported that they were better prepared to meet the special social-emotional needs of young children. For 80 percent of the programs, training was a priority area. These findings support Erikson's plan to initiate a new program in infant mental health. **Gilkerson**, in partnership with Larry Gray, M.D., of LaRabida Children's Hospital, also initiated the fussy baby study, examining the needs of families whose infants cry often, are difficult to console, or have difficulty in sleeping or feeding.

Herr Research Center at Erikson Institute

The Herr Research Center, established in 1997 with a gift from the Herr family, is the hub of research activities at Erikson Institute. Its mission is the development of knowledge from applied research that contributes to a significant improvement in the quality, effectiveness, and equity of education and services for children and families. The center provides technical assistance and funding for the development and implementation of a wide variety of research projects, promotes the dissemination of research findings, and sponsors conferences and seminars.

Dedicated to addressing the interests and needs of an increasingly diverse society, center-supported research initiatives work with populations that vary in age, race, and ethnicity, with a primary focus on programs and populations in disadvantaged communities. The center is committed to providing a sound and useful base of information to guide the understanding of complex social issues such as changing family and societal needs and families in stress as well as the nature and efficacy of services for children and families.

Current research projects

Erikson Arts Project
Caregiving Consensus Groups with Latina Mothers
Children and Violence Project
Doula Support for Young Mothers Project (in collaboration with the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago)
The Helping Relationship in Early Childhood Interventions Project
Computer Training for Early Childhood Teachers Project
Faculty Development Project on the Brain Fathers and Families
The Learning and Teaching Assessment System Project
Project Match
Reggio Emilia Project
Schools Project
Teacher Attitudes About Play
The Unmet Needs Project

Publications available from the Herr Research Center

Applied Research in Child Development
Number 1, After School Programs
Applied Research in Child Development
Number 2, Father Care
"Lessons from Beyond the Service World,"
Judith S. Musick, Ph.D.
"Harder Than You Think: Determining What Works, for Whom, and Why in Early Childhood Interventions,"
Jon Korfmacher, Ph.D.

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