

## WORKFIRST EVALUATION PHASE III

REPORT 00-4  
Full Report 00-4, Click Here

### REPORT DIGEST

JUNE 28, 2000



STATE OF WASHINGTON

JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND  
REVIEW COMMITTEE

#### AUDIT TEAM

Ron Perry  
*Staff Coordinator*

John Woolley  
*Principal Management Auditor*

Kendra Dahlen  
*Senior Management Auditor*

Toni Johnson  
*Intern*

LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR  
Tom Sykes

Copies of Final Reports and Digests are  
available on the JLARC website at:

<http://jlarc.leg.wa.gov>

or contact

Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee  
506 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE  
Olympia, WA 98501-2323  
(360) 786-5171  
(360) 786-5180 Fax  
e-mail: [neff\\_ba@leg.wa.gov](mailto:neff_ba@leg.wa.gov)

## WORKFIRST EVALUATION

The 1997 Legislature enacted Washington's welfare reform—WorkFirst—and also directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to evaluate its impact. This report is the third phase of JLARC's continuing work in looking at the effectiveness of this major change in public policy.

## GETTING A JOB IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP

The report focuses on “**post-employment services**” intended to help WorkFirst clients stay employed and improve their earnings.

By providing post-employment services, WorkFirst recognizes that many clients lack skills needed to hold onto a job, and attempts to provide them with assistance in solving work place problems as they emerge.

Since the potential problems are varied, what falls under the umbrella of post-employment services is also diverse. Post-employment services may include: assisting the client in learning how to interact with a supervisor, emergency car repair, or helping a client to participate in obtaining specialized technical skills in a trade or community college. Many clients simply do not have the skills needed to resolve the inevitable problems they experience when entering or re-entering the workforce.

As Washington's caseload changes, so does the type of services needed to assist clients who get a job but lose it and return to welfare. At WorkFirst's onset in July 1997, 58 percent of the caseload were “repeating”—that is, they had left welfare and come back. By February of 2000, 72 percent of the caseload were repeating, and lesser proportions were either new recipients or those who had been on welfare continuously.

However, welfare clients now have more work experience than in the past, and with this experience they are likely to have a better chance of getting another job.

We know from the national research literature some lessons that seem to be borne out in recent Washington experience. The three most important points are that steady employment among welfare clients is not common, there is no magic formula to keep them from losing jobs, and that fast re-employment may be a key to success.

## WHAT'S NEEDED IN WASHINGTON STATE?

WorkFirst has attempted to incorporate post-employment services as a key component to its approach in assisting clients to become independent of welfare.

There are considerable problems, however, in getting clients and employers engaged in the services.

### Timing of Communications and Contact With Clients Is Essential

**WorkFirst clients** are not taking advantage of post-employment services and employers have little knowledge that the state provides clients with on-going support once they get a job. Clients are not receiving the information about services in an effective manner. Clients are likely to be overwhelmed with information upon entering the program.

In areas of Washington with limited success in selling the services to clients and employers, the services are introduced to clients early. The value of the services is repeated during the job search process and again when a client gets a job.

### Basic Work Place Skills Need to Be Emphasized

**Employers stressed** the need for new employees to have basic work place skills to be successful on the job. Employers asked that WorkFirst train new employees in skills such as time management, how to work in a team, and effective communication with supervisors and co-workers. Employers view the *technical skills* training as part of what they would teach employees “on-the-job.”

### Information on How Fast Clients Get The Next Job Is Important

**Two clear findings** of the national evaluation literature regarding post-employment services are that clients usually don't keep their first job and that getting a client another job quickly is a key to welfare independence. Yet WorkFirst does not collect information on whether clients are getting another job or the speed at which they get that job. Without this information, important policy questions cannot be answered.

### Services Need to Be Reorganized

**As we reported** in our previous WorkFirst Phase II Evaluation, the logic for assigning job retention to the Department of Social and Health Services and wage progression to the Employment Security Department seems weak. WorkFirst agencies should strive to integrate the services provided to help clients stay employed and improve their earnings.

### Assess The \$1000 Early Exit Bonus

**Clients who receive a grant of less than \$100 a month may get a one-time \$1,000 Early Exit Bonus** if they leave the caseload; however, they may return to the caseload at any time. DSHS must monitor the impact of the bonus and report its findings to JLARC.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Clients should be introduced to post-employment service providers and their services prior to employment. The benefits of these services should be marketed to the employer as soon as the client is employed.*
  - 2. Job search and job retention efforts need to emphasize the ongoing development of basic job skills.*
  - 3. Re-employment of clients, and the speed at which clients are re-employed, should be counted as a performance measure.*
  - 4. The current organizational structure that treats job retention separate from wage progression should be eliminated and the two efforts viewed as part of one post-employment service.*
  - 5. The Department of Social and Health Services should report back to JLARC on the impact of Early Exit Bonus payments on caseload reduction. The report shall include an analysis of how many clients who received the bonus returned to the caseload, and how quickly they returned, compared to clients who did not receive the bonus, left the caseload, and share similar caseload characteristics.*
-