

Job Training And Alternatives To "Work First" ⁶

For more information on the model programs discussed, see [Links](#).

Successes involving life skills training, remedial education, pre-employment training, job training and job placement can be illustrated by the Ford Foundation's **Project Redirection**, run in locations around the nation in the 1980s; the **Argus Community Learning for Living** program begun in the South Bronx; Argus replications, like the **Capital Commitment** program in Washington, DC; the **Job Corps** nationally; and the **Comprehensive Competencies** program nationally. These models are applicable to out-of-school youth as well as to welfare clients. See: **Welfare Reform in Perspective**. See the **Citations** at the end of this section. For more information, visit the **American Youth Policy Forum**, the **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**, the **Delancey Street Foundation, Inc.**, the **Ford Foundation**, the **Job Corps**, the **Mathematica Policy Research Inc.**, the **Manpower Development Research Corporation**, the **National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support**, **STRIVE**, the **Urban Institute** and the **YouthBuild USA**, as well as **Publications**.

Project Redirection

Project Redirection invested in female welfare recipients, giving them the opportunity to secure high school diplomas, train for jobs and get placed. Funded by the Ford Foundation, Project Redirection was for mothers 17 years of age or younger who lacked a high school diploma or an equivalency degree. Most were eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Implemented by nonprofit community-based organizations in 11 locations during the 1980s, this comprehensive program sought to enhance teens' educational, job-related, parenting, conflict-resolution, and life-management skills, while encouraging them to delay further childbearing until they were more financially independent.

Project Redirection linked participants with existing opportunities in the community and supported these "brokered" services by organizing workshops, peer-group sessions, and individual counseling. One to five teen mothers were paired with a female adult counselor in the community. The counselors volunteered to provide ongoing support and friendship to convey values both within and outside the normal program structure. Stipends for participation (\$30 per month, with deductions for unsatisfactory attendance) were provided, along with child care, transportation and recreational services.

Five years after entering the program (and four years, on average, after leaving it), Project Redirection participants, although still disadvantaged, showed more favorable outcomes than did a comparison group of young mothers in terms of employment, earnings, economic self-sufficiency, parenting skills and likelihood that they would enroll their children in Head Start. Their children were more advanced developmentally vis-a-vis the comparison group. However, there were no differences between program mothers and comparison mothers in terms of educational outcomes, like completion of GEDs.

More positive outcomes for program vis-a-vis comparison mothers were experienced on-site, at the nonprofit host organization's facilities, rather than off-site. *This finding is consistent with our suggestion that counseling may have more powerful effects at safe haven locations and one-stop-shopping community centers, rather than away from them.* (See: **Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America**,

The connections among prosocial behaviors, decreased reliance on public assistance, and increased and better

employment that we found need to be further tested.

The Capital Commitment replication of Argus holds particular promise. Capital Commitment was begun by a husband-and-wife team with over 20 years experience in the telecommunications field, having worked with Pacific Bell, AT&T North American Communications, SPRINT and MCI. The focus of the program is on disadvantaged inner-city residents, homeless individuals, persons on welfare, single mothers, out-of-school youth and individuals in need of re-training. Capital Commitment provides classroom and lab instruction in telephone installation, maintenance and repair -- *before* placement in jobs. Graduates of the program have expertise in all areas of residential, commercial and central office installation. Graduates have historically secured jobs earning more than minimum wage, generally \$10 to \$15 per hour or more. Capital Commitment graduates often move on to positions where they can develop careers in the industry. The organization has continued to secure contracts for telecommunications installation and maintenance from large employers, like the United States Department of Defense.

The long run mission of Capital Commitment is to increase minority employment in the telecommunications industry. Although telecommunications is a \$700B industry, less than one percent of employees are minorities and women. Providing more well-trained minority job applicants is a necessary first step to changing this situation.

Capital Commitment wanted to refine its program with some of the socialization, counseling, youth development, remedial education, pre-employment training and corporate etiquette training components of Argus that help insure job retention. Accordingly, the replication merged these Argus components with Capital Commitment's placement in a high tech industry with upward mobility.

The successful Capital Commitment replication has important implications for welfare reform, we believe. More likely than not, states are placing welfare recipients in any available jobs. For example, in its contract with the state of Texas, the Lockheed Corporation may be creaming the best candidate for such jobs, because Lockheed is paid for the number of persons it places, not for the quality of the jobs or their potential to provide a liveable wage with upward mobility and the potential growth of the industry in which the job was placed. By contrast, Capital Commitment has recognized the need for "training first" and not "work first," identified an industry with great potential and succeeded in placing minorities in it in good jobs with good wages and considerable future upward mobility. Similarly, Argus Act I stresses "training first" and places welfare recipients in good drug counselor jobs that in great demand. There is a waiting list for the drug counselor graduates. These successes show the potential for a *demand* side training first welfare reform job placement strategy in which growth industries are systematically identified and strategic plans for placement then are developed.

For the complete evaluation of the Argus replications, see Replication of the South Bronx Argus Learning for Living Center, under Publications. Argus is a training first model that fits both welfare reform and reform of the Workforce Investment Act. See also, Welfare Reform in Perspective.

Job Corps

Job Corps is an intensive and comprehensive public sector program that takes seriously the need to provide a supportive, structured environment for the youth and welfare recipients it seeks to assist. Job Corps features

classroom courses, which can lead to high school equivalency degrees, counseling, and hands-on job training for very high-risk youth. Hence, as in individual community-based, nonprofit programs, like Argus, Job Corps carefully links education and training first, placement, and support services.

Job Corps centers are located in rural and urban settings around the country. Some of the urban settings are campus-like. Others essentially are "street-based." In the original design, a residential setting provided sanctuary away from one's home. Today, nonresidential variations are being tried.

Job Corps participants are high school dropouts, usually about 16 to 22 years old, and often at risk of drug abuse, delinquency, and welfare dependency. The average family income of Job Corps participants is less than \$6,000 per year, 2 of 5 come from families on public assistance and more than 4 of 5 are high school dropouts. The typical participant is an 18-year-old minority high school dropout who reads at a seventh-grade level.

In the 1980s, evaluations sponsored by the U.S. General Accounting Office and others included a representative sample of participants from 61 program sites. Participants and comparison youth were matched on age, race, poverty status, and educational level. During the first 6 months after the program, Job Corps participants were 5 times more likely to have earned a high school diploma or general educational diploma than comparison youth. In contrast to comparison youth, program youth experienced improved health, employment, and earnings outcomes over a 4-year period after the program. The program also was associated with reduced criminal behavior. During the program, participants had arrest rates significantly lower than comparison youth, and in the 4 years after the program, participants had significantly fewer arrests for serious crimes than comparison youth.

A later, 1991, evaluation by the Congressional Budget Office calculated that for each \$10,000 invested in the average participant in the mid-1980s, society received approximately \$15,000 in returns, including approximately \$8,000 in "increased output of participants," and \$6,000 in "reductions in the cost of crime-related activities."

According to one evaluator, then-Howard University researcher Robert Taggart, "Naysayers who deny that labor market problems are real and serious, that social intervention can make a difference, or that the effectiveness of public programs can be improved will find little to support their preconceptions in the experience of programs like Job Corps."

There have been criticisms in the 1990s of too much violence and drug abuse in Job Corps Centers. Such problems must be taken seriously. But the success of Argus in a drug-free, alcohol-free and violence-free environment demonstrates that Job Corps can refine itself with Argus-type solutions. Another criticism of Job Corps in the 1990s was that the success rate -- of youth who move on to a job or full-time study -- was too low in some centers. Individual centers can vary. But the overall success rate in the 1980s was 75 percent. Graduates retain jobs longer and earn about 15 percent more than if they had not participated in Job Corps. Given that Job Corps takes the most troubled youth and that the cost of Job Corps (about \$22,000 per year for the residential version) is lower than prison, a 75 percent success rate appears relatively high. For example, compare the 75 percent Job Corps success rate to the success rate of Ted Williams, the last baseball player to bat .400. There may be a need for a clearer national dialogue on relative standards of success.

The most recent evaluation of Job Corps was very positive. Written by Mathematica Policy Research Inc., the report is based on a nationwide thirty-month follow-up study of 9,409 participants who had been accepted into

the Job Corps program, and 5,977 applicants who were eligible for, but not enrolled in, the residential program, which generally lasts eight months. According to the Mathematica report, Job Corps participants were 20% less likely to be arrested, charged or convicted of a crime. If convicted, they served less jail time than control group counterparts. They received more post participation non Job Corps academic instruction and vocational training than control group members, received less in federal benefits than control group members, received less in federal benefits than control group members, and were less likely to describe their health as "poor" or "fair". See [Mathematica Policy Research Inc.](#)

Comprehensive Competencies

Comprehensive Competencies is a computer-based individualized instruction approach to teaching basic skills. It is based on extensive research with disadvantaged youth, dropouts and welfare recipients. The franchised system, marked by **USA Basics**, includes computerized management and testing techniques and is being used in over 250 schools and community-based agencies in combination with other education and job-training methods.

The package includes self-paced instructional materials that allow participants to work one-on-one with the computer without risk of the kind of embarrassment that can occur in a classroom setting. The package also integrates all modes of teaching, workbooks, and audiovisual materials. Teachers are encouraged to spend as much time as possible with individual students. Multiple evaluation studies using comparison groups have shown that participants make significant gains, for example, boosting achievement test scores by a 1.0 grade level in reading and 1.4 grade levels in math for every 28 hours of instruction.

The documented success of Comprehensive Competencies, and the implications for replication, are all the more important based on a new study by the Educational Testing Service, which has found that the nation's poor and minority students have significantly less access to computers in their classrooms than do more affluent children.

"Welfare Reform" in Perspective

Today, the top national priority when it comes to employment for low-income populations is welfare reform. It therefore makes sense to summarize how the successes of [Project Redirection](#), [Argus](#), [Capital Commitment](#), [Job Corps](#) and [Comprehensive Competencies](#) can be applied to welfare reform.

Welfare reform legislation, passed in 1996, abolished Aid for Families with Dependent Children and replaced it with capped funding, time limits on program eligibility and demanding work requirements. The requirements include "work first." No training is allowed until a person is placed on a job.

In our experience, "work first" appears to be modeled in part on the **Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)** for out-of-school youth -- a population that includes welfare mothers. JTPA for out-of-school youth failed -- because there was inadequate training prior to placement and because that training essentially involved placing "trainees" in low-skill work rather than investing in improving their skills. The results were high turnover in dead-ended employment and low job retention rates. In terms of earnings, young men under 22 who were in the program had earnings of \$854 lower than their comparison group, with significantly greater deficits for those who undertook "work first" on-the-job training. See: [What Doesn't Work?](#)

Combined with the other requirements of current welfare reform, "work first" can mean that, on an average day,

a welfare mother with little or no prior work history might, for example, need to rise early, get the children off to day care (which may be inadequate) or school, go to work (which can take a long time), work in a dead-ended job *and* train at the same time, travel back, pick up the children, make dinner and get everyone to bed. With such a day in mind, Mary Anderson, a "work-first" mother in Wisconsin (which is considered ahead of other states in "work first") wrote this in a letter to the editor of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*:

It's better [according to the governor of Wisconsin] to go to work at a non-living wage, leave your children, suffer stress every moment of the day, worry constantly, and not be able to make ends meet. But at least [the mother] is not on welfare.

I'm sure she [the mother] sees the benefits. They're readily apparent to me. Sure she's exhausted, sure she's scared, sure she may topple off the edge into homelessness at any point. But, she's off welfare and that's all that counts. Isn't it?

What's ironic to me is the thought that [the governor] most certainly enjoyed a marvelous, picture-perfect Christmas. I'm sure he was able to buy all of the presents he wanted, and had a beautiful tree to put them under.

And yet he presumes to tell thousands of Wisconsin women, who certainly do have jobs raising their children, that their lives are improving under ["work first"].

Let him do what those women do for a while. Better yet, let [the governor's wife] come to my house, work both of my jobs, inside and outside the home, at my wages, and see what she tells her husband when she comes home.

Of course, he would never do that to his wife or his family. But he has done it to me and mine.

In addition, "work first" does not acknowledge the evaluated successes of programs that have put training first, like **Argus**, **Capital Commitment**, **Project Redirection**, **Job Corps** and **Comprehensive Competencies**. Programs like **Argus** and **Capital Commitment** give priority not to placement in dead-ended jobs, but to jobs with living wages in sectors like telecommunication repair and drug counseling, where there is demand and the potential exists for mobility up the job ladder.

Almost all welfare reform evaluations are of "work first." *There is a pressing need for new, comprehensive evaluations that, for a comprehensive design across many sites, compare "work first" variations to training first variations.* Such scientific evaluations need to look at ultimate outcomes -- like whether there was more employment and income, how long workers were retained on the job, whether they learned skills that were transferable to other employment, whether they were placed in industries with genuine job ladders and real upward mobility, whether the family was stable and whether trainees and children were involved in crime.

Welfare originally was designed to reduce child poverty. Above all, therefore, when we evaluate, the measure of success is not less welfare but less poverty. Today, 22 percent of America's children, ages 1 to 5, still live in poverty. As the **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities** has shown, over recent years in the 1990s, the poor are barely better off -- in a time of great prosperity -- and the extremely poor are worse off.

While trumpeted by some, a 1999 report by the **Urban Institute** is not necessarily reassuring. Since 1993, welfare rolls have been cut in half, from 14 million to 7 million. From 1995 to 1997, two thirds of the former welfare recipients interviewed were working. However, of those working, 75 percent lacked medical benefits in the study by the **Urban Institute**. From 1995 to 1997, one third who left welfare rolls had returned by the end

of the period. Studies of individual state programs that put welfare recipients to work without much training show that earnings typically rise by very little. In addition, federal government data show that the poorest 20 percent of American families lost more in welfare benefits than they gained in earnings. Collectively, these studies and data therefore raise questions. For example, will former recipients who go to work be trapped in low-paying jobs with little chance of advancement? Will recently employed welfare recipients lose their jobs in a recession? Our experience is that the answer to both questions will be yes -- unless we reform welfare reform to include real training first like that provided by proven, Argus-type successes. Even if, belatedly, we recognize this need for training first, there presently are no guarantees that Argus-type training first can be replicated on a scale great enough to absorb the million of welfare clients who the 1996 welfare law will force off the rolls by 2002. Hence, the need for **communicating what works and creating will to act**.

For perhaps the best ongoing critique of "welfare reform", see the **National Campaign for Job and Income Support**.

Additional Examples:

1. Preschool
2. Public School Reform
3. Youth Investment and Development
4. Job Training, Placement and Retention
5. Community Development Corporation and Training
6. Problem-Oriented and Community Equity Policing
7. Comprehensive Interdependence
8. Contacts

6/ Citations: This section is based on:

Allen, LaRue. *An Evaluation of the Argus Learning for Living Program*. Final Report on HHS Grant 0090PD1403. Washington, DC: The Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, 1990.

Arella, Lorinda. *Field/Comparison Study of the Argus Job Horizon Program. Final Report on New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse*. Grant GJC-OASAS. New York: Gateway Jobs Corps Center, 1994.

Berlin, Gordon and Andrew Sum. *Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future*. New York: Ford Foundation, 1988.

Brown, Amy. *Work First*. New York: Manpower Development Research Corporation, March, 1997.

Curtis, Lynn A. *Family, Employment and Reconstruction*. Milwaukee: Family Service America, 1995(a).

Fisher, Marc. "German Job Training : A Model for America?" *Washington Post*, October 18, 1992, p. A1.

Karr, Albert R. "Job Corps, Long Considered a Success, Sparks Political Tug-of War Over Costs." *Wall Street Journal*,

June 1, 1992, p. A1.

Kaslow, Amy. "Corps for Troubled Youth Now Finds Itself in Trouble." *Christian Science Monitor*, February 2, 1995, p. 1.

Levitan, Sar A., and Frank Gallo. *Spending to Save: Expanding Employment Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Social Policy Studies, 1992.

Levitan, Sar A., Gallo, Frank, and Shapiro, Isaac. *Working But Poor*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Loprest, Pamela. "How Families That Left Welfare Are Doing: A National Picture" *Assessing the New Federalism*, Series B. No. 1, Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, August, 1999.

The Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation. *Training First*. Washington, D.C.: The Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, 2000.

The Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation. *Final Report to the U.S. Department of Labor on Replication of the Argus Learning Center for Living Center*. Washington, DC: The Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, 1998.

Nordheimer, Jon. "Welfare to Work Plans Shows Success Is Difficult to Achieve." *The New York Times*, September 1, 1996, A1.

Poliat, Denise F., Janet C. Quint and James A. Riccio. *The Challenge of Serving Teenage Mothers: Lessons from Project Redirection*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1988.

Rich, Spencer. "Job-Training Program is Paying Off -- for Some." *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1992, p. A11.

Sturz, Elizabeth Lyttleton. *Widening Circles*. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

Sanchez, Rene. "Poor, Minority Students Lack Access to Computers," *The Washington Post*, May 15, 1997, p. A13.

Taggart, Robert A. *Fisherman's Guide: An Assessment of Training and Remediation Strategies*. Kalamazoo, MI: W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, October 1981.

U.S.A. Basics. *The Comprehensive Competencies Program: A High Tech Approach to Basic Skills*, Alexandria, VA : U.S. Basics Skills Investment Corp., 1989.

Vobejda, Barbara. "Welfare's Next Challenge: Sustained Employment." *The Washington Post*, September 22, 1996, p. A1.

Vobejda, Barbara. "Old Problems Undermine Teen Mom's New Chance." *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1997, p. A1.

Washington Post. "Welfare Happy Talk." *Washington Post*, August 25, 1999, p. A 16.

Weinstein, Michael M. "When Work Is Not Enough." *The New York Times*, August 26, 1999, p. C 1.

Wilson, William Julius. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1996.

Wilson, William Julius. "The New Social Inequality and Affirmative Opportunity." In Greenburg, Stanley B. and Theda Skocpol, *The New Majority: Toward a Popular Progressive Politics*. New Haven and London: 1997.

