Whose Job Is It?  
Employers' Views on Welfare Reform

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The employer viewpoint is an obvious, but often overlooked, aspect of rural welfare-to-work efforts and reforms. What do they see as the major barriers to successful employment of welfare recipients? Who do they believe should address these barriers? This chapter describes the experiences and opinions of 130 Minnesota employers who have demonstrated some degree of interest or involvement in hiring welfare recipients. Several clear themes emerge among the entire group, as do some important differences between rural and urban/suburban employers. In addition, because the survey is part of a broader study, this chapter contrasts employers’ perceptions with those of welfare recipients.

BACKGROUND

Welfare Reform in Minnesota

When Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Minnesota enacted the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) as its state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. MFIP was intended to meet two goals: to reduce the number of people on welfare and to help families move out of and remain out of poverty. Key features of
MFIP include an emphasis on quick job placement, including some training and job support; relatively generous (38 percent) disregard of earned income in calculating assistance levels; continued eligibility until household income rises to about 120 percent of the poverty level; a maximum sanction of 30 percent; a full 60-month time limit; and a transitional child care subsidy and Medical Assistance (Minnesota’s Medicaid program) for one year after leaving MFIP. (For initial outcomes of MFIP, see Gennetian and colleagues in this volume, p. 287.)

At the time of the transition from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to MFIP, roughly 50,000 persons were receiving welfare benefits in Minnesota. Over half of these recipients (60 percent) lived in the urban and suburban counties of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, while 30 percent lived in rural counties and 10 percent lived in counties with mid-sized cities (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 1999). Minnesota’s unemployment rate dropped from 3.3 percent in 1997 to 2.8 percent in 1999, reflecting the state’s significant economic growth.

**Rural Issues in Welfare Reform**

Rural areas face special challenges in welfare-to-work efforts (Marks et al. 1999). Rural welfare recipients often travel longer distances between home, child care, work, and training opportunities, and services such as child care, public transportation, and workforce training are more scarce than in cities. Thus, it appears particularly important for public agencies to assist rural recipients with these services. Yet rural officials have fewer staff available to take advantage of state block grants for such purposes and to put welfare-to-work programs into action. In addition, public assistance appears to carry a greater stigma in rural areas, which reduces both recipients’ willingness to seek help and others’ awareness that help is needed.

Rural areas also have some advantages over metropolitan regions, including more personal relationships between service provider and recipient, the more informal nature of resource and support networks, and the smaller scale of human service agencies (Marks et al. 1999).

The types of jobs available in rural areas also differ. Jobs in manufacturing, which have traditionally supplied rural areas with higher
wages, have decreased in the last three decades (RUPRI Rural Welfare Reform Initiative Panel 1999). In their absence, rural employment opportunities are dominated by industries paying low wages, such as retail and service industries. The employment boom in recent years has passed over many rural communities, which often have high unemployment rates (Marks et al. 1999). To successfully move welfare recipients into the labor market without displacing current workers, rural communities with high unemployment must create new jobs. At this time of economic prosperity, the necessity of job creation is unique to rural labor markets.

To place the requisite number of welfare recipients in jobs to satisfy new welfare-to-work requirements, efforts to involve businesses must reach beyond earlier business partnerships in three respects. The first is scale; they must find ways to place and retain far more welfare recipients. The second is reach; they must find ways to place and retain a far wider mix of recipients, including many with serious barriers to employment. Finally, retention and advancement require that they help welfare recipients not only find jobs, but retain their jobs and advance into higher-paying jobs that can sustain their families without cash assistance (Brown, Buck, and Skinner 1998).

Mindful of these and other challenges to the successful implementation of a work-first model of welfare reform, the McKnight Foundation initiated 22 community partnerships throughout Minnesota, drawing together local welfare offices and the service providers who are helping welfare recipients make the transition from welfare to work, and strongly encouraging involvement from local employers.

The McKnight Foundation’s Welfare-to-Work Initiative

Minnesota’s largest private philanthropy, the McKnight Foundation, was interested in helping families make a successful transition from the old welfare system to the new one. McKnight was particularly concerned about potential gaps in service delivery and eager to learn the best ways to fill them. To achieve these goals, the McKnight Foundation provided $20 million to 22 community partnerships serving MFIP families in 86 of Minnesota’s 87 counties. Funding for most partnerships began about the same time MFIP took effect statewide, January 1998, and was initially for a two-year grant period.
The community partnerships, many of which included multiple counties in rural areas, were encouraged to experiment with programs to accommodate the specific needs in their area. However, each partnership was expected to address transportation, child care, and the employment needs of MFIP families. Each partnership brought together a variety of organizations, often including county MFIP caseworkers and directors, government or nonprofit employment services providers, social service agencies, educational institutions, employers, faith-based groups, and other community members.

From their inception, the McKnight-funded partnerships were expected to involve employers. Employers had a vital resource for welfare recipients—jobs—and the recipients in turn made up a sizable potential workforce, which many employers needed. This chapter addresses the perceived barriers to the transition from welfare to work; who should do what to address those barriers; the role of employers in welfare reform; and how various stakeholders can best work with employers to support the transition from welfare to work. Thus, unlike many other chapters in this volume that explore the impact of welfare policies that emphasize work (such as McKernan et al. [p. 257] or Lichter and Jensen [p. 77]), this chapter investigates the context and effects of a program designed to supplement such policies with the support services that might help such a model work.

STUDY APPROACH

The McKnight Foundation contracted with Wilder Research Center to examine the effectiveness of funded partnerships in increasing employment and self-sufficiency. Because each partnership was free to design its own approach within the relatively wide parameters laid out by McKnight, a controlled study design was not feasible. Instead, the study sought, through three separate methods, to describe the work of these partnerships. The first method involved interview-based case studies of 10 of the 22 partnerships.

The second approach involved telephone interviews with MFIP recipients residing in the 10 case study areas. Selected items from the
survey are reported here; the complete results are found in Owen et al. (2000). The survey was conducted between July and November 1999 with 395 current and former MFIP recipients, who were selected at random from the list of all recipients in the 10 case study sites. The response rate was 62 percent. Because of the restriction to case study sites and English language interviews, the sample is not fully representative of the statewide MFIP population.

The third component of the study, and the one on which this chapter focuses, consisted of telephone interviews with 130 employers identified by local representatives in 21 of the 22 community partnerships. The interviews were conducted between August 1999 and February 2000. These employers likely overrepresent those most inclined to play a role in welfare reform and should not be taken to represent employers in general. Of 181 employers identified in the 21 sites, 130 completed the interview. Forty-one said they had not been involved in partnership activities and therefore declined to participate. When these employers are excluded from the sample, the response rate is 93 percent. Employers’ views are presented and contrasted with the views of welfare recipients. In addition, employers’ perceptions of barriers to employment are contrasted with recipients’ perceptions of barriers to self-sufficiency.

The chapter also highlights rural/urban differences that emerged in the study. In this analysis, the urban/suburban grouping includes the core Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul and their three primary rings of suburbs, plus those in cities in the smaller Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the state. The rural grouping includes all nonmetropolitan counties, those in the nonurban areas of the smaller MSAs, and those in independent growth centers at the fringes of the seven-county Twin Cities area. The rural group included 81 employers (62 percent of the total) and the urban/suburban group included 49 (38 percent). Because the group of employers surveyed was a purposive sample rather than a random one, no claims are made about the statistical significance of the findings. However, results of $\chi^2$ tests were used to determine differences worthy of mention and are reported here for rough guidance on the magnitude of the difference, recognizing that the necessary assumptions about random distribution cannot be met.


STUDY FINDINGS

The Employers

Of the 130 employers interviewed, 71 (55 percent) were in rural areas of the state; 35 (27 percent) were located in the Twin Cities area (Minneapolis and St. Paul and their primary suburbs); 14 (11 percent) were in other large cities; and 10 (8 percent) were in independent growth centers at the fringe of the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Most employers in this survey (58 percent) had more than 100 employees, including full-time and part-time workers. One-quarter of employers were mid-sized (20–100 employees). Only 15 percent had fewer than 20 employees. Smaller employers were more common in the rural sample; one-third of rural employers, compared with less than one-quarter of urban/suburban employers, had fewer than 50 employees.

In contrast to this sample, only 4 percent of all Minnesota employers had 100 or more employees in June 1999 (most recent statistics available), while 67 percent of all Minnesota employers had fewer than 10 employees, compared with only 10 percent of the sample and 12 percent of rural employers in the sample (Minnesota Department of Economic Security 1998). Compared with all Minnesota employers, the welfare-to-work partnerships heavily overrepresent manufacturing and services, while underrepresenting all other sectors. Just under one-third (30 percent) of all employers in this survey were in manufacturing, and 18 percent each were in trade and in health care services. All service categories combined (health, business to business, social services, other) totaled 47 percent.

Employers varied in the proportion of jobs available to low-skilled workers. For about one-third of the employers in the sample, 76 percent to 100 percent of the jobs required no more than a high school diploma. About half of the businesses required only a high school diploma for half or more of their jobs. However, almost 10 percent of employers had no jobs available for workers with only a high school diploma. These proportions are consistent across the state.

The average hourly wage for entry-level employees ranged from $5.30 to $13.00. The median entry pay was $7.59. Urban/suburban
employers paid higher wages \( p \leq 0.001 \). A rural worker earning the median full-time wage for this sample would earn $15,600 per year, or $1,300 per month. The median urban/suburban worker, also working full-time, would earn $16,640 per year, or $1,387 per month.

Most employers (79 percent) reported that entry-level workers qualified for health care benefits within three months after employment. Eleven percent of employers (more often the smaller ones) did not offer health care benefits at all. Among those who offered benefits, about half (48 percent) reported that at least some of their employees could not afford to take advantage of the benefits because of the cost. About one-quarter of employers (28 percent) estimated that one-quarter or fewer of their employees could not afford to use medical benefits, and about one-quarter (21 percent) of employers thought more than one-fourth of employees could not afford to participate in the benefits. There were no urban/rural differences in the availability of or participation in benefit plans.

Most employers—93 percent overall and 94 percent of rural employers—said that an entry-level worker who did a good job would be earning more money after one year. Among the 111 employers who would pay more, the amount of the raise ranged from $0.13 to $3.00 per hour. The median increase expected during a satisfactory first year was $0.70. Most employers expected to continue to have higher-paying opportunities available. They reported that if the same worker were still with the company after five years and still doing a good job, the median hourly wage would be $10.00 ($9.76 for rural workers). For 6 percent of the employers (8 percent of rural employers), the wage after five years would still be below $8.00 per hour. Only 23 percent of employers, and only 12 percent of rural employers, thought entry-level workers could reach more than $11.00 per hour in five years. Thirty-six employers were unable to estimate probable pay five years into the future.

The rural median wage of $9.76 after five years would yield an annual income of $20,301. Assuming an annual inflation rate of 2 percent, this would be about 133 percent of the federal poverty guideline for a family of three in 2004—enough to leave welfare—but only about 110 percent of poverty for a family of four, and thus not enough to leave welfare.
The Welfare Recipients

The study also interviewed a group of welfare recipients. The 10 case study sites included two suburban and two mainly urban communities in the Twin Cities area and six mostly rural communities in greater Minnesota. Overall, 55 percent of the recipients lived in rural areas and 45 percent lived in urban/suburban areas, including the Twin Cities and Moorhead. Comparisons of the basic demographic characteristics of the study sample and of the statewide MFIP population indicate that the study respondents are somewhat representative of the overall welfare population. The average ages, length of welfare use, and marital status among the two groups are very similar (Owen et al. 2000).

The vast majority of respondents (90 percent), regardless of geographic area, said that MFIP had helped them in some way. Help with basic needs, such as paying bills (31 percent), buying food (24 percent), getting medical coverage (16 percent), and paying for housing (15 percent), were cited as ways that MFIP had helped. Several respondents also mentioned that MFIP had helped them to stay in school (17 percent), find a job (17 percent), or get child care (15 percent).

About one-third of all respondents (37 percent) reported that MFIP had caused problems for them. The bureaucratic complexities of the system (20 percent), loss of benefits (14 percent), and poor service from MFIP workers (12 percent) were most often cited. The distribution of responses from rural and urban/suburban recipients was similar, although rural recipients were more likely to report a loss of benefits (19 percent, compared with 8 percent). Working respondents (26 percent) had more problems with program complexity and paperwork than did nonworking respondents (11 percent), reflecting the increased paperwork requirements associated with being employed. Those who were not working were more likely to say that their MFIP worker was insensitive or rude (27 percent) and that they were “forced” to work or look for work (22 percent). This compares with 16 percent and 1 percent of working respondents, respectively.

Barriers to Hiring and Retaining Welfare Recipients

Employers, current welfare recipients, and former welfare recipients held quite different views on which barriers to the transition from
welfare to work were the most formidable. The only barrier that ranked among the top five for all three groups was the issue of child care.

**Employer perceptions of barriers**

Employers were asked, “What do you see as the main barriers to hiring and retaining current and former welfare recipients?” Respondents had a wide variety of opinions. More than anything, they cited a lack of “soft skills.” Soft skills are those work-related social and interpersonal skills needed to be successful on the job, such as general social skills, calling if one is going to be late or absent for work, and also staying with the job despite frustrations or disagreements. Forty-five percent of employers cited the lack of such skills as a barrier (Table 12.1). Past research confirms this sentiment. In a survey of 900 private businesses and public organizations in three Michigan cities, Holzer (1999) found that 90 percent of businesses wanted assurances that there would be no problems with absenteeism, tardiness, or work attitudes in hiring welfare recipients. These “soft skills” were mentioned more often than basic cognitive skills, and job-related skills were of least concern.

Employers in general did not see it as their responsibility to address the soft skills barrier. Their most common recommendation for welfare recipients was to improve their soft skills and attitudes: take more responsibility, be more dependable, develop a work ethic, “deal with their reasons for being late,” be more realistic, balance work and family better, and so on (Table 12.2).

Problems with transportation and child care were also frequently cited by employers. About one-fourth of employers said recipients could help themselves by securing transportation, child care, or other basic supports. Among rural employers, transportation problems ranked second in frequency of mention and child care problems ranked third. Among urban/suburban employers, child care ranked second, and transportation tied for third place with poor attitude and motivation, which ranked fourth for the overall group. “Attitude and motivation” includes references to laziness, preferring welfare over work, or being unwilling to accept the wages or hours of the jobs that are available.

Prior research has found that few employers are willing to help
Table 12.1  Employers’ Views of Main Barriers to Hiring and Retaining MFIP Recipients (most common responses to an open-ended question)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers’ views</th>
<th>Rural $(N = 47)$</th>
<th>Urban/suburban $(N = 79)$</th>
<th>Total $(N = 126)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of “soft skills”</td>
<td>36 (46%)</td>
<td>21 (45%)</td>
<td>57 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation problems</td>
<td>24 (30%)</td>
<td>11 (23%)</td>
<td>35 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care problems</td>
<td>21 (27%)</td>
<td>12 (26%)</td>
<td>33 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor attitude/motivation</td>
<td>15 (19%)</td>
<td>11 (23%)</td>
<td>26 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lifestyle” issues</td>
<td>15 (19%)</td>
<td>8 (17%)</td>
<td>23 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing; no barriers</td>
<td>7 (9%)</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
<td>13 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System/structural problems*</td>
<td>9 (11%)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>12 (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* System/structural problems include problems with medical insurance, loss of benefits, work-related costs, lack of support services, “can’t earn enough to make it.”

Sample responses for Table 12.1 to the question,

“What do you see as the main barriers to hiring and retaining current and former MFIP recipients?”

Their skill levels aren’t good and neither is their work ethic. They don’t understand about being on time, everyday basic common sense things. [Urban/suburban employer]

Lack of transportation. Unwilling to work second or third shift—due mostly to no child care available at that time. [Urban/suburban employer]

The primary one is work ethics. They just don’t want to work. [Urban/suburban employer]

Some of these people (single moms) don’t know how to juggle work and home life. They fizzle out after a month and they just can’t hack it. [Rural employer]

Retaining [a job]—can they make it on the wages they are paid? They have new costs, for clothing, day care, transportation. Expenses are extra and unforeseen. [Urban/suburban employer]

Child care issues; children’s issues such as sick children; big needs, like kids getting in trouble. They quit their jobs, because of their kids. They lack family support, transportation, a helpful environment. [Rural employer]
Table 12.2 Most Common Responses to the Question, “What Do You Think MFIP Recipients Could Do to Address the Barriers They Face?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers’ responses</th>
<th>Rural (N = 40)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Urban/suburban (N = 69)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total (N = 109)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve their soft skills/attitude/other life skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get transportation, child care, or other basic supports</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get education/training</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing; there’s nothing they can do</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a job (with a different employer)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve their psychological adjustment</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample responses to the question in Table 12.2:

Job preparation—have a safety net plan. If a car breaks down, can you get to work, by taxi, friend, how? Better to be late an hour than throw up your hands and not come at all. [Rural employer]

Be more open with employers, communicate their needs and concerns. Tell us when things come up in their lives. [Urban/suburban employer]

They need to get motivated and get responsible. They need to get moving—life is different when you have to work. [Rural employer]

Get technical skills and training, that builds their self-esteem. Also getting their relationships right, with family and friends. [Rural employer]

Find child care providers who will be flexible with nontraditional work hours. [Rural employer]

They don’t have a lot of things they can do. It’s a problem with society and the system. [Urban/suburban employer]
with these supports. In the above-noted Michigan study, Holzer (1999) found that only 7 percent of employers surveyed would help with child care, and only 8 percent would help with transportation, although more would help with basic skills (34 percent), and most would help with job skills (80 percent). This is consistent with other studies (e.g., Regenstein, Meyer, and Hicks 1998) that found that employers want good attitudes and reliability and are willing to train employees to actually do their job.

Another general category of barriers is grouped here as “lifestyle issues,” because they are sometimes perceived as resulting from welfare recipients’ personal choices or those of their family members. These included being a single parent, family crises (unspecified), drug abuse, domestic violence, or criminal history. Eighteen percent of employers identified at least one of these issues as a main barrier to employment of welfare recipients.

Where employers were willing to help was in overcoming perceptions and creating a positive work environment for the new workers. Over half (56 percent) offered suggestions that centered on employers’ relationships with employees, such as trying to understand what they were going through, being open-minded or flexible or encouraging, communicating their expectations clearly, or “providing a positive work environment” (Table 12.3). Nearly half (48 percent) suggested somewhat more tangible forms of support, including mentors; help with developing soft skills; help with child care, transportation, education, or training; and helping them “meet their needs.” These more concrete suggestions were more likely to come from rural employers (54 percent) than from urban/suburban employers (37 percent). Thirteen percent of employers suggested some form of positive community participation, such as greater involvement with the partnership or with social service agencies, working on affordable housing issues in the area, or communicating to policymakers about the welfare-to-work process.

Welfare recipients’ perceptions of barriers

Welfare recipients themselves mentioned many of the same barriers as employers did, but ranked their importance quite differently (Table 12.4). Respondents were asked to identify any barriers that
Table 12.3 Most Common Responses to the Question, “What Do You Think Employers, Like Yourself, Could Do to Address These Barriers?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers’ responses</th>
<th>Rural (N = 41)</th>
<th>Urban/suburban (N = 74)</th>
<th>Total (N = 115)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand their issues; communicate; encourage them; provide a supportive work environment</td>
<td>40 (54%)</td>
<td>24 (59%)</td>
<td>64 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help/support them; provide or link them to basic supports, mentors, soft skills, education/training</td>
<td>40 (54%)</td>
<td>15 (37%)</td>
<td>55 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic involvement; work on policy/social environment</td>
<td>10 (14%)</td>
<td>5 (12%)</td>
<td>15 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers could provide/improve pay, bonus, benefits, work hours</td>
<td>9 (12%)</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>13 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold the line; be tough with them; maintain standards; no special treatment</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>8 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing; “It’s not our job.”</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>6 (15%)</td>
<td>7 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be willing to hire; match workers with suitable jobs (not necessarily at this business)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample responses to the question in Table 12.3:

These people are not self-directed. We need to be tougher on them. Get them out of bed and on the telephone looking for work. [Rural employer]

We could work with employees one-on-one, [tell them] “This is what’s expected,” tie the person to a mentor who can support them. [Urban/suburban employer]


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample responses (continued)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We are not positioned to do anything. We don’t have excess funds to provide what they need, like on-site child care. [Urban/suburban employer]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We could provide transportation and child care. That would benefit us, that would cut the rate of days employees miss due to problems with transportation and child care. [Urban/suburban employer]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance and patience, those are the two big things we have to give. [Rural employer]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing, we don’t really have anything to offer, because they are so uneducated it’s too much work to try to help them. [Urban/suburban employer]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be as sensitive as possible to the needs of the employee. Many haven’t worked for a while, and be sensitive to their adjustment period. [Urban/suburban employer]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
would make it difficult for them to get off or stay off welfare within the time limits. Overall, about one-fourth of recipients (26 percent) cited the lack of livable wage jobs as a barrier to self-sufficiency. Lack of education (20 percent), child care (18 percent), and health insurance (15 percent) were also cited by many respondents. Rural and urban/suburban recipients did not vary much in reporting these barriers, although rural recipients (12 percent) were more likely than urban/suburban recipients (4 percent) to say that it was difficult to find a job, and urban/suburban recipients (27 percent) reported more problems with child care than did rural recipients (11 percent).

Overall, of the types of services typically offered by the partnerships, the following were most commonly used by rural respondents within the three months preceding the interview: help paying for child care (31 percent); help finding a job (24 percent); help at work from a mentor or someone else who supports and encourages you (21 percent); and soft skills training (20 percent).

Help to obtain and maintain a car was the dominant need for rural

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### Table 12.4 Welfare Recipients’ Reported Barriers to Leaving and Staying off Welfare (% of respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welfare recipients’ responses</th>
<th>Rural (N = 219)</th>
<th>Urban/suburban (N = 176)</th>
<th>Total (N = 395)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low paying jobs/cost of living compared with wages</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of education/couldn’t go to school or finish degree/lack of skills</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of child care/can’t find affordable, reliable, quality child care</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of health care coverage/can’t afford insurance</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to find a job</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability (physical or mental)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of affordable housing/housing problems</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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respondents. Overall, the most common areas of unmet need for rural recipients were help with car repairs (44 percent); an affordable car (free or low-cost) (37 percent); help paying for child care (26 percent); emergency money for living expenses (26 percent); help getting a car loan (25 percent); other car-related expenses (24 percent); and help getting car insurance or clearing a record (23 percent).

Although the majority of respondents said they were receiving food stamps (67 percent) and medical assistance or other medical coverage (85 percent), these were still areas of significant unmet need. Of those who did not have these benefits, 53 percent said they needed health insurance, and 38 percent said they needed food stamps. Rural and urban/suburban recipients reported almost identical rates of food stamp use and insurance coverage. Of those who did not have these supports, urban/suburban respondents (47 percent) were significantly more likely than their rural counterparts (31 percent) to report that they needed food stamps ($p \leq 0.05$).

### How Employers View the Community Partnerships

The role of service providers is changing as work demands increase under welfare reform. Employers in a nationwide random sample reported generally positive attitudes toward welfare recipients as prospective employees. Three-quarters of those who had already hired recipients were satisfied with their job performance, and 94 percent said they would hire recipients again (Regenstein, Meyer, and Hicks 1998). However, in another study, participants in focus groups in three major cities were not as positive. These employers believed that the many new applicants for entry-level positions, regardless of whether they received welfare, tended to have significant deficits in motivation, attitude, and life skills (Roberts and Padden 1998). Holzer (1999) found that employers had higher expectations for the advancement of welfare recipients who had been hired in the last two years than they had for welfare recipients they will hire in the future. Such findings point to the need to adjust business-involvement strategies as the characteristics of the welfare caseload change.

The employers participating in the partnerships under review here had a variety of opinions of what partnerships could do to strengthen the employability of recipients (Table 12.5). Nearly half (48 percent)
Table 12.5  Most Common Responses to the Question, “What Do You Think the Partnerships Could Do to Help MFIP Recipients Address Those Barriers?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers’ responses</th>
<th>Rural (N = 40)</th>
<th>Urban/suburban (N = 68)</th>
<th>Total (N = 108)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide/connect them with basic supports/resources</td>
<td>35 (52%)</td>
<td>17 (43%)</td>
<td>52 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help them develop soft skills</td>
<td>23 (34%)</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td>35 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help them get education/training</td>
<td>9 (13%)</td>
<td>10 (25%)</td>
<td>19 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide services to employers/the community</td>
<td>8 (12%)</td>
<td>7 (18%)</td>
<td>15 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide role models, mentors, coaching, counseling, support groups</td>
<td>7 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>11 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change/enforce the system</td>
<td>9 (13%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>10 (9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample responses to the question in Table 12.5:

I think the MFIP recipients need the help of the partnership because they can’t possibly do it on their own. They need to develop job skills. [Rural employer]

They could make sure the workers understand what’s expected of them and teach them proper work expectations. [Urban/suburban employer]

Follow up more on the placement with employees and also with employers about how it’s working out. More frequent communications between partnership entities. [Rural employer]

Help them with their skill levels and their work ethics. Many people don’t have English skills so they need ESL classes. Build relationships with recipients so they know resources. [Urban/suburban employer]

Be strict. Take away benefits right away [if they don’t show up for work]. [Rural employer]

Provide people to work with new employees, to help them with adjustments. [Urban/suburban employer]
said partnerships could provide or connect recipients to basic supports and resources (such as child care, transportation, medical insurance, after-hours services, English as a second language classes, etc.), and nearly one-third (32 percent) said they could help them develop soft skills. About 18 percent overall (13 percent of rural employers) thought they could help recipients get education or training.

In contrast, there were fewer mentions (14 percent of employers) of services that the partnerships could offer to employers or to the community. These included more information on available services, following up with employers after placing workers, and screening job seekers and matching them with employers’ needs. Among the top five suggestions of rural employers (but not urban/suburban employers) was the suggestion to change the system (advocate for policy or funding changes, enforce penalties for not working, or provide better incentives for working).

The survey asked employers whether local partnerships had helped them recruit, train, and retain employees, and whether partnerships had helped their employees balance their responsibilities to their job and to their children. Employers who reported that they had been helped in any of these ways were asked to explain. The responses allow us to explore the kinds of programs and services that employers consider useful, either for themselves or for their workers.

Three-quarters of urban-suburban employers had been helped to find and recruit new employees, compared with just over half of rural employers ($p \leq 0.05$). The kinds of services that were helpful were the same for rural as for urban/suburban employers. In both cases, they mainly cited referrals of job applicants and visibility in the community (75 percent of rural employers, 92 percent of urban/suburban employers). The visibility came mainly through advertising job opportunities, including job fairs for urban/suburban employers (but not for rural employers). To a lesser degree, it also included more general visibility for the company and its activities. Other help included various supports to workers themselves (transportation, child care, translation or English as a second language, mentors, etc.). Just over 10 percent of employers cited help given to employers themselves (assessment of applicants’ soft skills; help with training; and payment of wages for an initial employment period).

Almost the same proportion of urban/suburban and rural employers
reported that the partnership had helped them with training new employees (40 percent and 42 percent, respectively). The majority mentioned help given directly to employees, mainly partnership-based training programs, but also counseling or mentoring, English language or translation help, and “help with problems” not further specified. Only 11 percent cited help given directly to employers. These kinds of help included screening, training of supervisors or otherwise helping employers develop their own training programs, and partnership payment of wages for an initial period.

Job retention was also noted. Rural employers reported receiving slightly more help with retention than did urban/suburban employers (48 percent of rural, 38 percent of urban; not statistically significant). For the most part (80 percent), those who were helped cited ongoing support from the partnership for new employees, including help with transportation, child care, and translation, as well as training programs (especially in rural areas) and counseling or mentoring. To a lesser degree (20 percent), employers cited the value of help given to employers, including screening employees, training supervisors, ongoing communication with employers (presumably about any problems the employee might be having), and payment of initial wages or a bonus for staying six months. A few employers (6 percent) mentioned ways in which the partnership had helped them to better help employees. These included being more aware of workers’ problems, making accommodations for problems, or developing a program to meet their needs.

Helping employees to balance their work and outside lives was not cited by any employer as a concern that had led them to become involved in the partnership. However, when asked, slightly more than one-third (38 percent) were able to think of some way in which they or their employees had received such help. Two-thirds of this group cited nonmaterial help provided directly to workers by the partnership, including “they go over that in the training.”

Other employers mentioned material help to workers (40 percent), including providing or helping them to find basic goods and services, such as clothing and shoes, child care, transportation, and even housing. Just a few employers (9 percent) cited ways in which their involvement had led them to better support the work-life balance: greater awareness of employees’ problems, or accommodation to them; train-
Another insight into what employers find helpful is in their answers to a question about how effectively the partnership has balanced the different goals of social service agencies and businesses. A focus group study (Roberts and Padden 1998) found that employers believe that public agencies are out of touch with the needs of employers, especially their need to produce a product or service at a competitive cost. They need employees with basic work skills, and want agencies to help job-seekers acquire these skills.

In this study, however, a substantial minority (42 percent, slightly higher in rural areas) either believed there was no conflict between these goals or that the partnership was ensuring that both were being met. Next in frequency (18 percent) was the observation that partnerships were doing a good job of balancing the goals because they were meeting business needs. Some employers cited process factors such as realism, communication, or effort as ways in which the balance was being achieved (13 percent), and some cited the importance of business being involved in or understanding social issues (8 percent). Respondents who believed that the partnerships were not doing a good job of balancing tended to cite ways in which the partnership failed to meet business needs (e.g., “the workers they sent over both quit”; 13 percent), or faulted the partnership for asking business to do too much or not asking workers to do enough (7 percent), or for poor process, mainly follow-up and communication (7 percent).

### How Employers View Their Own Role

Forty-one percent of both rural and urban/suburban employers said their company does something differently as a result of their contact with the partnership. The changes ranged from knowledge and attitudes, to relationships with the community, to actual business practices. Urban/suburban employers were significantly more likely to report that they had adopted more open, less restrictive hiring practices (Table 12.6). Rural employers were slightly more likely to mention greater involvement or participation in the community or with social service agencies. About one-quarter of employers said they better understand the needs of welfare recipients, but a greater percentage have begun do-
Chapter 12

Almost all employers (95 percent) said there is a role for employers in welfare reform. Rural and urban/suburban employers alike said their role was to be open-minded and flexible and to consider hiring welfare recipients (65 percent). Other roles cited were to be good citizens (28 percent)—to help the community, work together, or be a resource for social service agencies; and to provide various kinds of tangible sup-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers’ responses</th>
<th>Rural (N = 29)</th>
<th>Urban/suburban (N = 20)</th>
<th>Total (N = 49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide supports (tangible, e.g., training, mentor program, child care, literacy program)</td>
<td>10 (35%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>13 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Meet their needs,” connect workers to supports (tangible, e.g., provide info on child care, housing, transport)</td>
<td>8 (28%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
<td>13 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand workers; “supportive work environment” (intangible or unspecified)</td>
<td>7 (24%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>13 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More networking, involvement in the community</td>
<td>9 (31%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>11 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More open to hiring; post jobs at agencies; identify welfare employees**</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>8 (40%)</td>
<td>10 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed hours; more flexible</td>
<td>4 (14%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Working on” child care, housing</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: ** = p ≤ 0.05.
port to their workers (28 percent), such as training, benefits, living wages, mentors; or help with transportation, child care, or career advancement. Fourteen percent mentioned more vague or intangible kinds of help, such as providing encouragement or support or “working with them” (14 percent).

Of the handful of employers who said there was no role for employers in welfare reform (three rural and four urban/suburban), the reasons were interesting in juxtaposition with each other. All three of the rural employers said that it was too much to ask (recipients need too much special treatment, or it is not the responsibility of business to take care of these needs), while the four urban/suburban employers were evenly split between that view and the opinion that nothing needs addressing (recipients do not need any special treatment, “there shouldn’t be any welfare”).

How to Work with Employers

Based on the responses, employer involvement in promoting the goals of welfare reform is likely to be more successful if

- public agencies, nonprofit agencies, and employers all agree on clear and consistent goals;
- employers can count on service providers to deliver tangible and agreed on supports;
- reasonable emphasis is placed on the needs of the employer, and genuine attempts are made to understand employer expectations;
- employers are educated in what can realistically be expected from some welfare recipients, and the time it might take to help them become good employees.

Reports from community partnerships bear out employers’ responses regarding the welfare-to-work transition: employers can be involved, especially if one is careful about good, clear, honest, ongoing communication. They are more likely to enter into the partnership if public and nonprofit service agencies make individualized contact with them, and when the contact is made by one specific agency with a track record in the community rather than by a new and untested collaboration (Owen et al. 2000). Responses to this study show that social service providers who ask and listen, and who make consistent efforts to
follow through with the needed support, can become valued allies for employers.

**Differences between Rural and Urban/Suburban Employers**

Consistent with previous research, this study shows that rural employers are not very different from urban and suburban employers in their views of welfare reform and welfare recipients. Although rural employers tend to be smaller, on average, and pay lower wages than urban and suburban employers, this sample of employers who have become involved with welfare reform did not otherwise show significant differences except that urban and suburban employers were much more hungry for workers and consequently demonstrated greater flexibility in hiring practices.

Previous literature and the case studies in this project both indicate that most rural employers are small. To maximize their efforts, the rural partnerships recruited a disproportionate number of large employers; therefore, the sample for this survey underrepresents the typical, smaller rural employers. To explore what difference, if any, size makes in rural employers’ needs and attitudes, the rural sample was subdivided into smaller and larger employers (with fewer or more than 100 employees). Those with a $\chi^2$ $p$-value of $\leq 0.05$ are summarized below.

Smaller employers were more likely to have no jobs available to applicants with only a high school diploma or less; they were less likely to offer a raise of more than $1.00$ to beginning workers after one year; they were more likely to have no medical benefits for their employees; and they were more likely to report that employees were unable to take advantage of medical benefits because of the cost. Almost half of each group was made up of organizations in the service sector (profit or nonprofit), but the large employer group included more health care services, and the smaller employer group included more services other than health care, business-to-business, and social.

Smaller employers were less likely to have expected to benefit from working with the partnership. However, among those who did have hopes, there was no difference between larger and smaller employers in the kinds of hopes they had.

Large employers were more likely to perceive transportation problems as a barrier to hiring and retaining welfare recipients. This was
the only significant difference in the barriers perceived by large and small rural employers. Large employers were more likely to say that employers could help to address barriers by providing help and support to their employees, including help with transportation, child care, or connection to community resources. In other respects, size made almost no difference at all in the kinds of suggestions for what employers could do.

Smaller employers were no more or less likely to say they did anything differently as a result of their contact with the partnership. However, of those employers who did make changes, small employers were more likely to say they had become more flexible or had changed their hours.

DISCUSSION

Role of Employers in Welfare-to-Work

In Minnesota, where the unemployment rate is extremely low (2.8 percent in 1999), on average, employers in all areas of the state appear to welcome help that will bring qualified employees to their door, support workers who encounter difficulty in entry-level positions, and coach workers toward long-term adjustment and stability. For the most part, rural employers value the help of social service providers in coaching and mentoring their entry-level workers. There are indications that rural employers in this study have needed and received less help in recruiting than urban and suburban employers, but more help in retaining employees on the job. All employers, whether urban, suburban, or rural, see two main benefits from affiliation with welfare reform service providers: preparing new workers for employment and providing ongoing support following the initial hiring. One employer summarized the ideal situation this way: “When someone doesn’t show up, I can call Sue and she will follow up with the worker and tell them to get back to work.” Nonetheless, a small number of employers say that they appreciate services provided by social service agencies to the employers themselves, for example through training, communication to employers, and suggestions on how best to support the transportation and child care needs of their employees.
Employer involvement in the welfare-to-work partnerships resulted in little direct employer help to new workers. Employers continued to report that their role in welfare reform is to offer jobs, salary, and (sometimes) benefits, as well as “to tell (or dictate to) the welfare department what we’re looking for, so they can provide people who already have the training they need for the job.” If employers changed their practices, the change was most likely to “have a greater understanding of employee issues, or to have a more open mind about the employees we are willing to hire.” Most employers did not feel responsible for helping employees deal with child care, transportation, or housing. Those that did were the exception rather than the rule.

Employers are most likely to remain involved in welfare-to-work activities when they see clear benefits through recruitment, hiring, and retention of new employees and when they find that social service agencies are clearly prepared to provide consistent back-up support to help new workers sort out problems and avoid ongoing crises. They want to be treated as a customer with needs to be filled, not as a way of filling someone else’s needs; they appreciate that some partnerships are “starting to listen more to our needs and concerns.” Other than recruitment, areas in which employers have clearly benefited include workplace mentoring of new employees, resolution of work behavior issues, and support for solving child care, transportation, and—occasionally—housing problems.

The wide variety of services offered by partnerships, and the equally wide variety of reactions from employers, point to the need for flexible and individualized approaches to meeting employers’ and recipients’ needs. In fact, it may be useful for social service providers to think of employers similarly to the way they think of recipients. Like recipients, some employers have it easier than others. Each is dealing with a unique set of circumstances while governed by fairly uniform rules and expectations, and each operates in a climate of scarcity and under significant stress, with little room for reflection or experimentation or frills.

**Perceived Barriers to the Transition from Welfare to Work**

Most employers in this study entirely overlooked two other sets of barriers that are of significant concern to the partnerships. One set of barriers mentioned repeatedly by recipients and partnerships, but only
very rarely by employers, are those economic issues arising out of the imbalance between the low wages in low-skill jobs and the high costs of housing, child care, transportation, and medical insurance. One urban/suburban employer expressed this concern, which from their point of view appears as a problem with retention: “Can they make it on the wages they are paid? [They have] new costs for clothing, day care, transportation. Expenses are extra and unforeseen.” For most employers, however, the assumption is that if people work (or work hard), they do not need any welfare. In contrast, recipients expressed significant worries about the most basic family support issues: paying for food, housing, medical insurance, and other unavoidable bills. One-quarter of all respondents worried about finding a job that pays enough to allow them to get by. One-eighth of rural recipients worried about finding any job at all. The lower pay among rural and small employers is consistent with Lichter and Jensen’s finding (p. 77 in this volume) that although rural single mothers are more likely to “play by the rules” and work, they are also more likely to be poor.

The other set of barriers of growing concern to partnerships, but rarely mentioned by either employers or recipients, are those of welfare recipients with multiple problems or more serious problems. These problems include depression, learning disabilities, substance abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, or children with disabilities. The new welfare laws require most such recipients to work, but most employers are not ready to accommodate such needs in their workplaces: “I’ll be honest, some just don’t fit into the employment realm . . . (such as, severe depression). Be careful of placement of some individuals. Not everyone is made to work 8-to-5. How to help [them] is the next goal.” Service providers cited by McKernan and coauthors (in this volume, p. 257) speak of the lack of services to address these needs. The failure of either employers or recipients in our study to even mention such needs illustrates one of the major difficulties in delivering vital services.

On the positive side, the survey suggests that employers’ successful experiences with the first phase of welfare-to-work could help to lay the foundation for the next necessary steps. Some employers are currently taking what they perceive to be risks by hiring the more job-ready recipients and investing enough effort to help them adjust to the workplace, with the help of support services from the social service providers. Most employers are not prepared to do more than two
things: “Give people without a job history an opportunity to build one and develop soft skills. Also we can be a resource for them in getting plugged into other services.” If employers find this experiment successful, they may be willing to take slightly greater risks with slightly more challenging employees, provided they are assured of yet more support.

However, this study also suggests that most employers will not take even small risks unless forced by a tight labor market. If the economy takes a downturn before people with more serious barriers have been absorbed, it may be difficult indeed to persuade an employer to hire someone who requires substantially more accommodation. This is already true in regions with higher unemployment rates. To accomplish such a change in practices, employees may need supported work models, similar to community rehabilitation programs that serve adults with disabilities.

Lower-paying jobs are the rule in rural areas, and the cost of living is not comparatively low enough to enable most single parents with limited education, or even two-parent families with more than a few children, to earn the amount needed for self-sufficiency. For half the employers surveyed, even five years of successful work experience would not yield earnings high enough for an entry-level worker in a family of four to leave welfare in Minnesota. This study does not suggest any solutions for these barriers. Almost no employer believes they can increase their pay to help welfare recipients. These findings are echoed in a report of a recent employer survey in Wisconsin (Jacobson and Green 2000), which also found little interest in supporting employees beyond a paycheck and some job-specific training.

**Suggestions for Supporting the Welfare-to-Work Transition**

Employers’ assessment of partnership benefits appears to reflect a traditional view of the roles of employers and workers, in which employers see themselves as responsible for recruiting, but see workers, once hired, as responsible to maintain or develop the needed skills and work-life accommodations. The few employers who mention the value of services to themselves in training, retention, or work-life balance may reflect the beginning of change in these assumptions, possibly as a result of changing labor force dynamics. Or they may represent a sub-
set of employers with a high sense of civic and social responsibility who have been there all along, and who would naturally be among the first to respond to the call to participate in the McKnight partnerships. Until more employers are prepared to accept some role in assisting their employees with difficulties in training, retention, and family issues, it is unlikely that more than the “first third” of welfare recipients will be able to make a lasting transition into the workforce. Employment support services from public and nonprofit agencies could make a significant difference in persuading employers to begin to accept this role. Evidence from other components of this study (Owen et al. 2000) suggests that the involvement of a diverse array of private non-profit organizations alongside the public agencies in the community partnerships strengthened the support available both to recipients and to employers.

Information from recipients and partnerships yields a different perspective on the “lack of soft skills” than one might get from reviewing only the employers’ comments. What many employers perceive as unreliability or lack of soft skills appears substantially related to problems with unavailable or unreliable child care or transportation. In other words, when an employee’s child care arrangement falls through, causing the employee to miss work, the employee views this as a child care problem, while the employer is likely to see it as a reliability problem. In addition, some recipients reported that they were obliged by their welfare caseworkers to take time off from work to come to the welfare office to prove they were working, or to take care of other required paperwork. Employers seem to have no idea their employees have such demands on them.

Employers’ suggestions for solutions to soft skills deficits emphasized that partnerships “could make sure the workers understand what’s expected of them and teach them proper work expectations.” In the participant survey, approximately one-fifth of respondents reported receiving such soft skills training, and most rated it somewhere between “somewhat useful” and “very useful.” This rating, while clearly positive, was somewhat lower than the average rating for more tangible services, such as help paying for child care or help getting a low-cost car loan.

One can conclude that soft skills training is helpful for many recipients, but that it does not solve many of the underlying problems. Some
partnerships have worked to educate employers about the shortages in child care, or have asked them to help develop solutions for transportation barriers. A few employers have become deeply involved in such problem-solving, and the survey suggests that a few more have increased their awareness of the underlying difficulties their employees are dealing with. Most employers, however, are only interested in efforts that affect the actual on-the-job performance of their workers. They are more interested in learning about community resources that can assist their employees with their child care or transportation problems. Getting to the job and ensuring that one’s family responsibilities are met while one is at work are considered the employee’s responsibilities. If anyone shares the responsibility, it is more likely to be the social service agencies in the community, not the employers. As one urban/suburban employer said, the employer’s role is “Not much. It should be their responsibility—the program [partnership] and the employee. We just train them for the job.”

From the employer’s perspective, the best support for the welfare-to-work transition is to ensure that people are working and to provide them with ongoing help to deal with any problems that might interfere with their work. Employers mainly want such support to be provided directly to the worker, but some employers welcome services that help them as employers help their workers. Mentorship programs, including training supervisors to be job coaches, seems an especially promising approach for employers willing to undertake something new themselves. One employer said a mentoring workshop “provided knowledge how to bring out the best in others, and how to treat each other using a feedback system.”

Smaller employers, underrepresented in this sample but predominant in the statewide population of employers, pose special challenges to social service providers who hope to assist rural welfare recipients move toward self-sufficiency. This study found that smaller employers have a lower proportion of jobs accessible to workers with a limited education, are likely to pay lower wages and offer smaller raises, and are less likely to provide medical benefits. There is some evidence that they may be harder to persuade to partner with social service providers, because they expect fewer benefits from such a partnership. On the positive side, although small businesses are less likely to feel that they can provide any additional supports to their workers, they do appear
more likely to be “innovative, flexible, and make changes when they make sense, [such as] restructuring work and hours of work.”

Note

The Wilder Research Center is located in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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Greg J. Duncan
Leslie A. Whitener
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“This book presents revised versions of about half of the papers presented at a conference on the title topic held in May 2000”—summary p.

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