

A Report to
NOW Legal Defense
and Education Fund

by the
Institute for Women's
Policy Research



Working First But Working Poor:

The Need for
Education & Training
Following Welfare Reform

Executive Summary



About

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR)

IWPR is a public policy research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating the debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. IWPR focuses on issues of poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family issues, the economic and social aspects of health care and domestic violence, and women's civic and political participation.

The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups around the country to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR, an independent, nonprofit organization, also works in affiliation with the graduate programs in public policy and women's studies at The George Washington University.

IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations. Members and affiliates of IWPR's Information Network receive reports and information on a regular basis. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

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Since 1970, the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund has been at the center of every major social and economic justice concern on the women's rights agenda, defining the issues and bringing them to public attention. NOW Legal Defense pursues equality for women and girls in the workplace, the schools, the family and the courts, through litigation, education, and public information programs.

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Established in 1970 by the founders of the National Organization for Women, NOW Legal Defense is now a separate organization with its own mission, programs and Board of Directors.

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Working First But Working Poor:

**The Need for
Education & Training
Following Welfare Reform**



Executive Summary

By

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First and foremost, we wish to thank the job training students and welfare, employment service, and job training staff who gave so generously of their time to participate in this study. Quite literally, this study could not have been completed without their cooperation. Tammy Ouellette and the staff at ORC Macro conducted the telephone survey with job training students, and we are most appreciative of their efforts and expertise. The research was supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies. We also thank Katherine McFate and Betsy Bieman, Program Officers at The Rockefeller Foundation, for their interest in and support of the survey research. Valuable research assistance was provided by IWPR staff Annisah Um'rani, Danielle Hayot, Alina Mason, Hedieh Rahmanou, Bethany Snyder, and NOW Legal Defense intern Nicole Lindemyer. The report was copy edited at IWPR by Marc Molino. Layout and design were provided at NOW Legal Defense by Aurora Robson. Martha Davis, Sherry Leiwant, Yolanda Wu, and Spenta Cama at NOW Legal Defense consulted on the project. We would also like to thank the Project Advisory Committee members who provided valuable feedback on the research design and survey instruments, including Dan Bloom, Jennifer Brooks, Ruby Coles, Cynthia Deitch, Jocelyn Frye, Pamela Loprest, Brigid O'Farrell, Anu Rangarajan, Barbara Reskin, and Stephanie Shipp. Dr. Negrey thanks the University of Louisville for a leave of absence to execute this study for IWPR.

A Report to
**NOW Legal Defense
and Education Fund** 

By the
 **Institute for Women's
Policy Research**

September 2001

Dear Friend:

For more than 30 years, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund has advocated for economic justice for women, from breaking the glass ceiling to making welfare reform work. This report is particularly timely and important as Congress begins to assess The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The goal is not just to identify problems but to create solutions. In this report, 12 practical and effective recommendations are outlined that will help women succeed in getting jobs with good pay and benefits, an all-important step toward long-term economic independence. We are proud to present *Working First But Working Poor*, a report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, the premier research organization for women's economic issues, which does just that.

The evidence is in: The "work first" approach to welfare reform isn't working. How can it, when former welfare recipients, most of them working mothers, are shunted into unstable, low-paying jobs that do not sustain their families and hold little opportunity for advancement? Instead of gaining a foothold in the new economy, where unemployment is low and good jobs go unfilled, many former welfare recipients, having lost health care and other benefits for themselves and their families, are becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty.

What's the answer? To find out, NOW Legal Defense worked with IWPR to undertake this study. To understand what job training opportunities were available to women leaving welfare, this report asked how they are counseled and prepared for employment. In intensive one-on-one interviews with welfare case managers, vocational counselors, job training administrators and instructors, and in telephone sessions with community college and job training students, a complicated pattern of job segregation by gender in client referrals to job training programs was uncovered. It was also found that many women were themselves unaware of what nontraditional employment was and what advantages it might offer them.

Unlike most service-sector jobs, nontraditional jobs—in construction, building, and other skilled trades, law enforcement, firefighting, and information technologies—provide higher salaries and better benefits. In short, they give women a real opportunity to achieve economic self-sufficiency after they leave welfare. So why, if training is available and the jobs are there for the taking, aren't women being prepared for them?

That's where we could use your help. Based on what we learned in this survey, we challenge those who care about giving women the tools they need to provide for their families and to succeed on the job to help us educate and mobilize policymakers and counselors on women's behalf. The good news is that solutions are available and doable. We're calling for an end to restrictions on education and training in the federal welfare law, systemic education of welfare case managers and vocational counselors about the advantages of nontraditional job training, access to and an increase in vocational and technical training for young women and girls, and community assessment of the demand for nontraditional training and employers' needs for women in nontraditional fields.

We are aware of the enormity of the task of getting poor women better access to living wage jobs. But we also know the critical importance of women having opportunities to provide economic security for their families. It's the difference between poverty and self-sufficiency. We're convinced that with your help, we can have an impact. We look forward to working with you on this important undertaking.

Sincerely,



Kathy Rodgers
President

 NOW Legal Defense
and Education Fund

September 2001

Dear Reader:

Since 1987, the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) has been dedicated to informing and stimulating the debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. IWPR focuses its research on five main issues: poverty and welfare; employment and earnings; work and family; the economic and social aspects of healthcare and domestic violence; and women's civic and political participation.

Research shows that increased education leads to higher-paying jobs. Another important avenue for greater pay and upward mobility for women is training for nontraditional jobs. Placement in nontraditional jobs could increase women's hourly wages by as much as one-third.

Unfortunately, in the rush to reduce welfare rolls, new restrictions have been placed on education and job training. In many states, "work first" is not just the rule—it's the mandate. Poor women, who are deemed 'employable,' are shunted away from training—training that would enable them to make livable wages to support themselves and their families—and are immediately placed in low-wage, "women's" jobs. Rarely are they encouraged or even given knowledge of training opportunities that might be available to them in nontraditional jobs that would pay more, have greater stability, and more upward mobility.

But, even among those women who do undergo job training, our research revealed a clear pattern of gender segregation. Interviews with welfare case managers and vocational counselors showed that female welfare clients are disproportionately referred to training for jobs in such female-dominated fields as hospitality, child care, cosmetology, and office work.

Job training program administrators say a miniscule proportion of female welfare clients participate in training for nontraditional jobs, such as truck driving, welding, carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, and computer programming. Moreover, there appears to be more interest by women to train for these nontraditional jobs than is tapped by case managers and vocational counselors. Nontraditional training options are greatly underutilized.

Working First But Working Poor, a study we were pleased to conduct in collaboration with the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, looks at job training programs in Albany, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; Camden, New Jersey; Chicago, Illinois; Oakland, California; San Antonio, Texas; and Seattle, Washington. Through surveys and in-depth interviews, we were able to gather new evidence on what is happening to low-income women in today's "work first" climate.

The bottom line is that women leaving welfare usually are placed in or are only able to obtain low-paying jobs. The likelihood of their ever being able to climb out of poverty is low. In this report, we present a number of recommendations that, if adopted, would help poor women acquire better skills which would lead to better jobs, thus greatly improving their odds of achieving economic success and being better able to support themselves and their families. These recommendations have one basic element in common—education and training. For those who are coming off welfare and for those who are doing the training—it's the most reliable investment we can make.

This report provides you with many of the facts you need to do the work in your state, your city, your town, and your community that will make the difference between poor women who are barely managing to survive and those who are working their way to self-sufficiency.

Sincerely,



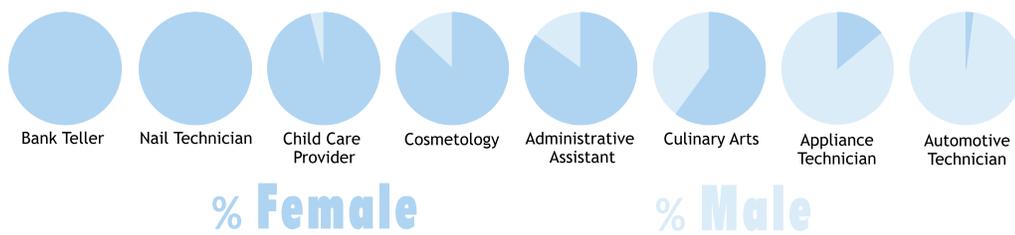
Heidi Hartmann, Ph.D.
President & CEO



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hile many welfare recipients are moving quickly into jobs, the majority of those jobs are unstable and pay very low wages. This is a result of many welfare recipients' low basic skills and the gender-segregated labor market that distributes women disproportionately to low-paying "women's jobs." The tendency for women welfare recipients to find employment in the lowest paying sectors of the labor market is exacerbated by overall labor market trends that show disproportionate job growth in the low-wage service sector. Without effective education that teaches welfare recipients the skills needed for occupations outside of these sectors, most will be unable to attain livable wages.

Male and Female Enrollment Patterns



Note: Based on responses from 14 job training administrators in seven cities about the four programs with the highest enrollment.

Source: Interviews by the Institute for Women's Policy Research

Unlike the previous Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program under the Family Support Act of 1988, the federal regulations associated with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Information Act of 1996 permit vocational education for only one year. Such education may be undertaken by just 30 percent of the caseload. These changes have led many states to incorporate "work-first" approaches into their welfare programs, resulting in an immediate, sharp decrease in access to comprehensive job training and postsecondary education for women.

These limits on access to basic and postsecondary education in the new welfare environment inhibit welfare recipients' ability to gain higher-paying jobs through such means. While educational opportunities should be increased, training for nontraditional jobs provides another avenue of upward mobility. Despite the fact that training and placing women in nontraditional jobs dramatically increases women's wages, nontraditional training options remain underutilized.

This report presents findings of an exploratory study about job training for low-income people, particularly women leaving welfare. Data are from in-depth structured interviews conducted from November 1999 to July 2000 with 67 welfare case managers, vocational counselors, job training administrators, and job training instructors in seven cities nationwide. The report also discusses results from telephone interviews conducted during the autumn of 2000 with 163 students drawn from community colleges and other job training organizations where staff participated in our study.

Practices that Reinforce Occupational Segregation

The report reveals a pattern of gender segregation in client referrals to job training programs. According to our interviews with case managers and vocational counselors, programs such as medical clerical, hospitality, paralegal, and accounting had 100 percent female referrals. Customer service, patient care, computer network specialist, computer operator, general clerical, child care provider, and culinary also had predominantly female referrals. Warehouse worker; computer programming, installation, and repair; medical assistant; security guard; electrician; janitorial; and bank teller were less gender segregated. Truck driving was clearly male dominated, with about 20 percent female referrals. While a narrow majority of welfare case managers and vocational counselors in our study had female clients in nontraditional training, the number of women in such training was quite small and the percentage of all clients they represent, miniscule.

According to our interviews with job training program administrators, programs training for jobs as bank teller and nail technician had 100 percent female enrollment; programs training for jobs as child care provider, cosmetologist, and administrative assistant were predominantly female in enrollment. Culinary arts averaged about 65 percent female enrollment. Appliance technician and automotive technician were overwhelmingly male dominated in enrollment.

The job training system is embedded within and perpetuates the gender segregation that is a central feature of the labor market. Staff interviewed for this study perceived that they respond to clients' career interests, that clients' interest in nontraditional training is limited, and that nontraditional training is only sometimes realistic for women leaving welfare. In our study of job training students, however, there appears to be more interest in nontraditional training among women than is tapped by case managers and vocational counselors. While a minority of women was interested in any particular nontraditional job, and 36 percent were not interested in any nontraditional job, 64 percent were interested in at least one nontraditional job from a list of 15, and 35 percent were interested in at least three nontraditional jobs.

Often students explained their lack of interest in nontraditional jobs by saying they don't like that type of work. When read a long list of jobs constructed by the researchers that they might consider if training were available, men's and women's affirmative responses divided along gendered lines and most of the differences were statistically significant. The list of jobs was not accompanied by wage information, however. Had wage information been made available, it is possible that more women would have expressed interest in nontraditional training leading to higher-paying jobs. One job in which women are underrepresented, although not technically a nontraditional job, generated the most interest: computer programmer (women are 26 percent of computer programmers—just one percentage point above the benchmark for nontraditional jobs according to the U.S. Department of Labor).

Among those women who expressed interest in nontraditional jobs, a number of factors emerged as important: having taken vocational/technical courses in high school; family status of single, separated, or divorced; low-income status, enjoying working outside; enjoying working with their hands; and temporary employment. Women with lower levels of education were more interested in nontraditional jobs than women with higher levels of education, probably because the latter perceive other higher-income options. Also, women who perceived that they had received good information about job options were more interested in nontraditional jobs than women who did not have this perception.

Counselors & Caseworkers as Gatekeepers of Nontraditional Training

While students were generally satisfied with their job training program, they were critical of the quality of vocational counseling they had received from caseworkers—many students felt caseworkers had not discussed different wages and benefits of different jobs, jobs with a lot of openings, and jobs with chances for advancement. Just half of the students said they had been asked about their job preference. Past work experience was most often taken into consideration by caseworkers in assessing students' skills, but students reported that tests to assess skills were rarely used. If past work experience is the primary benchmark by which case managers and vocational counselors assess future job opportunities, and clients' past work experience has been in gender-stereotyped low-wage occupations, some clients may be locked into a nar-

row range of occupational pursuits that fail to provide them the greatest opportunities for advancement and economic self-sufficiency. In addition to having past work experience limit future opportunities, low-income women were more likely than higher-income women to identify child care as a barrier to employment.

The evidence from our study indicates that low-income women and men pursue sex-segregated avenues of training and education. The extent to which they are encouraged to do so, however, is questionable. Our interview data from welfare case managers and vocational counselors indicate that they perceive that they respond to clients' employment preferences and career interests. Because they perceive that they are responsive, and not proactive, it may not be accurate to say that welfare case managers and vocational counselors "encourage" low-income women and men to pursue separate avenues of training and education. Instead, it appears that low-income women and men choose to pursue different avenues of training and education and case managers and vocational counselors do not necessarily dissuade them from doing so. Thus, the conventional gender division of labor is reinforced and goes unquestioned.

Generally, case managers and vocational counselors had limited knowledge about the effectiveness of nontraditional employment. A slight majority had female clients in nontraditional training, but the number and proportion of clients in such training was miniscule. About half of the case managers and vocational counselors who did not have female clients in nontraditional training had never had female clients in such training. Female case managers and vocational counselors were more likely than males to have, or have ever had, female clients in nontraditional training, but the number of male case managers/vocational counselors in our sample was quite small. Older staff were more positive in their attitudes toward nontraditional training as were more modestly educated staff (less than graduate degree). The latter result suggests that more highly educated staff may favor higher education as the preferred avenue of upward mobility for low-income people.

Overall, the results from our staff interviews indicate a general tendency for community college-based and non-community college-based job training programs to offer training in traditional female jobs. Community college and non-community college-based job training programs are equally likely to offer programs designed specifically for TANF recipients, although not all programs are designed for such students. Generally, there are no incentives for job training programs in either setting to enroll TANF clients, place them in jobs, or help them retain jobs. Job training programs outside community colleges are somewhat more likely to advertise. Programs in both types of settings are equally likely to have relationships with employers for purposes of matching students to jobs. Community college-based programs are more likely to have relationships with labor unions for the same purpose. Generally, community college based programs are longer, although many are being shortened since the implementation of welfare reform. These programs are also more likely to offer child care support and a larger range of other types of support for students, such as counseling services. Yet, among instructors who are likely to get to know students well

Job Training (Student Responses)

by Gender of Student

Currently Enrolled

Men (N=15)

Automotive	8
Computer Information Systems	1
Cosmetology	4
ESL	1
Psychology	1

Women (N=59)

Accounting	1
Associate Degree	6
Bank Teller	2
ChildCare/	
Child Development/Day Care	10
<i>Computer-Related</i>	
Adm Computer Tech	2
CIS Certificate	1
Data Base Specialist	1
Office Systems Tech	1
Programming	3
Telecommunications Mgmt	1
Cosmetology	21
Court Reporting	2
Culinary Arts	3
Medical Records	1
Nursing	1
Physician's Assistant	1
Teacher	1

Recently Enrolled

Men (N=27)

Appliance Repair	4
Automotive	12
Cosmetology	5
Network Technician	1
Welding	3
Other	2

Women (N=62)

Acctg/Bookkeeping	1
Bank Teller	6
Business	1
Child Care/	
Child Development/Day Care	8
Cosmetology	28
Criminal Justice	1
Culinary Arts	1
Computer Information Systems	1
Medical & Office Training	2
Teacher Aide	1
Teaching	1
Welding	3
Other	7

Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research

through repeated encounters in the classroom, community college instructors are more likely than instructors in other types of job training settings to say students need services they are not getting. This suggests that even the diverse support services available at community colleges may not be sufficient to help low-income students succeed in education and training.

The views of community college and other job training staff (administrators and instructors) differed little on the effectiveness of nontraditional training for helping low-income women gain employment and economic self-sufficiency and on nontraditional training as a realistic option for female TANF clients. Most felt nontraditional training is somewhat or very effective, and most thought it is a realistic option for TANF clients at least some of the time. Generally, their views were similar when the same questions were posed regarding training for higher-wage jobs. Community college staff were more likely than other job training staff to have a sense that low-income women get different jobs than low-income men and that they earn different wages when they secure jobs. Despite the positive attitudes of community college and other job training staff toward nontraditional training, few nontraditional training options are available at the community colleges or other job training organizations in our study, and few women participate in them.

Community college staff reported higher average starting wages than other job training staff for job training students overall (\$9.38 vs. \$8.09) and for TANF clients particularly (\$9.00 vs. \$8.16). Given our small sample, however, it is difficult to know whether the wage advantage of community college training is a product of community college training per se (a higher education premium of sorts); the types of occupations for which training is available at community colleges by comparison with non-community college sites; differences in student human capital (previous education, for example); or some other factor, such as relationships with labor unions. Nor can we know whether the wage advantage of community college training extends to both female and male students, although the result regarding higher average starting wages for TANF clients—90 percent female, generally—who received training at community colleges suggests it does.

Community college administrators and instructors were more likely than other job training administrators and instructors to report that their organization provided child care for students in job training. Administrators and instructors of non-community college programs, however, were more likely than the others to say that their organization provided clothing vouchers; they were also more likely to say their organization provided tools to students who needed them for training. Generally, students said they received child care support, but women cited child care most often as a factor that interfered with their participation in job training. This suggests that the child care support received is probably inadequate.

Policy Recommendations

Women leaving welfare usually obtain low-paying jobs, and the likelihood of their achieving economic success remains low unless interventions are applied that will help them acquire better skills and better jobs. In conclusion, we recommend a number of interventions that advocates and policymakers could pursue to improve low-income women's odds of achieving economic success. In particular, we recommend:

1

Training time should be extended to permit women leaving welfare to overcome deficits in basic skills. This would prepare them for additional training for higher-income jobs through community college education or nontraditional training. Federal TANF regulations should be modified to allow basic vocational education to be counted as work activities; these should be allowable for longer durations and open to an increased proportion of the TANF caseload.

2

Currently, job training programs outside community colleges are providing a "second chance" for many students who have not completed high school or earned a GED. Students who lack a high school diploma should be encouraged to complete their graduation requirements in order to better prepare them for future job training or higher education.

3

Because other research and this study show that those with more education earn more than those with less education and that community college students participating in job training programs at these colleges earn higher wages than students at non-community college sites, individuals who have completed high school should be encouraged to pursue higher education and job training programs available at community and four-year colleges. TANF regulations should be changed to allow recipients to complete as many years of college as they can benefit from. The current one-year limit is not supported by research findings.

4

Systematic education of welfare case managers and vocational counselors needs to be increased so that staff understand and utilize the advantages of nontraditional training for women, while improving counseling and assessment procedures to better tap low-income women's interest in nontraditional employment or other high-wage opportunities.

5

The concept of nontraditional employment itself needs to be better understood and accepted, especially with the advent of high-technology jobs. Due to the visibility of nontraditional training programs in the building trades, many people equate nontraditional employment only with the building trades. However, there are numerous jobs that fall under the U.S. Department of Labor's 25-percent benchmark for nontraditional jobs for women, such as machine operators; drafting occupations; electrical, electronic, computer, surveying, and telecommunications technicians; automotive sales; shipping; and welding to name a few. Case managers and vocational counselors more knowledgeable about nontraditional training would permit a wider net to be cast, perhaps better tapping women's interest in nontraditional employment. Subsequently, more funding for training women in these fields would create greater opportunities for women to enter these occupations.

Policy Recommendations Continued...

6

Access to vocational and technical training for young women in high school must be increased. Our research suggests that participation in such courses is related to later interest in nontraditional training. Local school boards could utilize materials available through the U.S. Department of Labor, or create materials of their own, to educate young women about nontraditional employment.

7

Child care must be made adequate through state accountability measures of welfare performance based, in part, on successful delivery of child care, consistent with final regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on the TANF high performance bonus.

8

Conflicts between training and employment must be minimized. Paying students for training (so they can work fewer hours) and permitting training and work to occur during regular weekday hours, such as two days of work and three days of training, would increase the likelihood that individuals successfully complete their programs.

9

Communities need to assess demand among women for nontraditional training and employers' willingness to hire women in nontraditional fields. This will ensure interest in programs and encourage job training administrators to provide such programs. Local, county, or state welfare performance should be evaluated, in part, on the basis of training for and placement in nontraditional jobs or other higher-paying jobs.

10

States must opt to retain a gender equity coordinator, which remains an option under the Workforce Investment Act.

11

Welfare offices and employment services should continue acquiring detailed information about their local labor markets so they can target the highest-paying jobs possible in stable and growing industries.

12

Welfare offices, employment services, and job training organizations need to provide accessible information to clients, informing them about good job opportunities that present visual images of women in high-paying occupations (such materials are available through the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau).

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*for NOW Legal Defense
and Education Fund*

About this Report

This report is the result of a joint effort of two organizations eager to learn more about the employment opportunities of women leaving welfare. The NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (NOW Legal Defense) asked the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) to develop research on workforce development issues affecting low-income women. Subsequently, NOW Legal Defense contracted with IWPR to carry out the proposed research. The focus on the job training and education opportunities available to low-income workers was proposed by IWPR. The specific sub-topics of interest and the states to be studied were jointly determined, while the research design and the conduct of the research were the responsibility of IWPR. IWPR staff, specifically those listed as authors of the report, conducted interviews in seven cities, in seven states, with 67 welfare case managers, vocational counselors, job training administrators, and job training instructors. Twenty-nine of 64 organizations contacted agreed to participate in the study. These same organizations assisted IWPR in identifying students and trainees to invite to participate in the study as well. Working with a contractor, IWPR staff conducted a telephone survey of 163 job training students in six of the study cities. They analyzed the data and drafted the report, which was then shared with each local participating organization for their review and comment. NOW Legal Defense staff and outside reviewers also reviewed and commented on the draft. The research was supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies and also in part by the Rockefeller Foundation, which provided a grant for the survey of training participants.



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