

**EVALUATION OF THE CALIFORNIA
COMMUNITY AND FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE (CFBI)**

First Report of the UC Davis Research Team

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The Research Questions: A Brief Summary of Working Understandings

1. *Do community and faith-related organizations approach their work with clients differently than traditional employment development or welfare-to-work projects?*

The outstanding characteristic of the six CFBI organizations in our study is their diversity in nearly every respect. This includes their size, organizational mission, culture, target populations, the focus and variety of services they offer, their approach to delivering these services, and the degree to which they are faith-related (if at all). There are, however, *three common elements* across the six sites: 1) they emphasize individual plans, approaches and attention for each participant rather than relying on pre-set programs in which all clients receive more or less the same treatment; 2) they deploy program staff or volunteers based on their ability to work as credible and flexible coaches or mentors rather than solely on their expertise in workforce development; and 3) with one exception, they exhibit a willingness to enroll and serve all kinds of participants regardless of whether they appear likely to find employment in the near future, including many individuals whom others would or have given up on. These emphases appear different from those in many government-run employment programs, though the degree to which this is true varies from case to case.

2. *How do community and faith-related organizations identify and engage potential participants? What are the characteristics of those who participate in the program? What are the characteristics of those that either did not or chose not to participate; or that dropped from the program?*

A more definitive answer to this question will be possible after we have access to administrative data. In the interim, we can report the following information from our participant interviews. Among the almost 90 participants UC Davis has interviewed, slightly more than half were referred by a local government agency. Some of these, and many others, connect with the specific program because of a referral or advice from a family member, friend, or pastor. Relatively few simply walk in off the street or arrive solely by their own initiative. Participants we interviewed are demographically diverse, defying simple description. About one-third of participants we interviewed have never previously received employment services, and two-thirds have substantial job experience. At the time of our interviews, 39 participants were employed and 43 unemployed. Among our six cases, the single biggest cause for individuals to drop out of the program is a lapse in drug recovery, often leading to incarceration.

3. *What are community and faith-related organizations' theories of change in this project? How do faith-related organizations use their unique resources to provide services? What are the components of faith-related collaborative projects and how do participants move from one component to another?*

The norm of individual attention and the diversity of CFBI programs make it difficult to pinpoint a single chain of program logic. One relatively common story line does appear in many participant interviews: "I arrived with my life in a mess and feeling down about

myself. I received respectful individual attention and some new resources (hard and soft skills). This experience boosted my self-esteem, confidence, and hope for the future. I now feel more confident about my life in general and my ability to find and/or keep a job.” The six organizations deploy various tools to promote this inner change, including staff/volunteer mentoring, peer support, exposure to positive role models, and in the two drug and alcohol recovery programs an invitation to put trust in a “higher power.” Further fieldwork and analysis is needed to examine the relationship between inner attitudinal changes and employment outcomes. Faith is evident in five of the six cases as the motivating and sustaining ethic that guides organizational priorities and supports staff, but is either absent or incidental to the delivery of employment services.

4. *What are the barriers affecting the ability of a faith-related organization to effectively administer an employment program within the constraints imposed by government? How have organizations overcome these barriers?*

Not yet having interviewed EDD program managers, we are reluctant to make any definitive statement with respect to these questions. EDD program managers get high marks from CFBI programs for their quick and effective response to problems. Program managers are perceived as having given far more of themselves than CFBI grantees expect or have experienced in the past with government programs. Despite this record, administrative and philosophical difficulties remain. Three of the most prominent are: 1) paperwork/reporting requirements that place burdens on already overworked CFBI staff, and in some cases undercut the organizations’ preferred ways of interacting with clients; 2) WIA eligibility restrictions which run against the open door ethic of most of the organizations; and 3) continuing confusion about the guidelines governing expressions of faith under CFBI.

5. *What factors help and/or hinder partnerships between faith-related organizations and local workforce service delivery systems?*

This question will be the focus of our next round of fieldwork. Our work to date suggests that the data will be rich. All six organizations have significant connections with other parts of the local workforce service delivery system, many of which pre-date CFBI, others of which have been furthered as a result of receiving the CFBI grant.

6. *Were the grantees able to develop effective sustainability strategies (i.e., ways to ensure ongoing effective programs, ways to minimize staff stress and burnout, etc.)?*

It is too early to tell. With regard to program sustainability, early indications are that many organizations will struggle as EDD funds are reduced or eliminated. This is especially true for organizations that were not well established prior to receiving the EDD grant. In terms of staff burnout, we find that the kinds of people who are drawn to this work seem to have significant inner resources that help them draw strength from their successes and buoy them up during difficulties. The stresses staff encounter range from frustration with bureaucratic issues and chronic funding scarcities, to watching participants make self-destructive choices even after hours of working together.

CROSS-SITE ANALYSIS—6 UC DAVIS CASE STUDY SITES

Purpose, Methods, and Limits of this Initial Report

This first report presents the UC Davis team's working understanding to date of the six community and faith-based organizations for which we have been asked to prepare case studies. These cases are Catholic Charities, Champions, Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries (FIRM), New Beginnings Partnership, Tabitha's House, and Wardrobe for Opportunity. The individual case studies are attached to this report as appendices.

Our understanding is that EDD wants us to provide a detailed description that would help someone unfamiliar with the CFBI organizations understand what they do, how they do it, and whom they serve. This first report is not a traditional summative evaluation of whether or not, or by how much, the programs are succeeding. The purpose instead is to describe what has been happening on the ground in CFBI funded programs and to illuminate future program and policy options. EDD also wants to acquire insights into how they can cooperate with community and faith-based organizations to support employment more effectively. Thus, we have tried to highlight successes or promising practices in all the cases, without ignoring the many difficulties they encounter.

This report is limited to data collected as of July 2003. Future fieldwork and analysis will be needed to reach more definitive conclusions about the nature and value of CFBI programs, especially in light of the effects on CFBI programs of reductions or delays in state funding, as well as the ongoing evolution of local programs.

Our fieldwork began early in 2003. Data gathering methods have included at least two site visits to each program, review of available program documents, and 145 semi-structured interviews—more than 80 with program participants, three dozen with program directors/staff, and a smaller number with representatives of the broader local community, including local workforce development agencies, employers who have accepted CFBI participants, community organizations that collaborate with the CFBI organization, agencies that refer potential program participants, and members of CFBI program boards of directors.

We attempted to interview 20-30 participants at each site, and have succeeded in completing interviews with at least 10 at each site. This represented about half of those selected for the sample from EDD supplied participant lists for each program (Table 1). In cases where CFBI caseloads approximated our target number of participants to contact for interviews, we used the full EDD list; in cases where caseloads were higher, we selected a random sample to interview. In two cases, we rounded out our set of interviews only after requesting additional names of more recent program participants from EDD. This was necessary to reach our target of at least 10 interviews per site and to make sure we had information pertinent to more recent program developments.

In all cases the actual set of participants interviewed was determined by many factors beyond our control: many people had moved without leaving forwarding information, many others failed to respond to repeated phone calls. For all these reasons, the preliminary results reported here cannot be considered representative of all participants in a given program.

The next phase of our work will include more extensive community interviewing, in addition to re-interviewing participants and staff.

Since administrative data have not been available to the research team, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive analysis of participant demographics and program outcomes in this report. We do report some outcome-related data available from participant interviews, *but strongly caution readers against over-interpreting this information until a more complete picture is available using additional data sources and future interviews.*

Describing CFBI Organizations and Their Approaches

The outstanding characteristic of the six CFBI organizations in our study is their diversity in nearly every respect. This includes their size, organizational mission, culture, target populations, the focus and variety of services they offer, their approach to delivering these services, funding base, value to government as a partner, and the degree to which they are faith-related (if at all; see Tables 2 and 3).

There are, however, *three common elements* across the six sites: 1) they emphasize individual plans, approaches and attention for each participant, rather than relying on pre-set programs in which all clients receive more or less the same treatment; 2) they deploy program staff or volunteers based on their ability to work as credible and flexible coaches or mentors, rather than solely on their expertise in workforce development; and 3) with one exception, they exhibit a willingness to enroll and serve all kinds of participants regardless of whether they appear likely to find employment in the near future, including many individuals whom others would or have given up on. These emphases appear different from those in many government-run employment programs, though the degree to which this is true varies from case to case.

The exact nature of the job coaching/mentoring approach varies from program to program, and to a lesser degree among different staff within programs. The approach typically involves a mix of exhortation, self-esteem building, job readiness training, skill development (particularly computer skills), help in finding needed resources, and interpersonal support. In some programs, staff/client relationships are also marked by close bonds, friendship, and caring concern. Participants express appreciation for having both “someone to push me” and “someone to push *for* me.” This dual form of support is communicated through frequent conversations; some planned (usually generated by staff) and some impromptu (usually opened by the client when staff make themselves readily available), and typically manifests itself in gradual transformations rather than dramatic conversions.

Participants particularly seem to value interpersonal encounters with staff that share life experiences or characteristics with them, and relate from the standpoint of “having been there themselves.” This enhances their credibility with participants, and creates an atmosphere that is different from an organizational setting where personal encounters are staged in ways that explicitly or implicitly accentuate the differences between participants and “expert helpers.”

At five of the six sites, group interaction—sometimes conducted under protected circumstances that permit intense and intimate self-revelation, and sometimes a matter of daily routines—is either a deliberate part of the program or results from the program’s delivery of services. Where these peer groups appear, participants often consider them to be among the most valuable part of their experience with the program.

While all of the six sites offer multiple services, most tend to specialize in one or two. Reputations built for those specializations are a critical reason why participants are referred to the sites by other local organizations and peers.

Charismatic women leaders founded four of the six organizations. Three of the women are motivated by intense faith commitments, and the fourth by a strong desire “to give back to the community.” These leaders are highly regarded in their communities, but in at least three cases there is concern about whether the organizations could survive their loss. The process by which nonprofit organizations prepare themselves for the transition beyond founding leaders is a traditional concern in the research literature, and something we will continue to monitor in subsequent organizational analyses.

The delay in receiving funding from EDD for the 2003-04 year has had a detrimental effect on the ability of at least two organizations to deliver their programs effectively, forcing staff cuts and reducing the numbers of participants who can receive services. Problems with delayed or reduced funding do not impact all CFBI organizations equally, however. In general, more established organizations with multiple funding sources have the flexibility to shift funds among programs so that programs have continuity, while newer organizations that are more reliant on CFBI funds have more difficulty. In sheer numeric terms, a 30% cut of a \$200,000 grant often is easier to absorb than a 30% cut to a grant of \$100,000 or less.

Participants

The data reported in this section are drawn from our analysis of completed interviews with just under 90 CFBI program participants. When administrative datasets are available, we will be able to add to this demographic profile. The interviews were designed to capture some basic information about individual lifestyles, education, and employment experience. They also explored experiences with CFBI services and with other workforce development programs, satisfaction with services, self-esteem, and progress toward employment outcomes. While we exceeded the number of interviews targeted in the research design, it is important to remember that the sample we have obtained is not representative of all participants in a given program.

CFBI participants we interviewed are demographically and socially diverse:

- Approximately three quarters of our respondents are women.
- About one-third are under age 25, with the next highest group in the 35-44 age range.
- One-third of those we spoke with do not have high school diplomas or a GED.
- Although we did not specifically ask about substance abuse, more than one-third indicated histories of abuse.
- Over half live with their own children.
- Eighteen of those interviewed indicated they were immigrants to the United States, and most of those had been here for 10 or more years.
- About 60% of participants were raised in a religious or spiritual tradition, and approximately 80% currently consider themselves religious or spiritual persons.

We explored the living arrangements of our respondents, and report those in the case studies. Comments we received seem to indicate that it is the *stability* of the housing situation that matters most, rather than whether the respondent owns or rents, or how satisfied they are with their current arrangement. Likewise, it is the amount of *support* from family, friends and/or roommates that is critical to participants' employment efforts, rather than simply whether he or she is married or single, or has children needing care. In a couple programs a significant number of the participants are homeless, and the search for a job is part of the larger search for stable housing.

Analysis of open-ended interview responses suggests that approximately two-thirds of participants have substantial past work experience, while less than 1 in 5 report no previous work experience. Of those who have work experience, a slight majority appears to have a poor work history that would raise serious concerns with most employers (from our best subjective assessment).

Asked how they came to be involved with the CFBI organization, over half of those interviewed indicate that they had been referred by a governmental agency (e.g. CalWORKS, court/probation, housing). Some of these were referred to a generic "recovery program" and sought recommendations from peers or had family members investigate a list of qualified programs. The others were referred from an affiliated program of the same organization, connections with friends or with staff of the organization, or simply came on their own initiative.

At the time of our interviews, 39 participants were employed and 43 were not employed. Few were actively pursuing educational training, certificates, or degrees, although many expressed an interest in doing so once their children were in school or when they could afford it.

Our analysis of open-ended responses found that participants mention the following type of outcomes most frequently: improved hope/outlook on life, improved confidence about finding and keeping a job, sobriety, and better communication skills.

Nearly 8 of 10 participants interviewed agreed that their CFBI experience “had made a significant difference in their lives,” and more than 9 of 10 indicated they would refer a friend to their CFBI organization.

Asked what the best thing was about their CFBI program, the most frequently mentioned responses were practical help toward employment, group social support, practical vocational skills, relations with staff, and personal growth and development. A common refrain in our interviews was: “I feel so much better about myself.”

The Faith Connection

No simple formulations or stereotypes can capture the varied and complex way in which faith plays a role in these six organizations.

One organization is not faith-related, two are faith-related in name and mission but put no emphasis on faith in their delivery of employment-related services, one is a product of a partnership that includes a faith-related organization but functions primarily as part of the county government’s work experience program for CalWORKs recipients. The other two organizations—both drug recovery programs—are the only two that are more overtly faith-based in the sense of including some faith-related practices in delivering services.

One of those more strongly faith-related programs centers its non-residential drug treatment on twelve-step programs. Readings invoking God as the Higher Power are used as meditations or to spark discussion in group sessions. The other drug treatment program is residential, and all residents are encouraged to attend a Bible study and other inspirational classes led by the organization’s leader and to attend church services, but the EDD-funded program is carefully designed to function as a job club/training forum only and has no overt faith component. In both of these organizations, staff we interviewed stressed that their understanding of faith precludes efforts to force acceptance of religious tenets. Instead, they seek to model a “way of life” that participants may never had known was possible given the grim circumstances in their lives. Of the 30 participants we interviewed at the two sites, only two individuals voiced a complaint about faith-based practices; many others expressed appreciation for those elements.

Overall, faith is very evident in five of the six cases as the motivating and sustaining ethic that guides organizational priorities and supports staff in their work with participants, but is either absent or incidental to the delivery of employment services.

A few participants spoke about the example being set by staff who are considered exemplary mentors for their own faith development and/or recovery process, while many more voiced appreciation for exposure to role models who had overcome obstacles similar to those they face irrespective of their faith commitments.

Our work to date suggests that many CFBI organizations are still somewhat confused about First Amendment/Charitable Choice guidelines as they apply within the EDD-funded initiative, and are extremely wary about appearing to contravene them. In general,

they appear to be more likely to censor their own expressions of faith than to risk non-compliance by pushing the boundaries.

Cautions about Outcome/Effectiveness Comparisons

Since the organizations we are studying work with individuals at various stages of the job readiness process—from those needing extensive remedial work before they can begin to seek employment to those already employed and concentrating upon retention or advancement—simple comparisons of employment outcomes across CFBI sites are unlikely to be instructive as a measure of program achievement. Our fieldwork suggests that if employment targets are included as part of CFBI contracts, they should be tailored to the unique mission and situation of each organization, rather than imposed across the board.

One option EDD may wish to pursue is to develop accountability standards that measure how program participants improve from their initial job readiness baseline, rather than standards based on arbitrary placement percentages or other traditional measures such as cost per client served. In some individual cases, merely arresting declines (such as a relapse into addiction) may constitute a successful outcome. In others, just getting an individual “in the door” may mark a significant achievement, especially where distrust or cultural barriers have kept certain individuals trying a one-stop program.

Program effectiveness can be conceptualized along a variety of dimensions including: success in getting people in the door and keeping them engaged in the program; delivering services efficiently; removal of key employment barriers (e.g., illiteracy, addiction); creating positive employment outcomes that move participants up the ladder of job readiness/placement; and providing follow-up that supports retention, advancement, and increased self-sufficiency. It appears to be rare for a CFBI organization to excel on all these dimensions, but many provide models in at least one of these areas.

A number of program staff across sites told us “we can’t help people until they are ready to be helped.” Staff are well aware of the connection between “participant readiness” and program outcomes, and devote a great deal of time and effort to boosting their clients’ confidence and self-esteem, moving participants to the point where their sense of self-worth is developed sufficiently that they refuse to give up on themselves. This process is not all warm and fuzzy; many of the programs practice various forms of tough love that are designed to help participants face disturbing truths about their lives or to push them past their thresholds of inertia and fear into actively going out to look for work. Contrary to some stereotypes, tough love often gets administered in small daily doses, as participants stop by to converse casually with staff. The outcomes that result from these modes of treatment are often slow to emerge and can be difficult for an outsider to assess.

Our sampling design envisioned the possibility of comparing the effectiveness of the more faith-related CFBI organizations with that of the more secular programs. Our fieldwork has tempered our enthusiasm for making this type of comparison, for many reasons. As we have noted, the design of CFBI has caused many faith-based programs to

self-censure their faith-related practices, leaving us no clear “dose” of faith whose effect can be measured. In addition, we find that more and less faith-related organizations often share more features in common than they do differences. Indeed, it might be just as appropriate simply to view all the CFBI organizations as community-based organizations with strong value orientations, rather than to single out the more strongly faith-related groups as a distinct category. Finally, the Workforce Investment Act has mandated that local service delivery boards seek greater integration of services that encourage government, nonprofit, and private providers to work together to meet overall employment objectives. Given this new paradigm, it seems more appropriate to ask what specific contributions different organizations are or could be making to shared community goals, rather than to set up effectiveness comparisons between different sectors or types of organizations that are in fact cooperating in many ways to achieve participant outcomes. The fact that a large percentage of CFBI participants also interact with non-CFBI workforce development organizations makes it difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the independent effect of any one organization.

The move to fund CFBI solely with WIA monies has created difficulties for many of the organizations. These include tighter eligibility restrictions (which run counter to the typical open door policy of CFBI organizations), difficulties with reporting and record keeping given the antiquated JTA data system, and recent imposition of higher employment outcome targets at the same time CFBI funding is being cut by about one-third (and sometimes more when it is stretched over periods longer than 12 months). In the current funding environment it is unrealistic to expect most CFBI organizations—particularly the less established ones—to find new funds to replace the cut in state allocations. Demanding enhanced performance requirements at the same time that steep CFBI funding cuts are instituted is problematic, and EDD needs to consider how it can ensure that accountability standards are fair and reasonable for all parties.

Local Support for CFBI

A more complete assessment of local impressions of CFBI and CFBI organizations awaits the next round of our fieldwork. For this report we completed a spot check, interviewing a handful of representatives of local one-stops, employers who have hired CFBI participants, referring agencies, and organizations that collaborate with the local CFBI organizations. Thus far we have noted up mostly positive impressions of the organizations from community interviews. Future interviews will follow up our initial observations about what matters to local leaders, which appear to include: 1) gratitude for any new state money for chronically under-funded local social services, 2) appreciation for the unique strengths or niche role played by particular CFBI organizations; 3) a concern that faith-related organizations not be singled out for state support at the expense of non-faith-related local organizations with roles to play; 4) a strong desire to avoid duplication of services—tempered by the reality that the relative dearth of most social services makes any additions welcome; and 5) concern about the typical pattern whereby state-funded demonstrations “come and go,” creating confusion and hindering long-term planning at the local level.

It is too early to ascertain how and if the organizational capacity building thrust of the CFBI is impacting the sustainability of funded organizations. The apparent desire of local officials for longer lasting partnerships with CFBI organizations may be at odds with the current EDD practice of weaning these organizations from state funding, which may make some organizations or their programs unsustainable.

Theory of Change

The norm of individual attention makes it difficult to pinpoint a single chain of program logic for each program. To the extent that a program logic is discernible, the underlying theory of change varies from program to program, each of which serves different—sometimes radically different—clienteles, with different services, and different understandings of the immediate and longer-term outcomes that are being sought. These disparate goals that are detailed in our case studies must be taken into account in judging program effectiveness.

Participants we spoke with often speak of positive transformation in their self-esteem, confidence, and hope for the future. The six organizations deploy various tools to promote this inner change, including staff mentoring, peer support, exposure to positive role models, and in the two drug and alcohol recovery programs an invitation to put trust in a “higher power.” Further field work and a more complete analysis of participant and staff interviews will be necessary before we can speak with more precision about the mechanisms for promoting personal change, and the relationship between these inner changes and employment outcomes.

In subsequent phases of our research we hope to track the distinctive approaches different organizations take to placing participants in jobs. Some programs accept the logic of “work first,” and stress that with the proper supports in place “any job,” even with a temporary help agency, can provide participants with a positive entry into the workforce. Other organizations pride themselves on helping participants find the “right job” rather than “any job.” Their assumption is that job retention improves if participants find a job that makes use of their expressed skills, interests, and purposes. Some staff are unconcerned with whether the initial jobs found provide a living wage, while others coach participants to ask for higher hourly wages so they have a better chance of becoming self-sufficient. We need to learn more about how well these alternative approaches work, and whether particular strategies work best with particular types of participants.

Table 1. Reasons Why Participants in UC Davis Sample Could Not Be Interviewed

	N
Contact information unknown	26
No response to messages	16
Incarcerated/fugitive	9
Entered/transferred to other program (residential drug)	8
Moved out of area	6
No show for scheduled interview	6
Couldn't arrange schedule of participant & interpreter/interviewer	4
Phone number working, but no way to leave message	4
Refused interview	4
Enlisted in the military	1
Other reasons	6
<i>Total participants selected but not interviewed</i>	90

Table 2. Comparisons of the Six UC Davis CFBI Case Study Sites

	Catholic Charities	Champions	FIRM	New Beginnings	Tabitha's House	Wardrobe
PRIMARY EMPLOYEMENT RELATED SERVICES						
Remedial services (sobriety)		X			X	
Work readiness/job search	X					X
Job training				X		
Job placement			X			
VALUE TO GOVERNMENT AS PARTNER						
Offer specialty service		X			X	X
Geographic location				X		
Cultural connections			X			
Previously known player	X					
FUNDING BASE						
Primary non-government						X
Mixed	X		X		X	
Primarily government (CFBI)		X		X		
BENEFIT OF EDD FUNDS						
Supplement existing employment efforts			X			X
Add employment to other existing Sources	X				X	
Main source of organization's revenue		X		X		

Table 3. Indicators of the Degree of Faith-relatedness of 6 UCD Case Study Sites

	Catholic Charities	Champions	FIRM	New Beginnings	Tabitha's House	Wardrobe
INDICATORS OF FAITH-RELATEDNESS						
Organization Mission						
1. Religious name	X		X		X	
2. Founded/affiliated w/religious organization	X	X	X	X	X	
3. Mission statement explicitly religious			X		X	
Organizational Culture						
4. Religious symbols/pictures			X		X	
5. Opening or closing session w/prayer		X			X	
Service Practices						
6. Religion/faith part of services		X			X	
7. Voluntary religious exercises		X			X	
8. Use religious values to encourage attitude change		X			X	
Total Number of Indicators	2	5	4	1	8	0

Case Study #1

Catholic Charities' Coach-2-Career Program

Catholic Charities of the Santa Rosa Diocese was founded in 1954 and now serves 60,000 people annually in Sonoma, Napa, Lake, Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte counties. Throughout its tenure, Catholic Charities has provided a cornucopia of assistance programs for people in need, whatever their religious affiliation may be, in accordance with its mission statement: *Catholic Charities reaches out to all people in need, offers hope, and builds a spirit of community.* The program for which CFBI and WIA funds have been used is called Coach-2-Career, and it has served Catholic Charities clients in Santa Rosa and in Napa during the last two years. The Napa program was closed in June in order to begin a Coach-2-Career effort in Lake County, where the services are considered more needed and less duplicative than was the case in Napa.

The major facets of this case study as presented here include

1. a detailed description of the CFBI-funded program and the staff members who construct and deliver the program on a day-to-day basis,
2. a profile of the program participants as seen both through our interpretations of interviews with 16 of them and through staff perceptions,
3. analysis of what the semi-structured interviews reveal about participant experiences while in the program and their progress toward the goal of stable employment.

Coach-2-Career Program

Program description. Both program sites are administered by the Regional Director of Catholic Charities in Santa Rosa—where the larger portion of services are provided—and each is run by a single highly-motivated coordinator who routinely exceeds job description and part-time status to serve the clients. Beyond these commonalities, the Coach-2-Career program has evolved differently in the two counties, shaped by the needs of the population served, the nature of each county's social service network, and the personality and style of the program coordinator responsible for delivering the program in each area.

In Santa Rosa, the Coach-2-Career program is located in the Program Coordinator's office, one room of the sprawling Catholic Charities building (once a hospital) that houses the Family Support Center, a homeless shelter. The program serves, but is not limited to, residents of the shelter who are looking for jobs so that they can make the transition to independence. The Coordinator assesses a client's work history and helps gather necessary background documents, coaches the client through resumé-writing and interviewing technique, helps locate jobs and arrange transportation for interviews, provides the necessary telephone number and address for call-backs, helps match clients with volunteer mentors, and generally functions as a supportive, safe, dedicated point of contact for the client. A system for providing mentors to interested clients is based on

obtaining volunteers from churches (via notices in church bulletins), Sonoma State University, and local high schools.

In Napa, the Coach-2-Career Coordinator shares a room in the Catholic Charities suite within a multi-agency building on a side street. The program here has focused on people 18 years of age and older who have multiple barriers to overcome in seeking to join or rejoin the workforce. The Napa program was designed to serve emancipated foster youth—the focus of several Napa-based Catholic Charities programs—and has expanded to include mentally and physically disabled adults. The Coordinator has been able to leverage services offered by Napa County’s well-developed network of community-based and public agencies for the clients’ benefit, obtaining subsidized training for them, and job-incentive funds for employers who hire them.

Distinguishing features. (1) The Coach-2-Career program is one of two programs (among the six we have profiled) that are being delivered in two counties simultaneously and the only one that has adapted itself to the particular attributes of the counties it serves. (2) Both parts of the program serve “in-house” populations referred from other Catholic Charities programs, thus enjoying an unusual degree of on-going access which facilitates forging close ties between clients and Coordinators and keeping track of progress on a day-to-day basis. (3) The coaching element in the program’s name is evident at both sites, with the Coordinators taking a primary role in motivating and reassuring their clients in addition to helping them locate the sort of job they want. (4) The Santa Rosa program pairs clients with mentors who are volunteer community members. (5) The Napa program networks with several other organizations to tailor job training opportunities to the special needs of clients with mental and physical disabilities and to access employer-incentive hiring plans to put these clients to work.

Profile of Santa Rosa program participants. Although it is not a requirement, many Coach-2-Career clients are or have been residents of the Family Support Center, a homeless shelter. Most are undergoing major life upheavals and transitions. Approximately 30-60 individuals are enrolled in the program at any given time, with a smaller subset of those being actively served on a day-to-day basis.

As the Santa Rosa Coordinator told us, characterizing the homeless is not a straightforward proposition.

You know what? I want to tell you right now that anybody can be homeless, you can be homeless in a matter of minutes if your boss says, 'You're fired.' Where you going to go if you have no family? Therefore 'homeless' is not...stereotyping of the drug addicts, people don't want to work. But no, we have a lot of families that are really, really smart, they have a good jobs and everything, it happens to be, they get into an accident, and they got divorced, whatever the situation will be, so 'homeless' is not a matter of doing nothing...Unfortunately, they have a bad name, I don't know why, but... that's not the way I look at it.

Based on staff estimates, Santa Rosa's Coach-2-Career participants include about three times more women than men, a mix of ages from their twenties to their forties, more Whites than African Americans and Hispanics, and as many as 80 percent with a history of substance abuse.

Profile of Napa Program Participants. In Napa, many of the younger clients live in the facilities Catholic Charities runs in Napa for emancipated foster youth. Disabled adults often enter the program through the network of social services with which the Coordinator works. The Coordinator manages a caseload of about 20 clients at a time who are in different phases of the program and have varying requirements for intensive one-on-one interaction. The majority of Napa's clients are 18 to about 45 years of age and there are slightly more women than men. Again, substance abuse has been identified as a major problem for both Hispanics and Whites in the program. About half of the clients are either attending some sort of vocational classes or preparing to do so.

Coach-2-Career Staff. As we understand it, the two Program Coordinators constitute the full Coach-2-Career staff. One is responsible for managing the Santa Rosa operation and the other for the Napa operation. Both individuals holding these positions are energetic, dedicated people whose roles include counseling their clients, giving them practical help toward stabilizing their lives, preparing them to seek employment, and assisting them in their search for a good job. Their work doesn't end there, however. Even when their charges are successfully employed, the Coordinators remain available for consultation and problem-solving as long as their clients need their help. The Napa Coordinator made this clear: "But yet, you know, they may... come back 2 years from now, and say, "I need to talk, I need help," and I want them to have that place, that comfort zone."

The Santa Rosa Coordinator has the additional responsibilities of overseeing his Napa counterpart and helping to match his clients with community mentors. Both Coordinators have found their way to their present positions through a long chain of related experiences that have given them a depth of wisdom and patience in dealing with the Coach-2-Career target population.

How Staff Define Success. The program's goal is to help clients find the kind of job that will pay enough to support them and their families, ending the cycle of homelessness and/or substance abuse. In order to accomplish this, Coach-2-Career clients typically need to see themselves in a new light, as competent, worthwhile individuals who deserve a good job and can succeed at it. A vital component of their mission, as the Coordinators see it, is to convince their clients that they can succeed. Watching clients' attitudes change over time toward themselves and their future is at least as satisfying a result to the Coordinators as placing them in a job. They describe their pleasure in their clients' success with warmth:

We have a lot of clients, they come here, they say, "You have no idea how much you've helped me." "I really appreciate your help. I'm never going to forget."—Yahhh , and I'm like, "Excellent, excellent! That's what we want to hear!"

[T]he change in my clients, from sad to happy, and from insecure to secure. When you see those frowns turn into a smile, and they walk in and they're smiling when they see you, you know, that's... that gives me the most ultimate reward.

At the same time, both Coordinators have developed the ability to set boundaries for themselves so they can withstand the disappointments that are an intrinsic part of their work. Each describes a personal faith that helps them place their efforts for their clients on a continuum of success, knowing that they are doing their best and trusting that their clients will find their way when the time is right.

Challenges to success.

For program participants. The people served at both sites have complex personal issues to overcome, such as attaining sobriety, finding housing, and addressing past misfortunes. Sometimes they are unable to cope with them. If they break the rules Catholic Charities sets for staying in the shelter or in subsidized housing, they must leave, setting back the clock on their progress toward self-sufficiency. Many clients lack skills and education, placing them at a competitive disadvantage for employment, and often the need for money is so pressing that it isn't possible to return to school or take training courses unless this is subsidized.

For the program itself. Building credibility among potential employers requires a solid reputation for providing satisfactory workers. Coordinators indicate that no matter how hard they try and how many resources they pull together for their clients, there are times that clients fail to appear for interviews or don't show up for work. The best-intentioned employer becomes unreceptive if this happens too often. Another challenge is that Catholic Charities obtains a large part of its funding (42%) from government sources and budgetary cutbacks can force programs that feed into Catholic Charities to be curtailed or shut down, breaking the internal referral link and weakening the coherence of the program.

The place of faith in the program. Despite its name, Catholic Charities never makes an issue of the religious affiliation of people who come to them for help: "We don't even *ask* what religious affiliation a person is; we don't care. If they're a person in need, they're a person in need." Nor is the faith or lack of faith of prospective employees an issue; all that matters is how well they can do the job. The organization makes an effort to maintain a connection with Catholic parishes across the Santa Rosa Diocese, but this is in order to identify local needs and to assist in fund-raising. Both Coordinators referred to a strong personal faith that enables them to give of themselves and connect at a deep level with the people they serve. This faith also helps to sustain them through the inevitable disappointments in their work. Asked whether and where Coach-2-Career was faith-based, one Coordinator said, "Probably with the clients, in helping—they know *we believe* they're going to make it. That's the way I feel, that's the way I look at it."

Program Participants

Interview sample. Of the 38 program participants whose names were provided to us by EDD, we actually interviewed 16 participants. Anticipating some difficulty in connecting with these participants, we elected not to reduce the list we received from EDD by the random sampling process as we did in some other cases. The Coach-2-Career participants with whom we were able to speak differed from the overall populations described by the two Coordinators and so we consider the analysis that follows to be in the nature of a revealing description rather than the product of a truly representative sample.

In Santa Rosa, we were able to conduct in-person interviews with six people, four of whom were male (aged 39-47) and two female (29 and 37) and could not reach by telephone any of the other people in that sample. Since women ordinarily outnumber men in Santa Rosa's Coach-2-Career program, and since the program serves more people in their twenties than we encountered, this ad-hoc sample is skewed toward the male gender and the older end of the continuum.

In Napa, we held in-person conversations with three women (aged 27, 34, and 48) and spoke via telephone to seven more participants for a total of 10 interviews. Overall, respondents fell into two age groups: 20-22 years (5 females and 1 male) and 46-48 years (3 females and 1 male). We took this—very tentatively—to be generally representative of the two populations served: emancipated foster youth and disabled adults. We did note, however, that considerably more women are included in our sample than are actually served by the Napa Coach-2-Career program.

Descriptive profile of Coach-2-Career participants interviewed. For simplicity, we will combine the participants of the two programs in the following descriptive analysis.

Living arrangements. Most people we interviewed live in a rental unit of some kind, varying from a single room and a very small trailer to a three-bedroom apartment and houses. Two people own houses and two live with their parents in a house. Two people live alone, three live with one child, four have two children (or one and “one on the way”), and one has three children at home. Of those who live with their children, seven have partners (five are married) who share housing costs. Half of our respondents would like to move, most to larger places, and the intensity of their desire ranges from “I’d do *anything* to get into a house!” to “Yeah [I’d like to live on my own], but I’m kinda lazy about it.” We caught two people at a moment of unhappiness with their living arrangements: one, a professional woman who lost her condo and is now living in a single room with her dog and trying to rebuild her life, and the other, a well-educated man with a history of homelessness who is living with his pregnant wife and baby daughter in a tiny trailer, far enough away from town that the lack of transportation is an impediment to finding a job.

Employment. We asked the people in our sample about their employment history, their current job status, and the kinds of work they would like to do in the future. Overall, there were more younger women than older ones in our sample and most of the former

reported experience in retail and food service settings. Most of the respondents have substantial employment experience. For example, two of the older women we spoke with have logged a number of years in the school system as teacher's aides and one had been a secretary with a steady job for over 10 years. All of the men we spoke with had worked; past jobs included farming, landscaping, baking, sales, carpentry, shipping and purchasing, plus many fill-in jobs such as furniture moving and mechanical work.

Of the people in our sample who were currently employed, one individual was delighted with his current job; four said they enjoyed their positions (clothing store sales, furniture sales, grocery store courtesy clerk, and nanny, respectively); three are luke-warm about their jobs (general warehouse clerk, retail cashier, and wait staff) and would prefer something that offered more money and responsibility; and two said frankly that they disliked their jobs (landscaping, retail cashier). Two people reported holding down two jobs to make ends meet.

When asked what sort of work they would like to do in the future, several people in our sample thought they would like to have their own businesses. Others chose careers that required more education, such as nursing, drug and alcohol counseling, social service, pre-school education, and veterinary care.

Education. Nearly three-quarters of the people in our sample were high school graduates and six had spent time in college as well. One received an AA degree. A few respondents showed no interest in returning to school at all, two hoped to have the opportunity in the future, and several voiced their intention to pursue particular courses of study as soon as they could—in art, the medical field, in human services, and computers.

Social self-classification. We asked our respondents whether they had any difficulty in talking to strangers or making new friends, and about one-third of the people in our sample answered in a non-committal fashion. The ones who saw themselves as friendly and open were in the minority; more described themselves as “shy,” “kind of like in this rut and that’s one of the areas that I really really need to resurface,” “not a very trusting person.” One Santa Rosa man who was trying to rebuild his life after being caught up in gang-related problems said, “I like to have a lot of friends, but—this time I try to find the right persons.”

Personal faith. Just over half of our respondents reported being brought up in a religious tradition (five in the Catholic faith) and 11 now consider themselves to be spiritual people, though only three say that they actively attend church. In making the distinction between spirituality and church-going, one Santa Rosa man told us,

Mmm, I go to the church once in a while, but in my own ideas, I think you love God and God loves you when you do your things, and not necessarily you have to go to a church. For me, when I’m going to my clients, I’m going to the church; when I help my kids, I’m going to the church; and when I fight with nobody, I’m going to the church.

We wondered whether the name “Catholic Charities” had any influence on respondents’ feelings or behavior vis-à-vis attending Sunday services, and our sample tended to deny this. In Santa Rosa, a woman said that even people staying in the shelter aren’t required to go to church and one of the men who talked to us responded to “And they don’t insist on it? Even though it’s called Catholic Charities?” with

No, no, no, that’s my preference, if I want to believe in something. Which I don’t, because I’m pretty open to suggestions.

Napa participants expressed a similar lack of pressure. A young man raised in the Catholic faith was asked if he still considered himself a Catholic and responded offhandedly, “Yeah, but not very.”

Respondents’ Experience with the Coach-2-Career program. In this section, we are primarily reporting our interpretation of the perceptions of the 16 Coach-2-Career program participants we interviewed, taken from their responses to our questions as detailed below. In some areas, we also draw upon the initial scoping survey we did with the Regional Director responsible for the Coach-2-Career program in both Santa Rosa and Napa, as well as on the interviews conducted with the Coordinators of the Santa Rosa and Napa programs, to present a more complete picture of the program.

Entry into the program. We asked respondents how they happened to come to the Coach-2-Career program. In Santa Rosa, we learned that our six subjects either had a connection with the homeless shelter—referred by Catholic Charities personnel or noticed a flier posted in the Santa Rosa facility—or with the Coordinator himself. When they presented themselves at the Coach-2-Career office, they seem to have reached a point of commitment. All of them have their own place to live but they need to find a job that will pay the bills, or they need help in furthering their education while still on public assistance.

In Napa, the entrance point to the program was less distinct although it did have one common element: the Coordinator. Most of our respondents associated her with the Dreamcatchers program (where she also works part-time), although they also mention links to agencies such as Job Connections and Vocational Rehabilitation. The reason these respondents who were already plugged into the system gave for coming to Coach-2-Career is that they wanted to work, or to continue to work, with the Coordinator. In Napa, the Coordinator does some recruiting at local colleges and substance abuse treatment facilities.

Services offered/received. In both locations, there is an initial conversation between the Coordinator and prospective participants to exchange information during which incoming individuals talk about their life and work experiences, their concerns, and their immediate and long-term needs and goals. In return, they learn what the program can offer them, including the mechanics of finding and applying for jobs (locating job openings, creating resumés, completing job applications, going to interviews), basic skill-building functions such as familiarity with computers and office procedures (telephones,

filing), and a variety of “soft” skills (handling money, building self-confidence and self-esteem, setting personal goals). The Santa Rosa program has access to clothing so that clients who need interview outfits can obtain them at no cost and can also assist in paying fees for career counseling at the local junior college. Another Santa Rosa offering is matching clients with designated mentors, people from the community who meet with them about once a week to provide a wide variety of one-on-one services. These include working with them to hone specific skills, finding and applying for jobs, helping them get established in the community, and spending time together as friends and helpers.

In both programs, clients and Coordinators work together in a highly focused, personal way, concentrating on the client’s greatest needs. Respondents in the Santa Rosa program reported getting help with their resumés, being coached on how to present themselves at interviews, having opportunities to use office computers for practice and to check job postings, being assisted in applying for college and GED instruction, and receiving assistance in a myriad of unofficial ways by the Coordinator. Napa respondents said they also received actual work experience in the Catholic Charities office (sometimes with a stipend paid through Dreamcatchers) as well as support prior to, on the way to, and during interviews and even consultations with shopping for clothes.

Relationship with staff and mentors. Half of our respondents said directly that their Coordinators were mentors to them: people with whom they could discuss everything in their lives. The fact that Coach-2-Career Coordinators provide such personalized services to their clients seems to have nurtured our respondents’ budding awareness that they are worthy people. For some it is a new concept. Over and over, we heard expressions of heart-felt gratitude as clients from both programs tried to say how much the genuine concern and commitment of the Coordinators meant, and still mean, to them. Some examples:

She’s a wonderful, caring, and understanding person, and she will do anything in her power to make you fulfill whatever achievements and goals that you have in mind, and I would like you to know, as far as my personal feelings about her, that she’s wonderful. Wonderful.

It just inspires me ... I can just come over and talk to him whenever I’m struggling with things and he’s just real confident ... he enthuse you a lot to make yourself do better and proceed. He’s good [laughs], I like him a lot ‘cause, you know, he did help me out a lot.

[S]he took me under her wing and she gave me that special input that I needed to focus on the good aspects that I’ve already achieved and had under my belt and focusing in on what to do next and where to go from here.

[I]f someone does show that they’re significantly interested in trying to better themselves and get a position and such, he does offer for clients to

even give him a call on a Sunday morning if they need to get to a job, or they have an interview they need to get to, he's 100% there for them...

One person in each program confided that s/he wouldn't even have gone to get essential dental care had it not been for the encouragement of their respective Coordinators. As the Santa Rosa dental patient told us,

I wouldn't ever got my teeth pulled out if it wasn't for [him] and the Coach-2-Career. He said, "The only thing you can do is hurt yourself by not going to the dentist, by not taking care of yourself," and he's right. He's right.

The Coordinators also knew when and how to be very firm with their clients, as several respondents told us.

A lot of times he told me, "Okay, I got a lot of work for you, that's up to you if you want to find a job, here is the list, just go and talk to those people, you know." And I talked to those people. ... They help me to get a job, and to keep it, you know, to keep it.

I go through depression, so most of the time I'm not motivated to do anything [half laugh], and [she] really helps me get going [laughs], she kind of gives me that kick in the butt that I need [laughs heartily].

Well, to be honest with you, they always be on top of me, this guy, calling me, "Hey, you know what? Why don't you come over here, I got some job for you, I just want you to call them... And he always be there, you know, pushing me. And you know, I'm the kind of person that if he didn't push me, ... something make me to stop there and don't keep going. And this guy, you know, I glad that he always be there, pushing me.

By comparison with the warmth they expressed for their Coordinator, the Santa Rosa respondents who had been connected with volunteer mentors were somewhat lukewarm about the experience. Often the mentors were described as quite young, very kind, and helpful in particular areas, such as helping construct resumés, writing letters on one client's behalf in legal matters, even taking a client and his children on outings. One client told us that his mentor ignored his job preferences and set him up with an interview that was doomed from the start, although "meeting with the mentor did help lift me up a fair amount as far as, you know, he seemed genuine in his expression that I look like a good candidate." Another client, well into his forties, respected his much younger mentor for his "...writing, and a lot of things that he would know 'cause he went to school, and had I went, I might have got that."

Interaction with other agencies. Respondents from both programs have had some experience with private and state employment agencies. Probed for a comparison between their experience in those programs and at Catholic Charities, a few respondents shared comments. Of a local private agency, a Napa woman said, "They were on a scale

of 1-10, a 6. They didn't help me personally... and they were very lax in communicating with me about any scheduled job." A Santa Rosa man said of the local EDD office, "[There's no resources accessible there. There's the telephones to call and file for unemployment and that's basically it." Encouraged past a visible hesitation, he continued, "There were some fairly rude individuals there..." The most devastating review of a facility came from a quiet Santa Rosa man:

I went to SonomaWORKS. They didn't do anything 'cause I can't read or write, so they're not willing to help me. ... Well, I'm not eligible for their help because I couldn't read or write, so they didn't want to take the time to train me, or the money to put out for me, so I really—I was useless in their eyes.

Santa Rosa respondents reported being referred by the Coach-2-Career Coordinator to other departments within Catholic Charities for help with housing and for financial assistance in other areas.

There was considerable blurring of boundaries between Napa County programs, to judge by respondents' difficulty in distinguishing where one left off and another began. The Job Connection, "Voc Rehab," Dreamcatchers, and Coach-2-Career appeared to merge seamlessly as participants passed through them, encountering familiar faces and enjoying the thoughtful assistance of helpful teams. In such an environment, where networking and service delivery integration are well-advanced, it can be difficult for anyone to isolate the impact of any single program.

Reported outcomes. In trying to understand what program participants gained from their experience with Coach-2-Career, we classified possible outcomes into four categories: attitudinal (confidence, hopefulness), remedial (removal of a basic underlying barrier to employment), educational (activities sparked by the program such as GED instruction, entering college, vocational training), and employment (getting a job or work experience due to the program).

Attitudinal outcomes. According to the majority of our respondents, the way the Coordinators of the Coach-2-Career program helped them to feel about themselves was the most valuable outcome of all. The unflagging support and encouragement they received, together with practical assistance, gave them pride in themselves and a sense of self-confidence some had never felt before:

I didn't have no training or no skills, you know, and being on that note I didn't have self-worth for myself. ... Now I feel 100% better about myself, oh yeah. I feel sure of myself.

An analysis of personal improvements acknowledged by our respondents reveals that seven feel more confident about work, four reported an increase in their general confidence, four are more confirmed in their sobriety, and two are pleased by improvements in their communication skills.

Remedial outcomes. Two Napa respondents were candid about the difficulties they encountered in holding jobs before they went into recovery programs, and they know that their past records are problematic. The Coordinator is working with one woman to help her find ways to field difficult questions from prospective employers honestly but positively. The resolution of some other barriers to employment—illiteracy and language problems, for example—are discussed under educational outcomes.

Educational outcomes. One respondent in the Napa program explained how the paid job her Coordinator had helped to arrange was accepted by her college as an internship, giving her college credits in addition to a salary. Another member of the Napa program agreed to take a series of morning computer classes as long as the Coordinator could switch to an afternoon schedule to work with her on other matters. A young Santa Rosa woman told us how her Coordinator had gone to the local junior college and collected all the necessary applications on her behalf, something she had been too frightened to do. Now she is not only enrolled in college but is completing her GED on the side (“[A]ctually the JC doesn’t require you to have a GED to take classes there, but it’s just my own personal thing that I wanted to do.”). An older Santa Rosa man also intends to get his GED. The Santa Rosa man who couldn’t read and write is attending the Adult Literacy School and is getting more skilled with the office computer. Several respondents plan to obtain Associate degrees and/or to take vocational classes, and two Hispanic men will take ESL classes soon.

Employment outcomes. At the time that we interviewed them, 11 of the 16 respondents were employed. Training and education are important elements of job-preparedness, but nothing is more vital than the self-confidence people in the Coach-2-Career program gained. For example,

I used to do sales all the time, in Spanish, but it’s different in English. So [he’s] saying, “You’re doing good, you’re doing good,” [he’s] pushing me to do it, so I got a little confident, I went over there and I talked to different managers, and they finally gave me a job.

Respondents in both programs credit their Coordinators for helping them prepare themselves to make the most positive impression possible on prospective employers, for not letting them slack off or give up after repeated disappointments, and for ultimately getting them placed in good jobs.

Participant Perspectives on Coach-2-Career.

Overall impressions. We asked our respondents whether they thought participating in the Coach-2-Career program had made or would make a significant difference in their lives. Of those who answered directly, ten said that it would, adding their own comments:

It’s been the most positive thing in my life for a very long time, and in that respect, it’s significant.

It works. If you're willing to put the time in to work the program, it'll work for you. But you have to put the time in to work it.

I feel really positive about this program, they're doing a lot of great things in this area. ...This program, I feel, is really powerful and it can do so very much...

The only thing I know is, they're good people. Yeah, and if you need help, they're there for you.

If it weren't for Catholic Charities, I would have no means to go to a job interview. ... [The ability to] open doors is the main thing.

In addition, near the end of each interview, we asked our respondents to tell us what they thought was the best thing for them about the Coach-2-Career program and also to make suggestions for improving the program. These suggestions are reported just as we received them, with no attempt made to place them in any order or to screen them for practicality.

What was the best thing about the program? Half of our respondents cited the coaching style of the Coordinators and the positive effect it had on them. Others referred to elements of the program, such as the availability of computers and assistance with resumés ("which I never had one before!"). One Santa Rosa man said, "Part of it is seeing other people getting positions, good positions," and another said simply, "Keeping my job."

How could the program be improved? [Note: In this section we are merely passing along the comments of participants, without judging or endorsing them.] Of the 14 people who responded to this question, four were unable to think of any suggestions and two comments from Napa respondents referred not to the Coach-2-Career program itself but to experiences with a couple of its Napa County collaborators. (underscoring, perhaps, the lack of differentiation among the programs from the clients' perspectives).

There were three suggestions for the Santa Rosa program. One man who had benefited from being strongly encouraged to make direct contact with prospective employers felt that the Coordinator should push other clients similarly: "Maybe if they just push a little more the people, you know, to do the things." Another respondent thought that greater care should be taken to pair clients with like-minded mentors and a third wished that more people, particularly those in need who aren't in the homeless shelter, could share in the benefits of the Coach-2-Career program.

There were five suggestions for the Napa program, two from one individual. One woman wanted the Coordinator to remain involved with clients for a longer period after they accept new jobs, possibly working with the new supervisor to ease the transition into employment. Another suggestion was to involve clients more fully in the process of

setting personal and professional goals. A second woman wished that the Napa program had its own funds to help clients purchase clothing for interviews and work, another was impatient with the time it takes to be placed in an actual job, and a third wanted the Coordinator to keep in closer touch with her.

Future interaction with the program. When asked whether respondents thought they would remain in touch with the Coordinators of their respective programs even after they had moved into permanent jobs, a majority felt that they would. We also asked if they would recommend Coach-2-Career to a friend, and here the response was overwhelmingly positive: everyone who responded to the question said without hesitation that they would.

Case Study #2

CHAMPIONS Recovery Alternative Programs

The organization called CHAMPIONS was founded in May 2000 and is located in a graceful Victorian building in downtown Hanford. The idea for the program was incubated while the Executive Director was part of the nearby Koinonia Christian Church, and CHAMPIONS was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in January 2001. The program was certified by the state Alcohol and Drug Program in September, 2001. Monies received through EDD have been the primary source of funding for the Recovery Alternative Programs from January, 2001, to the present. As the Executive Director states,

When they [EDD] came on the scene, that gave us credence to the community ... before that, we were just grassroots----it was a lot of 'feel good, do good'—but they didn't take us seriously.

The CHAMPIONS Program

Program description. CHAMPIONS defines its mission as *To put into order... disordered lives* and its purpose as *To provide a safe and supportive environment for young adults and their families who struggle with alcohol and other drugs, or any other life-controlling issues, in a continuum of care.* The organization offers a multi-faceted substance abuse treatment program, administered as an intensive outpatient program designed to last for twelve months or until treatment goals have been achieved. Central to the treatment program are the Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous Twelve Steps traditions. The program is divided into two phases—Intensive and Aftercare—and according to the program design, the client must either have a job or be enrolled in school before graduating into the second stage. Throughout the treatment program, clients are required to attend AA/NA meetings off-site in addition to taking part in group and one-on-one counseling with staff members. CHAMPIONS has such an effective tracking system for following up with program graduates that the Kings County Health and Human Services Department recently contracted with it to follow their cases as well.

Distinguishing features. CHAMPIONS shares many characteristics with other drug recovery programs, but is notable because: (1) it addresses problems peculiar to the 14-25-year-old population; (2) most of its staff members are in recovery from abuse issues themselves and thus able to give credible guidance and serve as role models to the clients; (3) clients who have advanced through the program are required, as part of their recovery, to serve as peer counselors to newer clients; (4) it is faith-based, which "...means that we address the whole person, body, mind, and spirit. You cannot treat one part of a person's life without the other;" and (5) it uses a computer-run assessment tool called the Addiction Severity Index (ASI) which allows incoming clients to be evaluated

in seven “life domains,” providing a reality check for both clients and staff; (6) for many participants, Champions is the last chance they have to avoid prison and/or a descent into debilitating health problems, violence, or death.

Program participants. CHAMPIONS was established to serve teenagers and young adults whose lives have become unmanageable due to addictive and other lifestyle dysfunctions, although older adults are also served. Many of them are court-referred to CHAMPIONS after one or more criminal offenses or gang-related incidents, some have been referred by Child Protective Services, some by local churches, and some are self-referred. Although the caseload varies, the official cap is 115 clients going through the program. According to staff, more clients are Hispanic than White and more are male than female. Most come from economically-disadvantaged households, and their lives have often been tragically complicated by the behavior of addicted and abusive parents.

Program personnel. The number and function of staff members changes periodically due to fiscal constraints and attrition. At the time we visited the program initially, in February 2003, there were four counselors—for male and female teenagers and male and female young adults—in addition to an Administrator who oversees the program’s day-to-day operation, and a Receptionist. The Executive Director’s duties have shifted away from hands-on work toward administrative tasks as CHAMPIONS has matured, though on our visit it was clear that she still interacts with participants on a familiar, first-name basis. When we visited the staff roster was almost full. Since that time, cutbacks in funding and subsequent Board decisions have led to the departure of some staff members, and forced a “postponement” of the program for teens.

The counselors have all been trained in substance abuse treatment, some have academic degrees as well, and expressed to us a “passion” for the work. Using their credibility as recovering addicts themselves, they take pride in gaining the trust of their clients and being available to them day and night. Many clients we interviewed spoke with intense feeling about counselors who “saved my life” by being there at the darkest times.

How staff define “success.” It is very difficult to find indicators of success in a program like CHAMPIONS for several reasons; first, this younger population has yet to stabilize; second, the clients are facing multiple barriers and may score higher rates of success in some areas than in others; and third, the full effects of such a program tend to be felt over a period of years, not months. Asked whether clients could complete the program in under the stipulated year, the Executive Director said,

It can’t be done in less because they didn’t get where they are overnight... [it takes time before] they start learning to live life on life’s terms and then they’re ready to really listen and go back and do it with more of a personal application.

CHAMPIONS envisions success for its clients in the following terms: Sobriety, and gaining the essential self-esteem that sustained sobriety implies; rebuilding their lives; and achieving self-sufficiency through education and employment. The ASI provides a more objective measure of attitudinal and behavioral change.

Challenges to success.

For program participants. Beyond their personal barriers to success, which can range from habitual addiction to the presence of felonies on their record, CHAMPIONS clients live in a rural county that ranks among California's top ten for poverty, crime, and unemployment.

For the program itself. Locating and retaining counselors who have the necessary training and experience is a difficult task, made all the harder by the fact that Hanford is a small town in the Central Valley without the urban advantages of selection, amenities, and competitive salaries. Finding sufficient funds to keep the program operating at its optimal level is a demanding proposition under the most advantageous economic conditions, and it is made more difficult in the current economy.

The place of faith in the program. CHAMPIONS brochures emphasize its drug recovery mission, not its faith-based nature, but the Executive Director and a number of staff are Christian in their own beliefs. There are a few visible expressions of spirituality in the communal part of the building—a Biblical verse in a small pastoral mural and some framed inspirational posters—and a few mementos in individual offices. Staff members we interviewed referred to a personal faith that helped them withstand some of the disappointments inherent in the work. Participants are encouraged to follow a spiritual regimen based on the AA/NA program's "Higher Power that we choose to call God." The Executive Director answered our question about the role faith plays in the program by saying,

Faith isn't spoken as in the four walls of a church or through the pages of the Bible, it's practical religion, it's practical faith, it's understanding that each person was created with a purpose and a destiny. And it was not to do drugs!"

In our interviews with clients, the presence or absence of spiritual guidance was seldom mentioned.

A Portrait of Program Participants

Interview sample. The first EDD roster of CHAMPIONS participants listed 99 clients who entered the program in 2002. Via random sampling methods, we reduced that number to 22 program participants and asked the Executive Director for help in setting up in-person interviews with them in February. In the course of two on-site visits, we were successful in conducting ten interviews with randomly-selected individuals plus six additional conversations with clients who were available on the premises. (Because these six were not a part of our random sample, we have not included them in the dataset of comparative tables developed across our six case studies. Their comments have added to our understanding of the program, however, and are occasionally included in this portion of our report.) Two of the official interviews with former CHAMPIONS clients were arranged for us at off-site facilities, one at a segment of Juvenile Hall referred to as the

Boot Camp and one at a residential treatment home. We hoped to expand our random sample and secured a second list from EDD of program participants entering in the early part of 2003 (a list of 15 clients which we randomly reduced to 8). Unfortunately, even with the help of CHAMPIONS staff, we were unable to reach these participants by telephone. The bottom line is that we attempted to contact 30 CHAMPIONS clients and actually spoke with 10, plus the six we encountered at CHAMPIONS in February, resulting in the total of 16 participant interviews described below.

Our respondents ranged in age from 16 to 55 years of age. Thirteen of our 16 respondents were less than 30 years old. Six were women, four in their early twenties; all of the three teenagers were male. Three older respondents were married and several were living with domestic partners. In telling us their stories, many respondents referred to several siblings and step-siblings, and mentioned complicated extended families living nearby. Nearly all had grown up and attended schools in the surrounding area.

Description of CHAMPIONS participants interviewed. In all six of our case studies, we are gathering information in the following areas in order to gain a better understanding of program participants: living arrangements, employment, education, social self-classification (in the context of forming friendships), and personal faith.

Living arrangements. Most of the teenagers and younger adults spoke of living with one or both parents—often a step-parent—when we spoke with them, and most lived in Hanford or nearby Lemoore. Older adults in our sample shared apartments or houses with their spouses/domestic partners. Despite long-standing attachments to the Hanford area, lifestyles of the younger respondents—especially of the younger men—seemed to include time spent “on the street,” sometimes punctuated with periods of incarceration as a result of following their addictions. Describing current living situations, many respondents sounded perched rather than settled, possibly due in part to the interactions they described with unstable and even abusive adults in their lives:

...my dad was gone, you know, all the time; he had just gotten out of prison and he was like taking off a month at a time, without coming back to eat or whatever...and, you know, it was getting my mom real upset, you know, and it was starting to affect me... And my mom moved out of that apartment [in Lemoore], she's staying here in Hanford with my grandma...

I have like family problems, because like my sister's husband's a user and he's being abusive, so I went up there and helped her move. And like just this weekend my little brother was working for his dad, which is my step-dad. ...he [the step-dad] started freaking out...he was on like PCP and crank and he has a chemical imbalance when he drinks...Took seven cops to get him out of the trailer. I had to go up there and try to cover my brother...he's fine now, moving down here too.

Employment. We asked our sample of CHAMPIONS participants about their employment history, their current job status, and the kinds of work they would like to do in the future. Some of our respondents have been working since their childhoods: in a grocery store and in retail stores (3), at a day care center and at an optometrist's office, on

a hog ranch and in a pistachio plant, at restaurants (6), at a ski resort and in a casino, in a warehouse; have served in the military; and have done office work (2), property management, telemarketing, home health care, house cleaning, limousine rental, auto repair, welding (2), carpentry, roofing and general construction, truck driving, and landscaping. Some of the younger respondents emphasized that they were working after school and in the summers.

At the time of our interviews, seven people reported having jobs, at least four of which were full time. Their work included carpentry, being the foreman in charge of erecting metal buildings, cleaning restrooms, cleaning and cooking at a fast-food restaurant, cashiering at a gas station, and handling medical records and dietary consultations at a local hospital. At least two respondents who didn't have jobs were actively looking for work and two were living in facilities they are not allowed to leave.

A number of our respondents had given considerable thought to the work they wanted to do in the future. Several already had well-paying jobs they enjoyed (carpentry, foreman/metal buildings, medical records) and others aspired to careers in welding, accounting, and counseling. Less well-formed aspirations included becoming a mechanic and entering the medical field in some capacity, such as an R.N. or a physician's assistant. Two respondents were concerned about the felonies on their records with respect to employment. One said,

...it's hard to find work with a felony on my record. And until I can complete this class so that I can get it dropped off... But I mean, there's people who don't want to hire [you with] a felony on your record. So I'm still looking, though.

One respondent knew only that she wanted to make a great deal of money and another had visions of turning his family estate in Virginia into a nursery.

Education. The two youngest respondents were still in school, as freshman and junior respectively. Six people had completed high school, two of whom had gone to college for two years or more. Five left high school in the 11th grade and three of them have plans to finish the requirements for their diplomas in adult school. Of the three respondents who left school in the 10th grade, one saw no need to return to school and the other two would like to finish.

Social self-classification. We asked our respondents whether they had any difficulty talking to strangers or making new friends. Of the ones who responded, a few indicated that they had no trouble establishing superficial relationships with people they didn't know, but more respondents became quite reserved:

Mm, it's not easy to talk to strangers and it's...it's not easy to make friends, either, because...not because probably who they are, just who I am. Yeah, I don't trust people that much.

Others generally went slowly among strangers, preferring to wait until they revealed who they were before opening up themselves.

It depends...if they're in like a situation like I'm in or something, or we're in a group or something like that, and they come out talking about it...yeah, I'll start giving my input, and if, after I say something, if they can give me—if they say something back again, after they've heard me talk, then I know that I can connect with that person—yeah.

When asked whether respondents had formed close friendships with others in the CHAMPIONS program, those who had been in therapeutic groups with other participants tended to respond warmly:

I made friends with all of them. We're all close, yeah, it's like a big family...

Yeah, almost everybody in the group I think of as friends. Except for maybe like one or two people 'cause either they weren't here that long or I just, you know, couldn't relate to them really.

I think that if we want to have a relationship with somebody we can have it here, and I think more than anybody people that are here can understand you because we're like going through the same thing.

Some respondents recognized that they need to choose their friends more carefully so that they don't find themselves drawn into situations that might cause them to relapse; as one told us:

Basically, you know, the friends that I used to have I really don't contact them no more. And usually just because I've known them for so many years, I usually would be hanging out with them, or—And you know, if I did...I know for sure I probably would relapse, because they'll be around,,,

Personal faith. Asked about their spiritual upbringing, seven said that their families were Catholic, and those who indicated that the family had gone to church emphasized that it tended to be a Sunday routine without much meaning to them personally. Two grew up in the Pentecostal tradition, two followed family affiliations as they changed, and one attempted to fit into other families' religions since her own family seemed disinterested. One man clearly reacted against the religion of his youth...

Well, most of my family were Southern Baptists. Growing up as a kid I always hated going to church because it was the whole hellfire and brimstone, if you don't do this you're going to go to hell kind of viewpoint. And I don't believe that myself.

Four of the remaining five respondents were not raised in any particular spiritual tradition and the fifth simply didn't acknowledge the question.

With regard to their current spirituality, ten respondents spoke—some very eloquently—about the place of faith in their lives at this time. Some have embraced their traditional

religion with new fervor and pride, some have selected a new kind of faith that fits them better, and others have developed their own philosophies. An example of each:

I'm—I'm proud of my religion, I'm proud of who I am, and, you know what I mean? Everyone has to have religion in them, they got to have God in them, and I do.

They taught me that you can turn everything over to Him [and] your life will be a lot better, which it has. I've turned a lot over to Him and just left it alone, and my mind is a lot clearer. I feel I had a lot of stuff on my chest I needed to get off and I just feel a whole lot lighter now.

Well, I kind of have my own beliefs. ...I've read on...just about every form of religion out there. I took what made sense to me out of each one of them and kind of put them all together.

Two people are trying to decide what they want from religion and which direction they should go, two don't consider themselves particularly spiritual, and one is passive about the issue. There is also one who is adamant about not liking religion in any form:

I've been baptized but I don't really care much for religion. It doesn't...you know, I'm a very open-minded person. I'll sit and, you know, people can talk to me, I'll talk to them, you know. I'm not going to be, oh, shut up, you know, but like, just, you know, I never caught onto it. I think it's all...in my view, I think it's a bunch of crap. I don't like it. I just live for myself.

Respondents' Experience with the CHAMPIONS program

In this section, we are primarily reporting our interpretation of the perceptions of the program participants we interviewed, taken from their responses to our questions. In some cases, we also refer to the initial scoping survey as well as to the interviews conducted with program staff.

Entry into the program. We asked respondents how they happened to come to the CHAMPIONS program. Twelve were court-ordered to a treatment program under Prop. 36. Asked whether they were offered a choice of programs, seven recalled that their probation officer had sent them directly to CHAMPIONS and three remembered the "choice" that was offered them was between going to CHAMPIONS and going to jail. A respondent who made that choice remembers his first day at CHAMPIONS:

Actually, it was...overwhelming because it was like I was getting a second chance. That's the way I thought of [it]—I mean, I felt relieved that I wasn't going to jail. I mean, it was just great.

Five court-ordered respondents felt that they really did have a choice among local programs and elected to follow the favorable recommendations of people who had been through the program. People who came voluntarily to CHAMPIONS included one who

had heard of the program through his church and another who decided to come in on her own because before she was court-ordered because

I wanted to change my life around. I was tired of just going out there, using, and also I'm trying to get my daughter back, which is a big part of it.

A respondent who had gotten a DUI made a similar decision:

'Cause I knew people that went here. CHAMPIONS—what they said—is for teens, and that's the main thing, I just heard is it's for teens, so I called here, 'cause I didn't want to go somewhere where a bunch of adults were, and they said it's for teen, people my age, people that I can relate to more with 'cause they're going through the same things I was, pretty much.

The court-ordered entrance into CHAMPIONS has a problematic aspect, since the success of the program is so dependent upon whether the participant arrives at Champions when they are ready to change:

At this point, to be honest, it's more like 'cause I have to do it, but I'm trying to turn it into what I want to do. And it *is* what I want...there's just so much on my mind (laughs). I get a lot out of this program, but I think that I'll get a lot more when I'm more ready to—and I can't say that when I'm more ready to—because I need to be ready now, you know.

Services offered/received. During intake the Addiction Severity Index is administered so that a treatment plan can be designed for each client according to individual need. This assessment tool covers “all seven life domains--drug and alcohol, their medical history, their legal, their family, their psych-social, their education and vocational, and their spirituality too.” The treatment plan guides the course and intensity of a client's path through CHAMPIONS basic services feature one-on-one sessions with counselors and three-hour in-house group meetings per week in combination with outside AA/NA meetings. Clients progress through the treatment at their own pace and are encouraged and supported every step of the way by the staff and by one another. In some cases, the nature of this continual interaction creates powerful bonds between clients and staff, and an opportunity to promote healing from the pain these young people have experienced.

Along the way, CHAMPIONS staff model and encourage self-reliance and the acceptance of responsibility, one expression of which is the requirement to find and hold a job. In addition, short courses and activities of a practical nature are arranged. Clients spoke of “cooking classes” and a client-run food-service booth at the Farmers' Market, complete with CHAMPIONS tee-shirts.

Clients respond in their own ways to being treated as valuable people. One young respondent marveled,

They know that I'm telling the truth, you know, they believe me, somebody *believes* me, you know, without me having to—you know—I don't even have to explain myself.

For some clients, being trusted enables them to trust in return, and this allows them to begin to open up and say what they are really thinking and feeling:

...they're always willing to listen to any kind of problems you have no matter what it's about. They said that they'll be there. And they have. And you can either talk about it in group or you can ask them to come up here like we are and talk.

It's like, hey, all they ask is for you to show your emotions and talk about it and, you know, communicate with them. That's all they ask for, and they're there. They don't pressure you, they're like—"When you're ready, you'll come see me and then we can start talking," and that's all it is. They don't pressure us here.

CHAMPIONS makes peer interaction a fundamental part of the program, an aspect that respondents like and come to count upon. Helping each other becomes an essential part of the recovery process:

What's cool is like some of the people here, they used to be into drugs, and then they turned, you know, they turned their own life around and start—and then they're trying to help younger people so they don't have to go through what they went through.

Relationship with staff. CHAMPIONS counselors tend to become mentors to their clients, and those who stick with the program often come to depend upon the counselors to be surrogate parents:

I feel like I can trust him, and he—he's like—he's like a dad to me, kind of. We're more than welcome to come in here, we're more than welcome to call them on the phone and tell them our problems, what we're doing...they'll help, a ride, or anything. There're there for—they don't treat us like we're just clients. They treat us like we're family. That's what they treat us like.

Any time that you're feeling down and out, I don't know why it is but the counselors here can just kind of pull it right out of you. And maybe they've just got used to reading people, or maybe it's the fact that they really care, but they won't let you stay unhappy.

She's like, you know, with everybody, she's like your buddy, and that's strange; she's like—she's like your age and is helping here, you know, and I feel real comfortable talking with her, you know, and when I need to talk to her, she's always—ready to talk to me.

The message from the staff to clients is often brutally frank:

During my first session here she came in and introduced herself and told us what the program was going to be all about and that some of us would make it and some of us would not. And the fact that we would have to accept some of—the term she used was, “Some must die so others may live.” And what she meant by that is some people would have to not literally die but go back to jail or prison for others to learn a lesson. And that was really hard for me to accept at first, but I’ve come to accept it since.

Interaction with other agencies. CHAMPIONS maintains connections with resources throughout the local area and makes some referrals. One respondent spoke of being referred for grief counseling and another for domestic violence counseling. On occasion, CHAMPIONS refers clients to a residential facility for more intensive treatment. A respondent who had abandoned his program at CHAMPIONS three times was grateful that the staff didn’t give up on him:

You know, they really cared about me. Usually...the people that I meet...like you gotta get to know 'em to, you know, help you out, and...the little time that I been there, they helped me so much...they were willing to call my probation officer and tell him that, you know, “He needs a residential home,” and that was—that was gonna be good for me, instead of putting me in prison.

CHAMPIONS also works with job placement agencies such as EDD and helps clients connect with the local one-stop to complete the program requirement for locating a job:

Yeah, this place—One Stop?—and I’m supposed to go over there and set up stuff so they can help me with the school and stuff and all that. ... We talked to them over the phone and that was last week. Like they say they can help me find a better job...

Reported outcomes. In trying to understand what program participants gained from their experience with CHAMPIONS, we classified possible outcomes into four categories: attitudinal (confidence, hopefulness), remedial (removal of a basic underlying barrier to employment), educational (activities sparked by the program such as GED instruction, entering college, vocational training), and employment (getting a job or work experience due to the program).

Attitudinal outcomes. Respondents told us what they had gained in the way of personal resources because of their experience at CHAMPIONS:

More courage, just not caring what other people think about you so—It’s like okay, if you don’t like me, but still—I’m straight.

I've learned that no matter what—no matter where you came from, that you always have something to offer to somebody, you know.

Yeah, it gave me a bunch of confidence. I never had any in myself, now I think I can do anything (chuckles).

Remedial outcomes. As our efforts to contact potential interviewees taught us, many CHAMPIONS clients relapse and end up back in jail. For other, however, the program provides a turning point that makes a positive difference:

I really didn't think that there was any way I was gonna make anything out of myself. You know, I probably, you know, was going to be a low-life but, you know, they showed me that—that there's something else, because – you know, I can break the cycle. Because my dad was pretty bad...marijuana, and you know, didn't even realize that I don't have to be like the rest of 'em, I can be different.

I probably wouldn't have even had a job, you know, 'cause I always used to think, you know, like I was crap, pretty much. I never thought good of myself. And then there's people here telling me all good things about me, makes me feel better and stuff.

Educational outcomes. Beginning to believe that they can afford to have some hope for the future has made some respondents more determined to complete their academic education and also to take some vocational courses:

Mmm, they helped—Well, they helped me, they've already made me get a job, and I'm planning to go back to school as soon as I get my work schedule stable.

I'm just waiting to go back home to Virginia, go to Virginia Tech. I've already been accepted there, so just waiting to get done with the program, be done with my probation so I can go home.

I think—like right now, I can just go to adult school and take one class and graduate, that's all I have to do. That's easy, man. I can do that. Yeah, I'm going to. Just to get it over with.

Employment outcomes. Some respondents accept the fact that the CHAMPIONS program requires them to find work, and then go out and do it:

I did go and get a job because they said in order for us to move on, you know...we needed to get a job, and I found a job.

Two of our respondents considered how the program might help them gain employment:

You know a lot of good jobs—they test. It [the program] helps me realize that—if I want a good job, they'll help me stay off and be able to get that job that I want.

I think it can help me if, I mean, if I use it as a reference. I mean, if somebody calls, they'll give me a good reference, 'cause I'm going through the program.

Participant Perspectives on the Program

Overall impressions. We asked our respondents whether they thought participating in the program had made or would make a significant difference in their lives. All but one of the respondents who answered this question indicated that it had already had an impact on their life. For example,

I think it has made a *big* difference in my life....I'm a different person, I can see it and everybody sees it—the change in me.

It has made me realize who I am now, and they've made me realize that I'm more...that I—I can do it, whatever I want, I can do it.

Two people recognized the distinction between being helped by a program and being given the tools to help oneself in the future:

Oh, yes, this has made a definite change in my life. It's like turned me totally around, like a big 180, you know, and put me in the different direction down the right road. You know, with the help of myself, too—that's what's good about this place. They help you, but it's mainly you've got to help yourself with the help of someone, you know. And that's cool.

Well, after this, when I'm done with this, I'm going to know a lot of things, you know, when certain things in my life that are bad, I'm going to know how to deal with them better, you know.

Another respondent saw CHAMPIONS as the vital catalyst that moved him past the powerful negative social influences in his life:

Yeah, I mean, I knew what I had to do, and that's—I know, but a lot of people don't want to—they know what they need to do but they're afraid to go do it. ... 'Cause people look at us different.

The single court-ordered individual who maintained throughout the interview that he didn't need to be at CHAMPIONS because his life had never been out of control acknowledged that the program had a lot of merit for those who did need help. For him, the benefits had been from customs peripheral to the program itself:

Well, at least we always have a reading out of the Bible and stuff, and there's nothing wrong with that. That's more knowledge to your power. And I don't know [chuckles]—I think it's good. It's helped me.

Near the end of each interview, we also asked our respondents to tell us what they thought was the best thing for them about the program and also to make suggestions for improving the program. Their answers follow.

What was the best thing about the program? The responses to this question probably reveal more about the speakers and the painful circumstances that brought them to CHAMPIONS than about the program itself. Some of the heart-felt replies below reflect this:

It's like it's given me part of my life back, you know what I'm saying?
'Cause at first I never had that, I never enjoyed life.

It'll make things better by making me succeed in life. You know, for me to become somebody instead of just throwing someone away.

The best thing that I got out of it...those other kids my age, you know, that were kind of in trouble for—being similar to the reason that I was there, and you know, we all ended up, a lot of us—we'd all go do the Farmers' Market and stuff like that together, and we had—we all had *fun* together, and we were all, you know, not doing drugs, not breaking the law, you know, and—that—that was like a wake-up call for me 'cause I realized that I could—you know, I had a lot—a lot of fun with CHAMPIONS, and I was never—never doing drugs...

The best thing is that it helps people, really. It really does help people. Some people don't got family, but right here they feel like they are your family. They show you—they show you that they're, you know, that you're special and that you're important to them and that they want to really help you. Other places don't do that. They just try to put you in a room or just try to make you work around the yard or something.

How could the program be improved? It was difficult to get most respondents to focus on the concept of improving the program itself; several, when pressed, commented on peripheral issues such as the difficulty of complying with the demanding schedule of meetings while holding down a full-time job or going to school and of finding child care so that mothers didn't have to choose between missing meetings or bringing children along. The respondent who brought up this issue felt that the counselor didn't fully sympathize with the problem:

A lot of them have dogs, they don't have kids, so I don't think he understands, you know.

The only thing another respondent could think of to change was the new practice of asking clients to pay for part of their services:

Just the financial. 'Cause right now I'm not working now and got a bill already. ...my first bill was 60 bucks and I haven't received a second one yet. Recently started billing us. I don't [know why].

A respondent who remembered when CHAMPIONS operated an inpatient facility and thought it would be a good idea to do that again:

That would be the only thing I would...that would really be an asset to CHAMPIONS, because if they had [homes] open up and they could take care...of 15 or 20 people off the streets, you know, that really need it, 'cause there are people that—there's women with kids and men with kids, and they don't have no place to go...

Other suggestions included:

As far as improvements, I'd like this program to be able to pay for more extracurricular trips, do more activities, especially activities in the community. When we have benefited the community, we used to hold our car wash at Alicia's Mexican restaurant. A lot of the members of the community would come up and ask what our program was about, and once we told them it put a smile on their face...

I think having a teen AA meeting instead of—You know, I mean, 'cause it's cool going to the other AA meetings and hearing older people talk about it, but it's just hard to sit there, you don't know nobody and it's hard to relate...

Only one program participant expressed some dissatisfaction with the expression of faith at CHAMPIONS, but in a novel direction. He thought there was too little of it:

A lot of people say, well, it's not a God program, you know it's a spiritual...NA and AA are spiritual. But people that followed NA and AA are all real Christians. So eventually they became more Christian, and it's all...you can go in the Bible and find the scriptures to support the steps. And so I think that could be stressed more.

Future interaction with the program. When asked whether respondents thought they would remain in touch with the CHAMPIONS counselors who had worked with them even after they graduated, nearly all respondents felt that they would:

Yeah, it's something—something that's really important to me, and the reason why I like this [pause]—I love to keep going there—the fact that the program's based on trust.

I can always come here anytime I want and, you know, talk to somebody and they'll help me, you know.

We also asked if they would recommend CHAMPIONS to a friend, and everyone who responded to the question said without hesitation that they would; some noting that they already had:

Oh, yes, definitely!"

They're awesome! They're awesome!

Yeah, it's a safe place for recovery. ... I mean, they care about people, you know?

Case Study #3

Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries (FIRM)— The Partners Program

The Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries (FIRM) was founded in 1994 to assist the Southeast Asian and other refugee populations (especially Hispanic, Slavic, and Ethiopian) in Fresno. Because of their large numbers, now estimated at over 50,000 people, the Southeast Asian refugees are the primary focus. The organization provides programs for entire families, from daycare for infants and toddlers to social and educational projects for the elders. Since the formation of FIRM, core constituents have identified employment services as a primary need. An initial grant from the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee allowed FIRM to start an employment services program, which was subsequently funded for many years under a grant with the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement's Community Service Employment Opportunity Program (CSEOP). EDD funding of the Partners Program is indicative of a new interest in FIRM on the part of mainstream employment programs, not in place of but in addition to FIRM's refugee-related funding sources. The EDD funds have been used in conjunction with other grants to help find jobs for refugees and immigrants. The Executive Director expands FIRM's mission statement—*Sharing Christ's love to build communities of hope with New Americans*—to add the commitment "...that employment is a central part of what helps people feel hopeful in this new culture."

The Partners Program

Program and staff description. This program is nearly as old as FIRM itself and has been adapted over the years to the economic resources available and to the changing needs of both the Southeast Asian refugee communities and the employers of Fresno County. At present, the Partners Program occupies a suite of rooms in FIRM's new facility, a remodeled Armenian school located directly across the street from one of the main Southeast Asian communities. Here, job-seekers are greeted and multi-lingual Case Managers assess their skills, particularly their ability to speak English. Together they prepare a resumé and, when jobs are located, the Case Manager accompanies candidates with limited English to the job site to help fill out applications and to act as interpreter when necessary. Throughout this process, a Job Readiness Specialist prepares candidates for the new experience of working within the American culture. Customers who are not yet placed use FIRM as an ongoing resource, calling and coming in to access the "job list" that is compiled from at least three web sites, updating and faxing their resúmes, learning new skills, obtaining help in other areas of their lives, and sometimes visiting just to hear their own language spoken. At the same time, the Job Developer works with employers to help develop new jobs and extend the range of existing ones; to educate them about working with refugees; to recruit from the community when a block of jobs becomes available, to screen candidates and to deliver selected ones to the site; and to offer support services to employers. Conversations with three area employers suggest that FIRM has an excellent reputation for its high level of service, careful screening,

conscientious follow-through, and—most importantly—the well-prepared, cooperative, high-caliber candidates they provide. FIRM’s reputation in other parts of the community appears equally high as reflected by the positive reactions to the organization’s mission, performance, and leadership we received from two ranking individuals in local workforce development.

Distinguishing features. FIRM is unique among the six programs we are evaluating for the following reasons: (1) It serves the Southeast Asian and other refugee populations with job development and placement staff who speak the languages and understand the customs. In addition, the Executive Director and Director of Employment Services practice a level of dedication to this population that is akin to immersion, until very recently this extended to living in the heart of the refugee community. (2) With the assistance of the CSEOP program over the years, FIRM has built long-standing relationships with several area employers who as a result have become accustomed to working with refugee populations. (3) FIRM is now the only provider of employment services in Fresno County who is able to accept anyone who comes to them for help. As the Director of Employment Services pointed out,

We’re the only one now that can have walk-in customers. Almost every other agency that I know of at this time, because they’re funded by the county, can only take CalWORKS recipients and only those referred directly, to that agency, by name, by the county. So that makes us truly unique, that we’re the only program that people can choose to come to.

We heard from many informants that staff at traditional government programs are reluctant to enroll refugees in services, fearing that to do so would jeopardize their ability to meet performance standards. FIRM’s open door policy stands in marked contrast, and gives staff in other agencies a place to refer clients who are deemed more difficult to employ.

Program participants (called “customers” at FIRM). The largest Southeast Asian refugee group in Fresno County is Hmong, followed by Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese. FIRM also serves Slavic, Ethiopian, and Somali refugees, as well as adults of any ethnicity who are on public assistance and are “timing out.” At present, staff members tell us that most of their customers are women and that they fall between the ages of 20 to 30. Younger members of the Southeast Asian population are likely to have been in public schools and speak English sufficiently well to gain employment in English-only establishments, but refugees older than about 30 are often unable to read and write any language at all and are unable or reluctant to speak English. For many of FIRM’s programs, there tend to be more older than younger customers; for this program, staff members notice that the distribution is reversed: in a 70-30 split, the larger percentage of customers are the younger ones.

How the staff defines success. Staff members who work most closely with FIRM’s target population consider a warm and continuing relationship with their customers an important indicator of success, reasoning that they can’t serve people who don’t come in.

The staff also feel that educating their customers in the ways of the larger culture is essential to helping them establish and maintain employment. Next in importance is finding good jobs for as many of their customers as possible, a difficult proposition in Fresno County's economically depressed and highly seasonal economy. If success can be measured in numbers of customers served, FIRM appears to be about twice as successful as it needs to be under the terms of its contract with EDD. Staff-provided estimates of customers served by the program range from 600 to 700, with the official target number set at 245. A less measurable kind of success is the accumulation of necessary skills, both at FIRM and on the job, which will make it easier for customers to obtain better positions. Another form of success from FIRM's standpoint is developing a roster of local employers who recognize the merits of hiring members of this population.

Challenges to success.

For program participants. The primary barrier for Southeast Asian refugees is language. The inability to speak and read English restricts the kinds of jobs open to a large part of the population. Cultural differences also create many challenges. Many Southeast Asians understate their own competencies, a trait that can get in the way of getting a job or progressing within the employment ranks. There can also be a lack of interest in "climbing the ladder of success," traceable to the mindset of generations of farmers who had no employment opportunities beyond farming. Other misunderstandings occur in the workplace—when an employee who is absent fails to call in, for example—and can sometimes make it difficult for a wife to work if the husband is unemployed. Transportation is also an issue when jobs exist outside the city of Fresno where public transit is less available. Many participants arrive at FIRM when they have reached or are nearing welfare time limits, and a sense of urgency or panic is present. They are understandably eager to find jobs fast, but this is often not possible.

For the program itself. It can be difficult to find enough linguistically and culturally appropriate staff to deal effectively with the flow of customers; the need still outpaces FIRM's ability to fill it. There is considerable competition among job placement agencies for the attention of the largest employers that offer the most unskilled positions—firms such as the Zacky and Foster Farms chicken processing productions—and the big temporary help agencies seem to receive special consideration. Another issue is that at present, FIRM is racing against the clock as customers on public assistance exhaust their lifetime benefits. This is particularly devastating for the older members of the community and FIRM is having a very difficult time discovering options for them.

The place of faith in the program. There is some visual evidence of FIRM's faith-based orientation at the site, including a few Biblical quotes, a large illustrated cross made out of bamboo in a meeting room, and the prominently displayed Mission Statement. Behind the scenes, the connection is even more apparent. Executive Director Rev. Sharon Stanley's salary is paid by various sources within the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and several of FIRM's programs owe their resources to her talent for fund-raising at churches in California and Nevada. With regard to the role of faith where FIRM is concerned, the Executive Director declared,

I'll say it plays a direct role in some of our hearts!—in being motivated to do what we do and in staying hopeful in the midst of all the typical non-profit funding challenges.

Staff members identified themselves as belonging to a variety of religions, many Christian, some with roots in the Buddhist or shaman cultures of their childhoods, but they made it clear that these personal preferences had nothing to do with their work practices. Asked about the role of faith-based organizations in general, one staff member said,

...I strongly believe in faith-based organizations because of what I heard from the community, that because they know that we are a faith-based organization, that we will definitely do good deeds by helping them, you know, providing them with the different types of services we're providing now.

A Portrait of Program Participants

Interview sample. We began with a list provided by EDD of 66 participants who entered the Partners Program in 2002, and reduced that number via random sampling methods to 24. Since the Partners Program is the only one in our study in which a majority of the participants speak little or no English, the interview process was considerably more complicated at FIRM than it was elsewhere. We were very fortunate to have the wholehearted assistance of the Partners Program director and staff, who contacted the 22 potential subjects, were successful in scheduling interviews with 12 of them over a two-day period in the middle of March, 2003, and spent those two days reminding people of their appointments, rearranging the schedule, and conducting often nervous subjects to the room set aside for our use.

The interview process itself was somewhat less satisfactory. In retrospect, given the fundamental importance of the quality of the translation, we should have devoted more time, effort, and expense to choosing our translator (who was not connected with FIRM). As it was, we relied upon the recommendations of others and discovered too late that our translator had difficulty herself in speaking English clearly, was unskilled in “drawing out” respondents, and interposed herself between the participant and the interviewer whether the participant was having trouble speaking English or not. The unfortunate result is a set of interviews that is less able than we would like to present the complexity and texture of the lives of the our twelve respondents and their experiences with FIRM. We have attempted to supplement the picture of FIRM’s Partners Program gained from program participants by obtaining some reflections of the program from local community sources: three employers and two workforce development professionals.

Our respondents fell into two distinct groups: seven were between the ages of 20 and 35 and five were over 40. There were eight women and four men. Three respondents—a 22-year-old man, a 40-year-old man, and a 44-year-old woman—said that they had been

coming to the program for two years, and a 24-year-old had been coming for a year. All four of these respondents spoke English, although the older woman didn't reveal that she could until nearly at the end of the interview, when she said clearly:

I don't know how to read, I [don't] know how to write, but I talk. Yeah, I can talk very good! (laughs with glee at interviewer's surprise).

Four respondents had been coming to the program for five to nine months and the remaining four had been reporting to FIRM for only two or three months. The younger group was the more proficient in English, although it was often difficult to tell whether respondents were truly unable to speak English, were responding politely to the translator's insistence on speaking to them in Hmong and/or Lao regardless of their competence in English, or were just shy and uncomfortable. Those who appeared especially unsure of themselves, male and female alike, seemed to take comfort in the presence of someone who spoke their language.

Description of Partners Program participants interviewed. In all six of our case studies, we are gathering information in the following areas in order to gain a better understanding of program participants: living arrangements, employment, education, social self-classification (in the context of forming friendships), and personal faith. At FIRM we also asked respondents about their arrival in the United States.

Arrival and settlement. Our respondents—three of whom are Lao and nine Hmong—arrived in the US from 1979 (1) to 1993, with seven coming in the 1980s and four in 1992-1993. From the seven who told us where they settled initially, we learned that destinations included Tennessee, Oklahoma, Minnesota (2), Illinois, and Fresno (2). Eight were children when they reached this country: four were teenagers, two were infants, and the other three were between 5 and 10 years old. Of the two respondents (one a 43-year-old woman, the other a 25-year-old man) who said they weren't American citizens, the first had made many expensive, frustrating efforts to cut through the red tape that prevented her and her husband from applying for citizenship. The other said he didn't have time. At least four have US citizenship (a 53-year-old woman with the help of FIRM), and, of the remaining six who didn't say one way or the other, it seems likely from their ages and familiarity with English that at least five are probably US citizens.

Living arrangements. Tradition and financial circumstance appear to be primary factors in determining the size and composition of our respondents' household. Women who have the three largest families, with seven, eight, and ten children respectively, are all in their forties, suggesting that they continued having children after they arrived here as they would have done in their native country. Six households consist of four people or less, in combinations which usually included the respondent and one or more small children. At least one family followed the traditional pattern where a son and his family lived with his parents. One respondent explained that he, his wife, and their two children had moved in with his younger brother's family because he was having so much difficulty in finding work.

According to FIRM staff, our interviews took place at a time when the Fresno rental vacancy rates were at very low levels (1-2%), and changes in landlords were resulting in both price increases and new regulations at key housing sites for Southeast Asian refugees. For example, some landlords were now limiting the number of people who could live in an apartment to five people, threatening one of the ways refugee families have stretched their finances to make ends meet.

Employment. We asked the people in our sample about their employment history, their current job status, and the kinds of work they would like to do in the future. The men among our respondents had performed warehouse, production, and janitorial work; had worked in a box-making factory, on a garbage truck, and for a temporary help agency in various capacities; had done years of electronic assembly; and had been a cook in a series of Chinese restaurants. Women reported being paid minimum wage by Home Health to care for their aging parents, growing specialty vegetables and selling them at farmers' markets, performing seasonal work at a large Fresno bakery (2), working in the medical field and with disabled children, sewing, and working as a bank teller. Several of these jobs were left behind when respondents moved to another state. In one case the respondent lost a strategic effort to leverage a non-existent job offer into a higher raise from his current boss, and in another case a sanitation engineer quit his job with the local garbage company told us in English "I cannot fix meal, you know. The smell was too bad." The highly-skilled seamstress whose job at a mattress factory was terminated by mutual agreement with her employer after two months was too painstaking at her work and consequently too slow for the production-line emphasis on quantity over quality. Two respondents' indicated they had quit good jobs that they liked, but did not specify why.

Present employment fell far short of this population's most desired type of position: a "production job" that would be permanent and full time, would have benefits and no threat of lay-offs, and that wouldn't require English. This type of employment has been possible in at least some of the areas that Southeast Asian refugees have located in the U.S., such as North Carolina where textile and other jobs were available. Among our sample, one man was delivering pizzas, two women were taking care of aging parents for In Home Supportive Services (IHSS), another was doing housecleaning, and the woman who does fine sewing was making decorative pillows and doing clothing alterations from her home. FIRM is currently trying to match IHSS eligible refugees with refugees seeking employment, potentially expanding this employment niche.

In asking what kinds of jobs or careers our respondents would like to have in the future, we ran into repeated assertions of our respondents' desire for work, any sort of work. Our interpreter translated the request of a 44-year-old woman as

But she would like to have full-time job. Any kind of job—is whatever she can do, but she would like to have full-time job. It doesn't matter what kind of job, as long as the job is a full-time.

A young man who has a high school diploma told us in his own English,

I like to do [anything] in a company, you know, I will...anything—just get a job today, you know, just for myself and my family—I can do...

A young, well-spoken woman with experience in job placement told us that she actually wanted to get a position at FIRM. She explained why, giving a glimpse of the work done here and the satisfaction it can offer:

It's really nice to find someone a job, they get really happy, to you, because they've been looking for a long time. You go out there and look for a job, you have a lot of—other people competing with you, and you don't have no help behind you, and it's hard. That's why I like it, I mean, being an agency, help other people, that's what I want to do.

Education. Eight of our respondents had high school diplomas and six of them had either signed up for college or had already been attending. Of these six, one was starting in the fall with his eye on becoming a radiologist. A woman holding her AA degree planned to go on to Fresno State for some medical classes when her two children were old enough for school. One intended to sign up for classes as soon as she satisfied residency requirements. One was in his second year but had yet to select a major. One had “a hard time and hard times” during his second year and thought he would work for a year or two. And one allowed peer pressure to influence her decision to drop out after one year:

Everybody was like, “oh, don't go to school, don't go to class,” you know, everybody that was my age dropped out of college. That's one thing I regret, though... I'm planning to back, I want to wait until my son go to school first, because—he's a brat, no one can take care of him.

The one respondent who had attended high school but had not graduated said, unaided,

Yeah, I go to school, to school, I go to Adult School, and—I need to learn English, but, you know, it's not get into my head because I'm thinking about [finding a] job...

Two women reported going to Adult School, one for a year of ESL and one for three years. In addition, the second woman had taken a class in nutrition five years earlier. One woman had attended seven years of mission school in Thailand and the remaining woman who could speak English when she wanted to did not mention of formal schooling.

Social self-classification. In other case study interviews, we asked our respondents whether they had any difficulty talking to strangers or making new friends and whether they had made friends with program staff and participants. These were such complicated concepts to convey to the translator, and respondents looked so puzzled as they attempted to address the questions, that we did not pursue this avenue. We were interested in the way that anecdotal remarks incidental to other discussions illuminated a couple of the

social issues with which women in this population are dealing, such as the effect of the “empty-nest syndrome” in a culture where families are supposed to revere and support aging parents, not abandon them:

She was be a mother. So she was thinking that when you are a mother, and then you just taking care all the children, all the year, go—Maybe the children grow up, they ain’t going to help you, you know, for stuff, but then, now you go, when the children grow up, they move out, and then you [left] out, and you don’t education, you don’t have nothing left, and you really feel depressed. ... [In the old culture, her children would be] close tto her, more, you know, like the way—mmmm—family back together, you are stay together, even you marry or you don’t marry, you will stay—you know, for example, daughter will marry, you move out with the husband, for son, they will be in the same house. It doesn’t matter how many people, yes, the son—and, you know, the grandchildren, those will be staying.

As more women in this population seek and find jobs, they leave behind their friends who may be less qualified for work or restricted by various cultural constraints. The women left at home (at least two of which have ventured out to FIRM at this point and are among our sample) become lonely. As one said, “I have good friends but, you know, they have jobs.” Speaking through the translator after that, she explained that she had hoped to make friends among Partners Program participants with whom to go job hunting herself, but that didn’t seem to be working very well. The woman who has been coming to FIRM for two years has been on a similar search; as the translator expressed it, she didn’t want us

... to think that she’s not an outgoing person... Yeah, she like social [unintelligible], she don’t want to stay home just, you know—so she want to have friends, and talk to friends, so that’s how her life.

Personal faith. Half of our respondents were brought up in a religion that the translator identified as Shamanism or “home spirit.” Four respondents indicated that they grew up in the Buddhist faith, and two recalled no particular spiritual orientation. Current expressions of faith were less classifiable, though none identified themselves as a Christian. Although six people indicated a preference for “the traditional religion,” as one person called it, there was more discussion of what that meant. One young woman was developing her own relationship with the one God she believed existed “up there,” except she returns to a traditional stance “in some situations where it comes to praying I think for family health.” Another woman found that her family was returning, albeit in an unstructured manner, to the old tradition.

When we first came we went to church. But we stopped going to church, I don’t know, it’s because of the old people. Now we just—now we just doesn’t have any—our own tradition.

Three people consider themselves to be Buddhists today and one preferred not to answer the question. A 25-year-old man, asked whether his religion was home spirit, showed no sign of recent influence when he said,

Yes. I know what you say, but I don't know how to tell you, because I don't know how to say, like "Buddhist," or "Hmong culture." I don't know how to say "Hmong culture." I know Christian, yeah, that's—(half laugh) I go to Christian for like couple months, long time ago.

Respondents' Experience with the Partners Program

In this section, we are reporting our interpretation of the perceptions of the program participants we interviewed, taken from their responses to our questions. In some cases, we also refer to the initial scoping survey, as well as to the interviews conducted with program staff.

Entry into the program. We asked respondents how they happened to come to the Partners Program and, of the eleven answers we received, four said that friends had recommended FIRM to them. One of the friends had said,

Mmmm, they're helpful. Help you find a job. They for people that's— doesn't finish high school, or whatsoever. I mean, I finished high school and they still helped me.

An older woman was referred by friends, according to the translator:

These friends say that because she does not speak English, and then she does not know how to find job, so she come here, they will help her.

Three respondents were sent to the Partners Program by relatives already acquainted with FIRM: a sister who knew one of the Case Managers, a brother who had found two jobs through the program, and a mother who took part in the Elder Program downstairs in the FIRM building. Two respondents caught mention of the program in the media, one on the radio and one in the local newspaper. Of the remaining two, one respondent was sent by someone she met in a medical clinic who had gotten that job through FIRM and the other was referred by a job agency called Fresno Center for New Americans. They couldn't serve her there because she was an American citizen and was not on welfare.

Services offered/received. There was a single-minded desire among the respondents we talked to to be placed in a good job and everything else was unimportant. Questions about the desirability of gaining more skills in order to become qualified for more and better-paying jobs were brushed away with relatively terse responses. One of the women we spoke with provided some insight into this issue, as explained through the translator:

She say no [to FIRM helping improve skills] because I don't have the background knowledge. ... She say FIRM helped just to get GED diploma,

and get some computer class, but here big point is that, if you don't go to work, where you going to get money?

Interviews with staff members confirmed that this is generally their experience as well and that, although training beyond immediate job preparedness could be arranged, there is little if any call for it. The main requests for assistance revolved around preparing a resumé, filling out applications, faxing either or both to prospective employers, and for those not comfortable speaking English and/or lacking transportation, accompanying respondents to the job site.

We asked our respondents how they felt they were helped in attaining their goal of steady work. One common point of contact seems to be the Job List. All the customers call or come in to check on it on a regular basis. Another is maintaining up-to-date resúmes in the program's computer. The younger job seekers were sophisticated in their use of the program's streamlined application transmission system:

Oh, they just give me a list of jobs, where I just apply for, or I write down the name and then—'cause the FIRM have my resumé and stuff like that, or they just put in application for me. I just come in, whenever I have time...

A woman with less English at her command was a more typical customer. She checked the job list in person once or twice a month, although there is an agreement that she will be called if a likely job opportunity turns up. She accepted help in filling out applications, and she was taken by a staff member to the employer's facility for interviews. Another woman who has taken advantage of this service even though she speaks excellent English explained why:

It's better than to walk in on your own, without them noticing you, you know. How like some place, they don't hire you just because of your application; sometime you need some help. Like—some place only hire you when you go through agency, that's how it is.

Since the time of our interviews, FIRM has added a pre-school program at its site that serves 3-5 year olds. The hope is that this will provide an additional support service to aid individuals with young children who are seeking employment, as well as FIRM staff, two of whom have children enrolled.

Relationship with staff. A mentoring relationship seems to be a rare occurrence between staff members and their customers. Always friendly and helpful, Partners Program staff generally maintain some emotional distance by keeping their interaction with the customers relatively businesslike. None of our respondents reported having a special relationship with just one of the staff, nor did it seem to be expected that one-on-one counseling was necessary to establish trustful rapport with a customer. Respondents expressed their appreciation for the comfortable atmosphere and the willing help program staff provided:

Actually, I'm comfortable with everybody, 'cause everybody's friendly with me, they... Well, they just friendly in here.

Interaction with other agencies. Our respondents are very eager to find work and seek help from any agency with resources that might help them. The same names came up in conversation repeatedly—temporary help agencies such as Manpower and Kelly Services; agencies with a cultural edge such as Fresno Center for New Americans and Lao Family; even EDD, although the respondent who mentioned them did so without affection:

I went to EDD, but they don't really help you. They just post a job, and no one comes to talk to you, you're just like you're walking into a place where you're not welcome. They just leave the paper up on the wall, and you want to, it's like—it's not the same, you got to get personal, too—you know what I mean? Get to know each other, how ability, what you can do, and stuff, you know, so they can...find a job that fits you, that's what I like.

Asked whether temporary help agencies have anyone who speaks Hmong or Lao, one respondent said they did not. Another said that they did not have Lao but they did have Hmong (we couldn't get the name of that company). Several respondents indicated that FIRM was their favorite because it was a friendlier place than others:

I did [visit the other agency], but they weren't ... that friendly, so I—so I decided to come here, stay here.

Reported outcomes. In trying to understand what program participants gained from their experience with the Partners Program, we classified possible outcomes into four categories: attitudinal (confidence, hopefulness), remedial (removal of a basic underlying barrier to employment), educational (activities sparked by the program such as GED instruction, entering college, vocational training), and employment (getting a job or work experience due to the program).

Attitudinal outcomes. Respondents in this sample made no comments that suggested that they had changed their attitudes significantly due to the presence of the Partners Program in their lives. At least outwardly, their attitudes toward FIRM seem to fluctuate according to whether or not the program succeeded in finding them a job. If and how their underlying sense of confidence, self-esteem or hope may be changing was difficult to determine given the difficulties we experienced in these interviews.

Remedial outcomes. Because the ability to speak English well seems so critical to this population's success, we had trouble understanding why the Partners Program wasn't trying to address this issue with classes, tutoring, referrals to other programs, or some other approach that would help remove this barrier. When we asked the Director of Employment Services about this, she made two points. First, this is a very independent

population that has had access to training programs for a couple of decades and, in the main, hasn't elected to take advantage of them:

Yeah, most of them have gone through Fresno Adult School, the Hmong have been here for maybe 20 years, over 20 years, some of them haven't been, they came in later than that, but a lot of them- they've been to school, you know, they've taken Fresno Adult School classes, maybe for a long time. So, you know, they've been through all of that...Now, if we get them jobs where there are a lot of other Hmong people, they're still going to speak Hmong, and they're still not going to learn.

Her second point was one we had already learned earlier that day, namely that the participants often speak and understand English considerably better than they are ready to admit:

And a lot of times they'll say they can't speak English, but, you know, I can communicate with them, you probably can, too--and it's just fearful, you know, they're just fearful, they'll call, or they'll come in, and they'll say, "Dammit, is there a Hmong person around here?" (laughs) And they speak English, you know.

Educational outcomes. One of our respondents seemed pleased that FIRM had been helpful in enabling her to obtain a GED and some computer courses, but that was the only instance of partnership in formal education that we encountered. It appears, judging by the preponderance of people with high school diplomas and college experience among our small sample, that the value of education is well understood in this population. With our limited understanding of this population, it is hard to reconcile this observation with the demonstrated reluctance in upgrading skills to obtain more and better jobs.

Employment outcomes. The bottom line among our respondents was FIRM's ability to find them work. Many of our respondents seemed disappointed in their luck so far and several expressed their displeasure that FIRM had not found them work in two months, five months, seven months. Although four people in our sample had been offered work and had either accepted or turned down a job relatively recently, a sort of "What have you done for me lately?" attitude seemed prevalent. At the same time, several respondents reported refusing or quitting jobs ad lib, which was somewhat confusing to us. Clear enough, however, was the translated comment of one of our older female respondents:

She say she does feel depressed, because—uh—people who come in '97, they all—the welfare all cut, so she feels sort of discouraged why she did not find—she not get a job.

Participant Perspectives on the program.

Overall impressions. Near the end of our interviews, we generally ask our respondents whether they think participating in a given program had made or would make a significant difference in their lives. The purpose of this is to obtain an oblique assessment of the program through the participants' eyes. This was very difficult to communicate to the translator, and we elected to omit it altogether. We moved along to the end of the discussion and asked our respondents to tell us two things: what they thought was the best thing for them about the program and also what suggestions for improvement they would like to make. Their answers follow.

What was the best thing about the program? Several respondents were willing to acknowledge the positive aspects of working with FIRM:

Oh, they work well with you, um, like, you know, say you really need a job, and they—like the kind of jobs you need, they like help you find it, you know, that's—but, you know, it's better than looking in the ads and just go apply yourself, you know, yeah. ... 'Cause—I guess they—give you good references, yeah.

The best thing is, you have peoples in here, and when you come, they direct you where to go for help. And they send you to like different agencies, so you be able to know where to start to find employment jobs.

The best thing about FIRM? They keep on calling you. Yeah, they keep calling you. They keep you updated with what they have over here, if you have no job, that's one thing that's good. I mean, you don't have to call them, they'll call you.

They're nice, they really help you find job, and something like—things that you don't understand, you can ask them, they're very open.

They are very friendly—and if you don't know anything, they would teach you how to do it, and they would help you do anything you want, that you don't know.

The final response to this question was processed through the translator and emerged as:

Okay. She finally get her job that she like, but then one the best thing about FIRM, FIRM try to contact her employer, so see how well they treat their, you know, FIRM's people, so they try to find a way to find employers, and then later contact to the employer later. They check to make sure it's going well, on how the—you know, the client's doing, so they do check.

The respondent, asked whether FIRM also checks to see if she's happy, indicated via the translator that that they did:

And they do that, okay, all right.

How could the program be improved? Several people had no suggestions to offer and four wanted to pass along some thoughts to FIRM. Their comments are presented in order in which we received them and are modified only by an attempt to clarify their meaning:

Her opinion is that FIRM ought to find more jobs and take the ladies like her that don't speak English along to these jobs. And they should use the opportunity while they're there to try to get more jobs added. In other words, FIRM is basically doing all right but they should try harder.

The Partners Program should try harder to figure out how to help customers get jobs faster—to create a special job line that will make it possible to get jobs more quickly.

FIRM should gather together people with interests in various areas, such as sewing, and hold training classes in that interest: "In her opinion, she say if...these people like to learn how to cook, they will teach them how to cook; if these people like how to sewing machine, well, show them, you know—train them that area... It would be done in FIRM, days, evenings, it depends those people's interest.

His thought is that FIRM could contact more employers and could help more people who don't read or write or speak English.

In lieu of suggestions, one person wanted to pass along a positive comment:

There's nothing easier- you have to try on your own, too, you can't just depend on other people. You know what I mean? It's all in your ability to go look for a job. They did their part, it's us that have to do our part. You know? We have to come in and look for the job, and call in, and they'll help us set up stuff, you know, appointments and stuff. They can't get any better. I mean, they're good already (laughs).

Future interaction with the program. We asked our respondents whether they thought they would continue to remain in touch with the Partners Program, and everyone who understood the question nodded hard and said that they would. We also asked if they would recommend FIRM to a friend, and here the response was overwhelmingly positive. Everyone who responded to the question said without hesitation that they would continue to remain in touch. A two-year veteran who had complained several times about not having gotten a job recently said,

Oh, no—for people that doesn't know how to speak English, they can just come to the people in here that can help them translate, or help them read application. Like the Hmong kids or the Lao kids, yeah...

And the last comment, offered via the translator, was:

She love FIRM, and she will try to come to, you know, support FIRM.

Case Study #4

New Beginnings Partnership

The New Beginnings Partnership was created in March, 2000 when Valley Education Foundation (VEF), a non-profit community service organization that provides educational training in the Visalia area, joined with Open Gate Ministries in Dinuba to apply for a grant under the California Faith-Based Initiative program. Open Gate Ministries, the faith-based component of the partnership, is an independent Christian organization that was founded 27 years ago and operates a homeless shelter (serving 200-300 individuals a year), a food distribution program, a thrift store, and a direct assistance program for the needy in the Dinuba area. As a result of connections made by the Open Gate Ministries Executive Director, the New Beginnings program has been housed in the city's Memorial Building in Dinuba. CFBI and WIA funds have been the program's primary support from its inception, with supplemental support for job placement and development services provided under the Tulare Office of Education's SEE program (Services for Education and Employment).

The major facets of this case study as presented here include

1. a description of the program itself and a brief sketch of the staff members who construct and deliver the program on a day-to-day basis,
2. a profile of the program participants seen both through our interpretations of interviews with 21 of them and through staff perceptions, and
3. an analysis of what our semi-structured interviews reveal about participant experiences while in the program and their progress toward the goal of stable employment.

The New Beginnings Program

Program description. New Beginnings has offered four training programs designed to give clients practical experience as they learn. At the time of our visit, two of the programs were the mainstays: the 16-week *Office Skills* and *Culinary Arts* courses. *Office Skills* features self-paced computer training overseen by an instructor together with opportunities to practice office procedures at the Open Gate Ministries food bank: interviewing potential recipients, answering the phone, doing data entry, and filing. *Culinary Arts* teaches food preparation, cooking, kitchen procedures, and serving techniques which students practice under actual restaurant conditions by making and serving lunch to the public at the Memorial Building several days a week, taking advantage of the complete kitchen facilities. An additional benefit of this program is the opportunity to receive "Serve Safe" training and certification in food handling. The other two courses—*Maintenance* and *Retail*—flourished under capable instructors during the early stages of the grant. When these individuals moved on, these training programs became less central. The *Maintenance* program involved learning to clean floors,

bathrooms, and windows; maintain gardens; and perform minor repairs. Students put these techniques to practical use in the Memorial Building and at the Open Gate Ministries homeless shelter. The *Retail* program shows students how to operate a cash register and maintain stock by operating the Open Gate Ministries' thrift shop. In addition to the training programs, clients receive personalized assistance in locating employment and are referred as needed to local educational facilities and other area services.

Distinguishing features. (1) The New Beginnings Partnership provides an essential service to public assistance recipients who lack transportation and is the only training facility in rural northern Tulare County available to them. (2) The hands-on experience offered by all four training programs gives students an opportunity to hone skills in on-the-job settings. (3) Program participants are able to return to New Beginnings after they complete the training for which they contracted; to brush-up work on the computer, as space permits, and take an additional training course. Several individuals told us that they had graduated from *Office Skills* and gone on to *Culinary Arts*, and vice versa. They can continue to seek assistance from the staff as well. (4) The small-town setting sometimes has an impact—either positive or negative—on the program and on the participants. For example, it's difficult to conceal substance abuse issues or incidents of child or spousal abuse in Dinuba, which are immediately reported to caseworkers or other proper authorities. This can be disruptive to the training programs on occasion but can also lead to important remedial activities. (5) Program staff have many life experiences in common with the clientele they serve, allowing them to empathize with their clients and gain their trust. (6) New Beginnings is the only program in our study with dual citizenship, so to speak, in both the faith-based and secular nonprofit worlds. This has required program leaders to confront and resolve a number of philosophical and administrative differences between the Boards and staffs of Open Gate Ministries and Valley Educational Foundation. Considerable diplomacy on the part of many parties was necessary as the partnership evolved, and MOUs were rewritten on several occasions. All this was made more difficult by the departure of the VEF Director shortly after the CFBI grant was awarded, since he had originally conceived the program and wrote the CFBI grant. Open Gate was the fiscal agent for the first CFBI grant (state general funds), while VEF became the fiscal agent under the second grant (WIA funds). New Beginnings leaders are to be commended for their commitment to the value of the program and their ability to keep it operating in the face of substantial obstacles. At the same time, the case illustrates the importance of having a solid collaboration in place prior to receiving a substantial grant.

Profile of program participants. The majority of New Beginnings clients are Hispanic—primarily second- and third-generation—and most (an estimated 90-95 percent) are women in an age range of 22 to 38. The staff Job Developer thought that perhaps ninety percent of program participants had not graduated from high school and that 90 percent headed up single-parent households. Many program participants have grown up with welfare being regarded as the standard means of family support, and many lead stormy lives that include substance abuse and spousal abuse or simply a lack of support; sometimes these issues intrude while they are at New Beginnings and must be addressed

there. In an effort to explain how this situation impacts his approach to teaching, the Office Computer Instructor told us

I think a lot of what people don't understand, that I deal with in my job, is that there's times when there's extreme lack of motivation. Students come in that have been there for three or four months and...they get burned out. And I have students come in from day one and they're already like that, and it could be any number of reasons. I was talking about the home life...they go home and they tell their spouse or significant other that "Welfare is making me go to school," and then the spouse says, "Well, I don't know why, because you're not getting a job!" and that sort of thing, why do they care, they already have it set in their head, "I can't get a job because So-and-so won't let me," so that all won't succeed. ... There's quite a few that you know it can't be laziness, there's something else there, and you can do all you can to help that person, but the bottom line is, they still go home every night, and got the same problems, you know. And that's where...That's what the problem is, yeah.

Most of New Beginnings' clients are referred by TulareWORKS in Dinuba and are receiving public assistance, although the program also accepts self-referred candidates. During the program's early months, the training courses operated out of the Open Gate Ministries facilities and at that time residents of the Open Gate Ministries homeless shelter were the first participants. The Open Gate Ministries Executive Director explains:

We never anticipated that the number of people that could be served through this program would become as great as it was. We thought maybe there would be 10 people from the shelter involved in the program but it didn't take long to realize that the people in the shelter were not ready for training, they had other, more important, things to be mitigated, and even though we pushed the training program, they just couldn't concentrate on that, because they didn't have a place for their family to live...And so we had to open it up to the community, anybody that Welfare-to-Work would send over our way.

Once it became clear that people in the homeless shelter at Open Gate Ministries were dealing with fundamental issues that needed resolution before training for employment could be helpful to them, the Program Director went to the Tulare County Welfare Department and arranged to work with their hardest-to-serve population. New Beginnings was housed in downtown Dinuba for a year before moving to its present location in August of 2002. When we were conducting on-site interviews there in February, 2003, 37 students were enrolled in the training programs.

Program Personnel. The program's staffing levels and configuration fluctuate with the availability of funds but the the Program Director and her Administrative Assistant have remained in place to see that the program continues to function properly. They have often been assisted by members of the *Office Skills* program, who benefit from the opportunity

to learn telephone and filing techniques in an on-the-job setting. At least one other position has been kept filled: the Office Computer Instructor. When we were conducting on-site interviews in February, 2003, there was also a Job Developer/ Employment Specialist whose job it was to attract and educate employers as well as to counsel students on job-related issues, to provide them with the essential tools (e.g., a resumé, interviewing tips), and to match them with suitable employment opportunities.

The Program Director is a dedicated, highly-skilled and experienced individual whose daily responsibilities include coping with her complicated role as intermediary between the two sponsoring organizations with tact and dispatch, handling the intake duties with new clients and maintaining friendly contact with continuing ones, guiding staff and making programmatic decisions, interfacing with community agencies and the public, and performing the demanding record-keeping functions associated with government grants. In addition, she is frequently pressed into serving as an informal mentor to clients experiencing personal difficulties. The most satisfying aspect of her work is when the students recognize what the training programs can really do for them:

...when we see them beginning to realize, "This is what I need to do!" or helping to lose their barriers and seeing that there's a different side of life than they've been living...and once we've seen that, then it assures us that they're going to be able to become employed now. And to see, you know, a change in the way they're seeing things, and start understanding...budgeting, and, you know, what it is to become more independent, to be able to make a decision, I think that's the most rewarding, is to see that we're helping them in their lives, we're not pushing them out there to make a number but helping with their lives—helping their fears, and maybe not follow that same... the route as they did maybe from their parents, and help them, you know, get out of that rut.

There are acute disappointments built into the work as well, however, and she counsels herself and her staff not to take it personally when a client who showed great promise suddenly returns to a dysfunctional lifestyle. She deals with these issues on a secular basis; her own spirituality is a private matter.

The Office Computer Instructor is in charge of a classroom full of computers (12 in all) and 15-20 students who are working on a self-paced learning program. He inserts hands-on training on other office equipment as well as a practical grasp of computer hardware and software so that people who typically arrive with no computer experience whatsoever can begin to grasp some of the principles with minimal apprehension. The goal is to enable them to gain an entry-level position in a business environment: "Get employed. Definitely." One of the tasks he assigns himself is finding ways to motivate his students to learn when some of them have such troubled lives that they are very hard to reach.

Motivation...that was one of the hardest things I had to learn to teach, to teach somebody to want to learn, nobody ever told me I had to do that, it was something I had to learn on my own. [But] without that, everything

else won't come. ... I have a lot of things that I use [to] help motivate, but it's up to them, it's...tough sometimes, but definitely, I... I believe that without that, that I wouldn't be- my class wouldn't be as successful as it is.

In return for his concern and dedication, students give him consistently high evaluations.

How Success is Defined. Students feel successful when they complete difficult parts of their training—when they advance from one computer training manual to the next, when they master culinary techniques and successfully cook a meal. Graduating from those two training courses gave participants a sense of self-efficacy and the belief that they could bring practical skills that were as good as anyone else's to an employer and could compete successfully for a job. The New Beginnings Program Director gauged the clients' success by their test results at the conclusion of the courses and also by seeing participants identify and deal with underlying issues that have caused them to require public assistance in the first place. The Office Computer Instructor offered his own definition of success:

Watching a student come in from absolute no training, zero- I wouldn't call it ability, but basically, education or training, some of them come in with very little education, not even a GED or high school diploma, and watching them go from that to completely developing their skills, and getting employed, and being happy in what they're doing. That makes my job worth doing.

At the time of our February, 2003 visit, the instructor reported that about 50 percent of his students had found jobs and remained in them.

The Open Gate Ministries Executive Director emphasizes that self-sufficiency is the ultimate goal:

Here we had a chance to take these people under our wing and train them, and then help them find jobs, which takes them to another level where they *can* be self-sufficient. And our whole goals all along was to help people become self-sufficient. *Jobs* are the *most important thing* to self-sufficiency. If you don't have a job, you can't do for yourself, because you don't have an income... So, in that sense, we offered a very important component...because without a job, you don't know who you are--you just don't know who you are. You can have all this history, and this faith in yourself, but if you don't have a job, you don't know where you're going to be tomorrow! You don't know if you're going to be able to *afford* tomorrow! See, and these people have lived this way, many of them, for quite some time, and they just are overwhelmed with appreciation when you've helped them find out who they are and become something that they wanted to be. And actually walked *beside* them, and mitigated whatever circumstances that needed to be mitigated.

Challenges to success.

For program participants. One of the greatest problems for those seeking jobs in this rural area is the lack of nearby employment opportunities; a well-trained individual needs to go to larger urban centers to find well-paying office and food service positions. Coupled with this issue—and considered the greatest hurdle by the staff—is obtaining consistently reliable transportation. Bus service in this area is almost non-existent and many people, especially women, can't afford or have no access to, a car. Another difficulty that affects primarily women is an inability to find and afford child care. Many program participants are living with relatives because they can't afford housing for themselves and their children, which can lead to unpleasant family situations that impact their effectiveness. Domestic violence is also a frequent problem. Substance abuse has intruded into the lives of students and can result in termination from the program. Those not comfortable with English are not only limited in the training program they can take but also in finding good jobs. Few women we talked to were looking further than the local fruit packer or fast-food restaurant for employment.

For the program itself. Programmatic barriers include the unwieldy alliance between two independent organizations with little in common beyond the New Beginnings Partnership. For example, there are two boards of directors with differing perspectives and goals that have oversight responsibilities for the program. The Program Manager, a VEF employee, must not only administer a complex set of training programs for hard-to-serve individuals, but must also negotiate a practical path among conflicting directions received from the two parent organizations. Fiscal difficulties that have resulted in the loss of key staff members have also plagued the program, although so far it has always managed to land on its feet.

Open Gate Ministries has appreciated the fact that CFBI program managers are willing to come to them to work out issues and provide needed technical assistance. The faith-based organization willingly changed the New Beginnings personnel procedures to prohibit religious discrimination in hiring at the request of EDD. Even so, Open Gate's board had difficulty accepting some aspects of its association with VEF, and began to wonder if it was not straying too far from its pre-existing mission. The Board began to balk at continuing to support the program.

The place of faith in the program. In its everyday mission and operation, New Beginnings is one of the most secular among the six organizations we are evaluating, despite its connection with Open Gate Ministries. Pressed to consider whether faith has played even an *indirect* role in the program's work, the Program Director said that Open Gate Ministries' connections in the Dinuba area have sometimes assisted in arranging housing, donating clothing, and even locating jobs on occasion. The Program Director also feels that the presence of a faith-based entity might be somewhat comforting to program participants because it may be perceived as being more sympathetic and less judgmental than other employment and training programs, especially those run by the government.

The Open Gate Ministries Executive Director describes the importance of the faith connection as follows:

Well... our organization would not exist without that connection. However, because we were not allowed to proselytize, through the use of any of these funds, we didn't even attempt to make any kind of faith connection with the students. However, because of our learning environment being the shelter, and being the thrift store, where the staff is all faith-based and enthused in those areas, you always had the influence of the faith-based people around them. That added a discipline dimension, that added a spiritual dimension, and it added an emotional-stability dimension, and it added an outlook- you know, purposeful dimension. All of those things are caught as well as taught.

Program Participants

Interview sample. Interviews with program participants added to our understanding. Although our sample is not representative of all program participants, the interviews provide a revealing glimpse of several aspects of their lives and beliefs. The participant list we received from EDD contained 31 names and we attempted to contact all of them. We actually spoke with 22 individuals (the highest number among our six CFBOs), 14 in person and eight over the phone. An interpreter unaffiliated with New Beginnings but familiar with the area conducted three of the interviews in Spanish for us. Of the three men on our list, we were able to reach only one and were unable to complete that interview, so the results reported here apply almost exclusively to female participants. Half of the respondents for whom we have data were in the 18-24 age range and the rest divided evenly between 25-34 and 35-44. Only five of our respondents had not completed high school—unlike the 90 percent estimated for program participants by the Job Developer—and seven report some college, one with an AA degree.

Living arrangements. Of the respondents who talked about their homes, ten live in Dinuba, five live in Orosi, a few miles away, and two are further out. Those who don't live in Dinuba are at the mercy of the transit system, sometimes arriving at New Beginnings as much as an hour after class officially begins. All of our respondents have at least one child, most have two children, and two have four and five children, respectively. In all but three cases, children are younger than school-aged, requiring either day care or their mothers' presence. Six respondents live with relatives—mother, parents, grandparents, brother, cousin—and most would prefer to have their own place. Two are relatively newly separated, four live with their husbands, and two speak of their boyfriends as permanent members of the household. Ten live in houses, at least three of which are rented, and all but one of the rest live in apartments—the exception is a woman who lives with her young son in a rented room. About half of the respondents who either live with family members or live in apartments would like to move; the rest express contentment with their present arrangements. One woman who was homeless for a while is happy that she and her two children were taken in by her brother and sister-in-law.

Employment. We asked the people in our sample about their employment history, their current job status, and the kinds of work they would like to do in the future. Only two of our respondents said that they had never worked for a living because they have focused either on raising children or on going to school. This is not an area that offers much part-time or after-school opportunity to teenagers. Even minimum-wage jobs tend to be snapped up by adults trying to support their families. Their experience is often limited to babysitting or volunteer work at the schools. Of respondents who have held paying jobs, the preponderance of them mentioned that at some time they had worked either in the fields (3) or in the packing houses (9). One was a medical assistant for 12 years before the doctor retired and one in a convalescent home (“I liked working with the older people until they started hitting me...I worked with the Alzheimer’s, so they’re kinda—they’re very combative.”) Another woman had been a bank teller and three have at some time worked in food service, one for nearly three years:

Taco Bell! I’ve always wanted to work at Taco Bell, ever since I was like 16, and I worked there for 2 or 3 years. I was so happy. When I was working, I’d be early for work and I would just like do my best and, you know, the guy who owns Taco Bell even told me one time, he goes, “You’re one of the best employees that I’ve ever had and I hate to see you go!” I wanted to cry, I was all...

An older woman with no job experience parlayed her volunteer classroom work into occasional substitute teaching and convinced a local insurance agent to try her out for two months on filing and telephone, holding both jobs at once and walking the three miles between them. Retail sales, some work at a temporary agency, and housekeeping at the local Best Western complete the past employment experience of these respondents.

At the time of our interviews, the only man among the respondents held a managerial position in a Visalia restaurant and five were poised to begin jobs already arranged at packing houses. Of others who reported having a job, one was providing child care, one worked the graveyard shift at a gas station, one worked at a local pizza parlor, and one had just accepted a position as Culinary Arts Instructor at New Beginnings in the wake of the chef who had departed for medical reasons. Ten others said they were not working; several of them thought of their training course at New Beginnings as their job at this time:

By the time I’m done, I’ll get my certificate and that’ll help me find a job that’s gonna be higher than just the average minimum wage. But even so, it’s just learning the new stuff, ’cause it’s a challenge. Yeah, you feel better.

Future aspirations included finding an office job (5), being a cook at a hospital or school cafeteria (this from two women, one of whom admitted that, before her experience at New Beginnings, she could barely cook for her family), cooking at a restaurant (2), providing licensed child care, working at a school in any capacity that involved children, going back to being a medical assistant, and being a cashier at a grocery store:

Oh, I really want to work in a grocery store [laughs]. I know it doesn't sound so dreamy and everything like that, but it's what I want to do, I would be happy working at a grocery store, as a cashier. [I want to do it because of] the interaction with people. [sighs] Going back to fast food would be like, hard, 'cause you'd have to start all over at the bottom again. ... That's why I'm here. To better myself.

Education. As noted above, our respondents demonstrate a higher level of education than the Job Developer's estimate for all New Beginnings participants. At least five have attended college (one has received an AA degree and another is in her third year of studying accounting) and no fewer than 13 have their high school diplomas. One determined woman who had left school during her sophomore year to be with her husband reported

I didn't go back to high school but I did go back to Adult School when I was 23 and I got my high school diploma, I wasn't going to settle for the GED. I mean, they told me it was the same; I don't know—I want my diploma. So I went through the same classes, I had all my stacks of books, but I *got* my diploma.

One Spanish-speaking woman who was born in Mexico attended ESL instruction at the local community college and two more took courses to enable them to become a medical assistant and a licensed child care provider, respectively.

Social self-classification. The Program Director saw significant coherence among the students with respect to both personal and job-related matters:

The clients really help us out with that [being alert to substance abuse on and off the premises] too; everybody knows everything in this town, so they kind of let us know heads up [about potentially abusive men waiting outside] ...and we try to get back with them; it takes a team to make this happen. Yeah, they kind of watch out for each other... helping each other out with job resources—"I'm going here applying and I saw this over here but I don't want it, but you..."—you know, they let each other know what's going on.

To get a feeling for the peer relationships they might be building, we asked our respondents about their success in making friends among New Beginnings staff or with fellow students. Nine respondents felt that the friendships they formed at New Beginnings, including with staff members, would be of long standing:

I believe they're all my friends... you meet people, and some people have a little bit more problems than you have, and you can't help the whole world but, you know, if you listen and you give a little advice every now and then, you make some friends along the way.

We'd have birthday parties for children this year and... and invited some people from here and they'd come and be supportive. And they're really helpful. And a lot of times in this community, there's a lot of people that don't have a lot of money... You know, people are real friendly out here, and if you're ever in need, people are always willing to give you what they have, even if it's only a little bit.

The young woman who recently separated from her husband was particularly delighted to make friends in the program:

The people that come here, they're like real friendly, it's awesome... You know, being with someone for so long, and not having any type of, you know, friend, 'cause *they* would, you know, get upset and everything like that—coming here, it's like wow, I got friends! It's like I have people that I can relate to, they either went through the same thing or they're going through the same thing and it's like—you're not alone!

Some women renewed acquaintance with old friends, particularly among Open Gate Ministries staff, that dated back to needier times when they were given food and shelter there. A few women enjoyed the on-site companionship of fellow students but doubted that the relationships would extend beyond the end of their studies.

Personal faith. Of the respondents who addressed this issue, nine were raised in the Catholic faith, two called their early religious affiliation “Christian,” and at least six said that they weren't raised in any spiritual tradition. At present, ten people considered themselves to be religious or spiritual people and most—but not all—were regular church-goers (one attended a church she associated with Open Gate Ministries); as one woman said,

I believe in God and I don't go to church every Sunday, but I believe. I'm Christian religion... 'Cause you know, the world's so crazy nowadays, you gotta—you gotta have faith it's gonna get better.

Three women didn't see themselves as especially religious but said that they did still believe, and four didn't consider themselves to be spiritual at all.

Although parts of the New Beginnings program explicitly requires students to assist in some of Open Gate Ministries activities or to perform various tasks on their premises, none of our respondents mentioned that they found this to be offensive from a spiritual point of view. A number of participants really appreciated the opportunity to help people in need, such as when they participated in the food distribution program.

Respondents' Experience with New Beginnings. In this section, we are primarily reporting our interpretation of the perceptions of the program participants we interviewed, taken from their responses to our questions. In some cases, we also refer to the initial scoping survey, as well as to the interviews conducted with program staff.

Entry into the program. We asked respondents how they happened to come to New Beginnings and it turned out that all but two of them had been referred by TulareWORKS. Some were only told about New Beginnings' training programs. Others spoke of being given a choice between New Beginnings and Proteus, another job training and placement facility, and elected to go to New Beginnings because it was closer. Of the two women who found the program on their own, one saw it advertised in the *Dinuba Sentinel* and the other discovered it when she came with her sister to rent space on the Memorial Building's patio.

Several respondents reported taking a placement test at TulareWORKS and using the results of the test to decide which training program best suited their goals and abilities; others knew ahead of time which one they wanted. In some cases, the *Office Skills* course was full when they arrived and respondents went into *Culinary Arts*, their second choice, instead.

Services offered /received. In addition to the training programs that are the reason for New Beginnings' existence, the program officially offers skilled assessment of clients' needs and abilities, basic preparation for seeking and holding jobs, job development and placement assistance, and referrals to other agencies and programs for further education, counseling for clients and their children, housing, child care, and transportation. The staff also performs a host of informal services such as driving clients to interviews and picking them up, and offering a friendly ear when they need to talk.

Fifteen of our respondents signed up for *Office Skills*—which they called “the computer class”—and 13 of them had either finished the course or were still taking it at the time of our interviews. Ten enrolled in *Culinary Arts*—“cooking class”—and eight had finished or were still involved in it when we spoke. Four told us that they finished their computer training, took their certificate, and then signed up for the cooking course, which is where they were when we interviewed them. One woman was bumped from computers into cooking because there were fewer computers than there were candidates for the course; another said she was progressing too slowly in computers and was switched to *Retail* (where she spent only two months). Because this experience in *Retail* is incomplete and because we were unable to speak to anyone who had taken the *Maintenance* course, we will look at only the computer and cooking classes here.

Office Skills students reveled in recounting the things they were learning about computers, from how to build one (an exercise invented by the instructor in order to demystify the hardware) to sampling and gaining proficiency in software such as Office 98, Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, and Publisher. They also learned how to access

e-mail (each had her own e-mail address) and the Internet. In addition, they were given a taste of office comportment. As one student explained:

They expect you to come dressed nicely, more like office-type, and no, like, cussing profanity, nothing like that. Respect others and just basically behave, yeah.

They learned to answer the phone properly, both at New Beginnings and at Open Gate Ministries, and to use fax and copying machines.

Culinary Arts students also enjoyed describing the skills they were learning, which include using simple and complex equipment to turn raw vegetables and meats into finished meals; learning how to manage a professional kitchen, from maintaining an inventory and ordering food to keeping the surfaces and utensils clean and safe; mastering meal-planning for varying numbers of people, and developing all the skills necessary to operate an actual restaurant three days a week. Students enjoyed different aspects of the experience; one very practical woman said,

I like that they taught me how to properly chop the vegetables, but also they would allow us to take leftovers home. I liked sampling the foods.

In addition, they are given the opportunity to earn the highly respected Serve Safe certificate, valid for five years, if they successfully complete an intensive course of study on food handling safety and pass the National Restaurant Association's qualifying exam.

Relationship with staff. Without exception, members of the computer class spoke of their instructor with affection and respect:

He's always willing, if you ask him a question, he's willing to do it up on the board and he can just keep going and going. He jokes around and stuff, and he knows how to control the class, and I like him as a teacher.

You feel so comfortable, you could pour yourself out to him, and he's there for all of us. That's why I say he's so awesome... you don't feel like he's going to be judging you, knowing that we don't have jobs, he still doesn't make us feel like we're nothing.

Some clients felt a bit reserved with the Program Director and Administrative Assistant, referring to them collectively as The Office, while others recognized them as friends and allies:

Well, the Administrative Assistant, she's really nice, like we talk to her really good, outside of school and inside of school, yeah, and [the Program Director], she's really nice. At first I was like, she's an *instructor*, but now we joke around and everything...

[The Program Director], she goes out of her way and she like gives us rides places we need and like they're there, you know, they help you a lot. They recommend you to places. You need something, they'll like "Oh, go here, or go there!" you know. Yeah, they're a big help.

Several respondents recalled a particular Job Developer as very helpful and were sorry he was no longer there. One woman told us, "He was always on top of everything, you know, he was real good about that. But—they had to let him go, so..." Asked why he was let go, she responded succinctly, "Budget cuts."

Interaction with other agencies. TulareWORKS was the parent agency for nearly all our respondents. One woman explained how "the worker" at TulareWORKS would arrange for members of the cooking class to go to a uniform shop in Visalia to pick out chef coats, aprons, and other necessities. Respondents knew that if they needed counseling or medical assistance they could go to their worker at TulareWORKS for referrals. None of the people we spoke to had gone to a job agency per se, although one had an unpleasant recollection of a single visit to Proteus and two others mentioned C-SET, "a job placement place. It was all right but I like it better here." Several respondents mentioned a temporary help agency that had apparently made a presentation at New Beginnings, and were disappointed not to have been contacted:

Through this program here there was one that came, it's not Manpower but it's kind of like, yes, temporary help, and I signed up my name, but they never—I never heard anything on it. We made resumés, and we turned them in to them, and they said, "We'll call you," but I haven't heard.

Interaction with Open Gate Ministries. Several respondents had benefited directly from Open Gate Ministries' shelter and food programs in the past and expressed warm feelings for members of the staff who had been kind to them. A number of participants we spoke with signed up to work at Open Gate, answering phones, filing, or preparing boxes with food. In earlier stages of the partnership, participants in the New Beginnings maintenance training program helped construct a building at the Open Gate Ministries site, while other participants were involved in a reorganization of the Open Gate thrift store.

Reported outcomes. In trying to understand what program participants gained from their experience with Program, we classified possible outcomes into three categories: attitudinal (confidence, hopefulness), educational (activities sparked by the program such as GED instruction, entering college, vocational training), and employment (getting a job or work experience due to the program).

Attitudinal outcomes. Several respondents told us that their self-confidence and self-esteem had risen throughout the program as they discovered their ability to learn new skills and to be comfortable with new people. They were grateful to the supportive staff and to friendly fellow students, and felt prepared to take the next step in their lives.

It's helped me so much, yeah, I've come a long way. I didn't feel I was gonna really be here, you know, I didn't even think I was gonna work, I didn't know how—I *felt* like I didn't know how. And being here, too, helped me do stuff more myself. You know, feeling I *could* go out there, and I could work.

...when you're out of work for a while...you lose contact socially with people outside and then all of a sudden you feel like you can't do the work. ... when they see that you're doing well in class, they tell you, they pat you on the back, and they tell you, "Your're doing great, you can improve on this, or you can improve on that," and then when there are job openings coming, you know, open for you, they come and they tell you, they say, "I think you could qualify for this job, I think this would be good for you, you should go out." And so it builds your confidence, too, it makes you feel good about yourself.

Educational outcomes. Beyond the achievement of completing their training courses and receiving certificates, two women who left school before graduating had been inspired to look into obtaining their GEDs and planning to pursue instruction through TulareWORKS, and three spoke of enrolling in or returning to college. In addition, members of the New Beginnings *Culinary Arts* class were very serious about their attainment in having obtained their Serve Safe certificate.

Employment outcomes. Graduates of the computer and cooking courses gained broad knowledge of their subject as well as hands-on experience and confidence in their new ability to compete with anyone for good jobs. In addition, *Office Skills* students could obtain a certificate guaranteeing that they could type 45 words a minute that they thought would be an important adjunct to applying for many positions.

Overall impressions. We asked our respondents whether they thought participating in the program had made or would make a significant difference in their lives. Of the 18 people who answered this question, 14 believed that it would. One woman expressed her feelings this way:

Programs like this, for people who don't have a whole lot of money, like me, myself, I can't attend college or find someplace where I'd have to pay to get help. Programs like this, they help people like me, you know, to come into a class, learn what I can, and then go back out and find a job... with computer skills. So I love this program [laughs]. It's very helpful to me.

Most people felt that their training programs were excellent: thorough and accessible, accomplishing a great deal in a short period of time. As one member of the cooking class said:

I think we learn things that probably an actual culinary arts class school learns, and it takes them a while to learn, and we pick it up quick!

A respondent who had taken both the computer and the cooking classes agreed:

In the kitchen I like it 'cause it's hands-on, you're actually in there waitressing and everything. Like the books in the computer class, they're really easy and everything, it's like step-by-step telling you how to do it, you could learn it really fast, catch on pretty quick.

We took advantage of the opportunity to see the program through our respondents' eyes by asking, near the end of each interview, what they thought was the best thing for them about the program. We also asked them to make any suggestions they could think of for improving the program. (Suggestions are reported as we received them, with no attempt made to place them in any order or to screen them for practicality.)

What was the best thing about the program? The majority of the people who answered this question found ways to say how much they valued their new knowledge, not only for its practical value in the job market but also for the satisfaction of having skills they could be proud of. One woman said simply: "The *very* best? That I'm learning something!" The hands-on nature of the training got high marks as well. Respondents also liked the sense of being part of a supportive group; as one woman told us, "The best thing for me is, I guess, being there—it feels like a family, you know, we all support each other." Another said, "I would probably have to say the efforts of everybody trying to help you get ahead, the staff and also the students."

How could the program be improved? Our three Spanish-speaking respondents expressed unanimous disappointment that no instruction was delivered in Spanish. One really wanted to work with computers and the opportunity was denied her. Nearly everyone who had taken the computer class told us that the teaching conditions were very difficult for the instructor because people in the class were at such different skill levels. They wanted him to be able to teach the whole class at once rather than having to work with individuals. Several people expressed the need for more computers and one pointed out that the ability to preserve one's work is also needed. One woman wished that people in her computer class wouldn't play their music so loudly because it made it hard to concentrate, and another felt that attendance rules were too lenient. Another woman would have liked to join in the *Retail* program but felt the store was too messy and questioned the type of training she might receive there. Another thought the job readiness instruction needed to be made more engaging, and the cooking class would benefit from better organized activities on Monday and Tuesday when the restaurant isn't open. A number of people said they wanted a lot more assistance in finding jobs than they were getting.

Future interaction with the program. One of the tenets of New Beginnings is that clients are welcome to return whenever they need to as long as the program exists. A number of respondents appreciated that offer and thought that they would at least stop in to say

hello. We also asked if they would recommend New Beginnings to a friend and most respondents said that they would; for example,

Yeah, I would. I would really recommend it, it's a good experience!

Yeah, I told my aunt...like she wants to be a secretary, I go, "Just go to New Beginnings!"

Future of the New Beginnings Program and the Case Study

New Beginnings is the only one of our six case study sites that was not refunded by CFBI for the 2003-04 year. The Program Director was informed of this decision in a brief letter near the end of July, 2003. Apparently the decision not to refund is related to an audit of the departed VEF Director's handling of an earlier workforce development grant rather than to any deficiencies in New Beginnings itself. The Program Director indicates she has not received negative feedback from EDD sources, and that the program has been satisfactorily meeting its performance and reporting targets.

Since EDD was the program's only fiscal sponsor, New Beginnings was forced to discharge its staff, dismiss its students, and close its doors. A number of students wrote gratifying letters saying how much they enjoyed the training programs and hoped that they could somehow continue. As of August, 2003, it appeared that another workforce development entity, a nonprofit called Proteus, will be attempting to underwrite the *Office Skills* and *Culinary Arts* training programs. This effort illustrates the value the programs are perceived to have, and the ongoing need for such programs in the northern part of Tulare County. As the Open Gate Executive Director states:

And they'll never forget each other. I mean, there won't be a single person that came through this program, that made it through, that'll ever forget Merla. Or the teachers.... It just emphasized so much for us the expanding *need* and it makes me feel that our organization should double and triple in size so that we can do more.

The UC Davis evaluation team intends to follow-up on developments at New Beginnings and with program participants, just as we will do with our other five case studies.

Case Study #5

Tabitha's House— The Goals for Life Program

Tabitha's House is a sober-living facility founded in Bakersfield in 1992 by "Miss Bennie" Jacobs. It is situated just off a busy four-lane highway in what used to be the El Rancho Motel, once known locally as Drug Central. "It was a place to go to get drugs and do drugs," the Goals for Life Program Coordinator told us. "Now it's a safe place." Seventy-two units provide housing for recovering addicts and their families while they go through the year-long treatment program. EDD funds are used primarily for salaries and overhead associated with the Goals for Life program, which is the job readiness course that is offered to Tabitha's House residents during their stay. Since beginning in 2001 the program has become so popular and successful that it is now required of all residents.

The Goals for Life Program

Program description. Tabitha's House is the only organization in our study where participants in one program live within another program's treatment facility, which raises some special considerations vis à vis evaluation. First, it becomes difficult—and probably impossible—for participants, staff, and evaluators to distinguish between the effects on program participants of the Goals for Life employment-oriented program on the one hand and the effects of living within the Tabitha's House spiritually-based rules and guidelines on the other. Second, although the Goals for Life materials are entirely secular and the two instructors are determined not to risk censure by permitting the faith-charged atmosphere of Tabitha's House to penetrate into the Goals classroom, it is next to impossible to avoid some philosophical overlap in attitude and teaching style. Since our task is to learn about the Goals for Life program in the context of helping participants rejoin the workforce, we are interested in anything that makes it especially effective, including its setting and the spiritual orientation of its instructors and students.

After clients have been in the Tabitha's House residential program for 30 days, they are eligible to sign up for the ten-week Goals for Life program. Their first step is to take a pre-test to determine their education and skill levels in various areas. Classroom instruction on work preparedness is lively and interactive, with students expected to complete work sheets, make decisions, and explain their reasoning. They are also expected to attend a computer class and become sufficiently proficient to do some of their Goals for Life homework assignments and job hunting via computer. Underlying the standard coursework is a continual effort to help build the students' self-esteem and self-confidence, to teach and model boundary-setting, and to give them ways to solve problems without relapsing into drug use.

Distinguishing features. (1) Unlike other faith-based substance abuse treatment programs in the Bakersfield area, Tabitha's House has a very active and successful employment component, a feature considered vital by program participants:

In a lot of these programs, they do the spiritually-based but they don't prepare you and get you jobs and help you get working. You know, I don't really understand how that works when someone gets out because, to me, if you're not working, and don't have that part of it set up, what happens to you, you know? Maybe you get lucky and you get that job and things work out for you, but if you don't get that job, it'd be so easy to get depressed and just fall back into what you used to do.

(2) It is unusual for treatment facilities to provide accommodations for the participant's children and spouse or partner. (3) Many of the Tabitha's House staff, including one of the Goals for Life instructors, are in recovery from chemical dependencies themselves and have dealt successfully with problems similar to those faced by their clients. "The clients here can really relate to someone that has been-there-done-that kind of thing," the Program Coordinator said. (4) Living at Tabitha's House gives Goals for Life students more access to their instructors than most job readiness programs permit. Thanks to the staff's open-door policy, students can come for assistance with homework and with concerns about job-related issues, or just to talk about personal matters. (5) Women who attend Goals for Life classes and GED instruction can count upon on-site child care at no cost to them while they are in class so that they can concentrate on their work.

Program participants. Although both men and women choose Tabitha's House as their residential substance abuse treatment facility, nearly all the Goals for Life participants have been women. Many of them have come to Tabitha's House via a painful route that has included arrest and incarceration, and have been court-ordered to a treatment program or referred by probation and parole officers. Tabitha's House also accepts "dual diagnosis" clients—those with a history of both substance abuse and mental disorders—referred by the County Mental Health Department. In addition, the Program Coordinator explained,

A lot of them have resorted to prostitution and that kind of stuff, so their self-esteem is just gone. ... [early in the class] I tell them to tell me, in the class setting, three good things about themselves. And they can list 20 negative things but it's really hard for them to scrounge up just one or two positives. So by the time they finish our classes and are ready to go out there, they know all kinds of good things about themselves. It's pretty neat.

Their ages range from 19 to fifty-something, with the majority in their mid-twenties to mid-forties. The ethnic mix varies from one Goals class to another but includes primarily Whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics.

Program Personnel. The two Goals for Life instructors have other responsibilities (the Coordinator is also the grant writer and is taking on new duties in the Outpatient

program; the Job Development Instructor is also the program's Administrative Assistant) beyond teaching segments of the Goals program. In addition, both make themselves available to their students outside of class and have established supportive mentor-like relationships with them. They also are called on to deal with problems that arise in dealing with residents, who sometimes need to be reminded of their responsibilities and obligations (e.g., keep their rooms clean, respect common areas). Both instructors have experience with substance abuse and the attendant lifestyle, one through her own experience and the other through living all her life with an alcoholic father. They come to Tabitha's House from other helping professions and find this experience to be highly fulfilling despite the disappointments and setbacks inherent in working with this volatile population. One of the instructors adheres to the faith that Miss Benny practices and the other has developed her own kind of spirituality. Both depend upon their spiritual support, together with the support of the staff and director, to help them cope with distress when clients in whom they have invested a great deal of themselves go off track. The Tabitha's House residential program depends on a number of volunteers in lieu of paid staff to perform a variety of function necessary to serve the clients and keep the old motel in reasonable repair, but the Goals for Life program has no volunteer assistance at this time.

How staff define "success." There are several stages of success at Tabitha's. Learning to value oneself is primary and essential, for that makes it possible to maintain a recovery program. This sets the stage for learning new skills, which opens the door to getting a good job or obtaining a college degree. The instructors articulated some of these points:

I think the most important goal would be to re-teach and re-think and rebuild self-esteem. Yes, we want them all to get back and go out to work but I think to be able to do those things you need to have a little bit better self-esteem than you had in the past. ... And of course we all want them to stay sober, that's the bottom line.

Success is that a client that comes through and goes through our ten-week class, and I can think of 5, 6, 7, 8 clients that have never had a job before, and when they're done with our class, they're out putting resumés. To me, that's a success.

Getting them clean so once they get a job they can sustain that job.

I try to explain to them, they can go get a job, but *keeping* a job is what we want to accomplish. And get them off of welfare, and SSI, and all that stuff.

And just by their attitude and how they're carrying themselves lets us know that they're being successful. And the first time they get their check and don't want to cash it, they want to show it to me—*that* kind of stuff shows success.

Challenges to success.

For program participants. Some of the barriers are internal to members of this population. Clients arrive at Tabitha's House with a multitude of problems of which substance abuse is only one. Some must virtually reinvent their lives in order to make a successful transition to being self-sufficient in the real world, and in some cases old habits and connections prove too strong to overcome this time around. Some clients leave Tabitha's House and then return, feeling that now they are ready for change, and do succeed; some leave and return yet again; some never make it. Other barriers that Goals for Life clients face are external:

...how the community thinks about drug rehabilitation programs. I think a lot of communities think like, 'Once an addict, always an addict; they'll never change.' ... And that's not true.

The Goals for Life Coordinator finds that a number of local employers will give ex-offenders a chance while others refuse even to consider hiring someone with a history of substance abuse and a police record.

For the program itself. Helping newly trained and enthusiastic clients locate good jobs can be difficult in a sluggish economy, especially when employers hesitate to risk hiring people who have had difficulties in the past. Subjecting people whose self-esteem is still fragile to a series of disappointments can be counterproductive to the goals and purpose of the Tabitha's House rehabilitation program. In the past, Tabitha's House has been able to depend on spontaneous contributions of goods and money from area churches and other organizations, rather than developing a grant seeking capacity. The CFBI grant has been one catalyst for encouraging the kind of grant seeking that other non-profits do as a matter of course. At the moment, however, the Goals for Life Program is dependent on EDD funds which may not be forthcoming in the future.

The place of faith in the program. Tabitha's House makes no effort to conceal the powerful Christian orientation of its residential program. "Most of our residents really didn't know life before, and we want them to experience a *way of life*," notes Miss Benny. Residents are encouraged, but not forced, to take part in her Bible study and other spiritual growth classes. We encountered only one Goals for Life participant who objected openly to this; others, even non-believers, expressed their gratitude for the efforts made to give them the chance to learn more about the Christian life:

And... uh... at night... it got kind of boring, and other people are readin' the Bible, so I started readin' the Bible, and the more I read the Bible, the more my life changed (half laugh).

They helped me find it to where I now wake up at 4 or 5 in the morning, and I just start my day with Christ, I pray, and read my Bible, every day, 7 days a week, at least 45 minutes to an hour... when my children get up in the morning, I've already done my prayer and my Bible reading, but every

morning before they go to school, I read them a little story out of the Bible, and my children now can tell you what size the ark is, most people don't know that, you know, but because I've read them the story, and then I ask them questions as we're walking down to the bus stop, you know, to get them excited about it, they really like it, and then we read and pray together at night, and it just- to me, it's incredible how it's changed my life.

One instructor said,

When the girls come into our program, they're beaten down. And *they* think nobody loves them. And giving them something to believe in that they can't see—and once they build that, they have a hope that they *can* change, and life *can* be good, and that they're loved. ... In the Goals program, I don't focus it just on faith. I want the girls to have a little bit of everything, and then—whatever works for them, is how I think. Because what might work for Sandy won't work for Debby.

A Portrait of Program Participants.

Interview sample. The first EDD roster of Goals for Life participants listed 46 clients who entered between May and December, 2002. Via random sampling methods, we reduced the list by half and were able to set up ten in-person interviews in March, 2003. We later requested a second list (11 names entered in January, 2003) so that we could talk to some more recent program graduates, constructed another random sample, and talked to an additional four people. In other words, we attempted to contact 27 people in all and obtained 13 interviews, seven conducted in person at Tabitha's House and six done over the phone. In every case, our respondents were open, courteous, and friendly.

Expecting 13 people to be representative of all the Goals for Life participants since the program's inception is clearly unrealistic; all we can do is to describe some of the characteristics and experiences of the participants who were kind enough to talk to us. Our respondents ranged in age from 21-46. Nearly everyone we interviewed had at least one child although in several cases their children were not living with them at that time. Three of our respondents were men. In the course of our conversations, five women mentioned that this was the second (for one, the third) time they had returned to Tabitha's House after a relapse.

Description of Goals for Life participants interviewed. In all six of our case studies, we are gathering information in the following areas in order to gain a better understanding of program participants: living arrangements, employment, education, social self-classification (in the context of making friends), and personal faith.

Living arrangements. Residents of Tabitha's House live in what might be described as small apartments. The rent per month is \$500 for singles and \$700 for families. A number of respondents made it clear that they didn't want to leave Tabitha's House even

though their treatment year was drawing to a close—or had ended some time ago—and were grateful for the policy of not insisting people depart before they feel ready. We were interested in learning what kinds of accommodations our respondents expected to have when they left Tabitha's House after their treatment year. Several women planned to move in temporarily, along with their children, with their relatives—generally a parent or grandparent—in order to save some money to get a place of their own; others hoped to find apartments in the Bakersfield area or to move away to a place like Arizona.

Employment. We asked the people in our sample about their employment history, their current job status, and the kinds of work they would like to do in the future. The men spoke of past employment in construction and in the oilfields, driving trucks, and doing apartment maintenance. Two of the women have been on disability much of their lives and have never worked. The rest described a variety of jobs, including dog grooming, cashiering (2) waitressing, parking cars, day care, clerical work (2), cake decorating and deli, and working in an ice cream shop, fast food restaurants (3), and family businesses.

At the time of our interviews, six people were working full-time for pay outside the premises of Tabitha's House and one was working on a volunteer basis inside the facility. The kinds of employment included being a manicurist, a well puller on an oil rig, and a weigh master at a truck scale; plumbing swimming pools; and working in food service and for a temporary help agency. Several others were actively pursuing outside positions.

When we asked our respondents what they would like to do in the future, many women said that they enjoy meeting and working with people in a number of capacities. We learned that several would like to use their recovery to inspire others. For example, one woman who has never worked sees herself counseling women who, due to chemical dependency, have lost their children and have lost hope in themselves. Another would concentrate on teaching parenting skills to a similar population and a third would work with at-risk children who have been molested or are starting to do drugs. One young woman spoke of learning to be a dental hygienist and another of becoming a medical assistant. Others will continue with the work they are doing now and will look for other possibilities. Two of the men will continue or return to careers in the oil fields and the third will seek employment in construction or landscaping.

Education. Only four of our respondents had not finished high school. Of the high school graduates, seven have attended college for varying periods of time and a number of them are looking into returning. In addition, one man completed a course at a truck driving school.

Social self-classification. We asked our respondents whether they had any difficulty talking to strangers or making new friends. A number of them spoke of feeling shy most of their lives but finding themselves opening up here at Tabitha's House. Others see themselves as outgoing by nature. We also asked whether respondents have formed new friendships during their time at Tabitha's House, especially enduring friendships that will last beyond the program. Without exception, our respondents put staff members into that category. As one woman told us:

And I'm so close to everybody here at Tabitha's House that I know that even after I graduate I'll be coming back to the Goals staff and saying hi to them, and visiting. And who knows, maybe someday I'll come back and be a speaker.

A smaller number have found good friends among other people in the program—one woman said, "About 170 of them!" Another respondent referred to friendships that have extended beyond the program already: "I have friends that have graduated and left the program that I still talk with, or we'll barbecue on weekends, or whatnot." Other participants were selective about the people they spend time with. One man said, "I kinda stay with one set, [the ones who] want to make something out of themselves."

Personal faith. From the respondents who answered this question, we learned that eight did not feel that they had been raised in a religious or spiritual tradition. The rest had had some exposure to religion—"Well...my parents sent us to church but I don't remember them going with us"—but it hadn't been a central point in their life. Most of our respondents acknowledged a tremendous—even transformational—change in this area of their lives since coming to Tabitha's House. Joyful expressions of faith were the rule rather than the exception within this sample:

I'm full of Jesus! ... I knew Him, you know, but since I've come to Tabitha's House, Jesus is not just *on* me, now He's *in* me!

I think that the personal relationship with Christ that I have now today is through the teachings of this program, that allowed me to obtain that relationship. Had I not come to this program, I would not have a relationship with Christ that I have today.

Asked what brought this change about, respondents gave credit to Tabitha's House teachings, including the Bible study:

Ahhh—these programs, and how my life's changed around since I started readin' the Bible.

...just finding myself and going to classes, and just spending some time to myself and...getting back in the reading [of] the Bible, and just mainly the classes and stuff.

The classes here. Being able to get closer to God, having them explain just how to do it, and that...just because we've sinned, we're not going to die and go to hell...as long as we believe and confess, and that's helped me a lot.

Several people tied a strong personal faith to being successful in their recovery, based upon the success of others who had graduated from the program. For example,

She stayed here two years and changed remarkably. I never thought that she would go into a home and take it to heart... [Previously] she had got off parole also, and her and I spent most of our time in and out of prison. At any rate, she made it. She's very successful, she got off disability, she's working...

...seeing some of the people that graduated from here already, they come back, and they're doing well spiritually, and they're not messing up their lives any more. ... I can't really speak on anyone else but for me...I learned here, if you walk away from God, you just—walk away. Things don't seem to go as well.

...the program works. I've seen many, many people graduate, people that graduated five years ago that come back, and you can see how well they're doing.

Even respondents who have skepticism about religion were giving it a chance, based on what they were seeing around them. One woman said:

I would still call myself non-denominational. But my faith is much stronger since I've been exposed to the teachings and the beliefs. ... And a lot [in the Bible studies] I still find that I have a hard time accepting it, not that I don't believe it; like, well, it doesn't apply to me today. But I actually like the Bible studies a lot...those studies can help you at least come closer to an acceptance if not an answer.

This woman was annoyed with the small dissenting faction (she estimated 2-3 percent) who act out during the theological classes:

Some people, it drives me crazy with the way they downtalk it. Even while they're sitting there in class. It's beyond rude, it's like, you have your right to your opinion but so does everybody else, so you should keep your opinions to yourself. I mean, there's a lot of people out there who just don't believe yet because they haven't been exposed to it enough, but that's different than actually being forcefully down-put, you know? A lot of these people are still vulnerable in that if they have the right teachings, they can believe it and they really come a long ways, and yet if they have the wrong teachings, they can really go back the other way. So I think maybe we all should work with the program and let happen what's going to happen with each person.

Asked whether the obligatory nature of the classes and the requirements for attending church would put too much pressure on a person who wasn't religious, one of the men reassured us from his own experience:

They didn't push it on me. There's a lot of spiritual teaching, they don't push it on you but, I mean [long pause] you're gonna, you're gonna grow, a little, and it may be slow growth, but you will grow, spiritually, in time.

The only person among our respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with the religious nature of the program told us

[I don't like the religious studies] because I feel like a person who—the Lord is here when you should be able to know Him on your own, if you really want to know Him... There's Bible studies in the morning, and I know most of the people here don't want to go. And they don't like going out to *their* church for two to three hours on Sundays.

Two respondents chose instead to emphasize the voluntary nature of joining Tabitha's House in the first place:

And so, if there's something that you wanted to change, there's a million other programs out here, this is Miss Benny's program and the way she runs it works good for a lot of people. And some it doesn't, but there's other programs out there; some people need more than one program.

...they know before they come in that this is a Christian home, so there are certain requirements, and... if they don't want to be here, then they don't got to. So everyone here knows that, and [she believes] it doesn't bother anyone.

Respondents' Experience with the Goals for Life program. In this section, we report our interpretation of the perceptions of the program participants we interviewed, taken from their responses to our questions. In some cases, we also refer to the initial scoping survey, as well as to the interviews conducted with program staff.

Entry into the program. We asked respondents how they happened to come to Tabitha's House and thus into the Goals for Life program, which only serves residents. At least eight respondents who were entering the residential program for the first time were court-ordered and/or referred by their probation officers. They did have a choice of programs, however, which one woman described to us:

They said there were some programs that I could choose from, and he [the probation officer] gave me a list of about five or six that he felt comfortable with, and Tabitha's House was one of the ones that would allow me to come with my children, so I chose this one and he, of course, endorsed it; he suggested it.

Another respondent did her own research:

Well, basically, the judge sentenced me to a year in an in-home program and I went to the Law Library and asked them for a copy of all the homes that were available to me. ... There were three pages, actually. A lot of them were state-funded programs...and I chose to go into one that was not...so that I could work and pay my own way. ... I figured it would be nice to be in a place that would let you live your life and be there to support you. ... This is the one I chose...number 1, it was a program that my daughter could come live with me at...and Tabitha's House was the cheaper of the self-paid programs. ... It didn't bother me in the least [that it's a faith-based program] and as far as me liking it that way, I've never really had much experience with religion, and I was open to just about anything.

Other first-time court-ordered respondents acted on the advice of relatives and friends who had some personal knowledge of Tabitha's House:

My cousin went there. And she made it through, and she's doing fine already- I mean, she's been out of here for 3 years now, and she's still doing really, really good, and so--she recommended it.

Concerned relatives checked out Tabitha's house for two first-time respondents, and another followed the advice of her pastor.

People who entered the program voluntarily included some who had dropped out previously and had convinced Miss Benny to give them another chance. Others saw it as their last chance to turn their lives around:

I'd lost my children for the third time and I was just [distracted], and I just basically wanted to turn my life [around]. I wasn't court-ordered here but it helped to get my children back... My husband heard about Tabitha's House 'cause my cousin was in the program, and so then a couple of other people told us about Miss Benny, and we came here.

One woman had worked at a nearby treatment facility and selected Tabitha's House for herself and her husband as a sort of wedding present when they married so that they could begin their life together clean and sober.

Services offered/received. The Goals for Life program teaches such standard practices as responding to advertisements with formal letters, writing resumés, filling out applications, preparing for and undergoing interviews (videotaped so that they can watch themselves fidget the first time). Toward the end of the course they watch a video that shows how to dress appropriately for various kinds of jobs. Throughout the ten-week course, the underlying themes are "You can do it" and "You're worth it." It is this aspect of the course to which most respondents referred when asked what they learned:

Patience... Learning how to present myself before people...My dressing, my appearance—they go into everything. ...They are helping me with the areas of my life, that it's okay to talk about the issues that had caused me to relapse in my past... And that's something else I learned from the Goals class: the only stupid questions are the ones not asked.

There was so much positive input... It really boosted morale, self-esteem. It wasn't just educational, there was, you know, a lot of feedback, a lot of participation... There was a lot of information given to us, whether it was best to go back to school or work.

Well, basically, from them I feel like I got confidence. ... Just the fact that they made me feel like regardless of what I've done, or what my record looks like, there's [work] out there. If I'm willing to do it, there's ways of doing it; I just have to self-help a little. If I had to put my finger on it [what taught her that], probably just because they talk to us and treat us like we're people. Not just part of a number system. It's amazing what that can do for a person's self-confidence when they're already down on themselves. Just somebody saying, "You can do it." ... And someone that's willing to be there whenever they can be to answer questions or just sit and talk, which is what the ladies in the Goals program have provided for all of us here.

I learned—the most important thing I learned is that I'm not alone, there's other people out there like me.

Respondents also appreciated the educational component of the Goals course:

I learned to put words in proper perspective. I never been really of a serious type, a business-minded person, and I mean—it just may be something small to you, but due to the lifestyle I come from, it really meant a lot to me to learn...working computers, oh, that was fabulous! Not to see somebody do it but to be on the computer doing something positive for my own self...

I like the focus on the career part. A lot of girls have gotten jobs, after they leave here, when they finish the Goals. It makes 'em—more experienced; there's a hope that they can still get a job.

It really helped me with the things that it took me to get the kind of job that I wanted. Oh yeah. If I wanted to learn—the stuff I learned in the program really helped me go through the interview, that got me the job.

Peer interaction was another helpful attribute of the Goals program. Students were encouraged to share experiences and help one another along the way and the instructors were regarded as peers as well, due to their common experiential history:

And then, of course, the group itself, we help each other too...the ones of us that had a little more experience in this area helped out the ones that didn't—you know, we're kind of a family here. I like it.

Probably Goals helped me more than anything...just people talking, you know, not that I was the only one, and the teachers, you know, that have gone through the same thing that I had gone through, so they could relate to us. And just to get, you know, out talking again...

Relationship with staff. Several respondents—male and female alike—sometimes choked up as they tried to express their feelings about the many areas in which the Goals instructors and Miss Benny have helped them. Respondents most often valued, first, the respect and honesty with which they were treated; second, the staff's availability and willingness to talk; third, the way one of the instructors has put her own life on display without reservation to show that past history, however painful, can be overcome and a new way of life successfully embraced. Examples of their comments follow:

Because you know that if you talk to somebody and you're not going to get some whitewashed answer that's out of a textbook, that you'll open up because you're more comfortable.

They're in the office during the daytime hours if you need them. And they're always friendly and willing to talk. ... they treat us like we're on the same level. Because so many times, you know, felons—people just out of jail—we get treated like we're below, you know, the dirt under their feet and we're not worth the time, but they don't treat us that way. And that's a *good* thing!

It's [the Goals program] really awesome. And you know what, it was an inspiration to me because, for one, she was an addict like my mother, and her story was just—it was awesome, and she overcame her addiction and she was doing something about it to help other people, and that really just touched me. And everything she had to say was just awesome, and they gave us positive affirmations, you know, goals, and that we wrote and hung on her wall, and those really helped a lot.

Interaction with other agencies. Several respondents reported being referred to the Career Services Center for job-seeking experience, and there the Goals program helped them again:

It was really helpful to know how to get on the computer, because you have to there, and there's a lady that will help you but, you know, they get

awful busy, so if you don't know what you're doing, you're going to be stuck.

One man expressed a common complaint about other job agencies:

I went out probably on... I would say over 30 different interviews, or application places, and never once got a job through one of those other agencies. And a lot of jobs were minimum wage, were \$6.00 an hour or \$7.00 an hour, and I was going out on them anyway because at the time I had to have work...but the realization of it was that I could draw a welfare check and it was more money than minimum wage.

A Goals instructor referred one respondent to the West Tech temporary help agency and he was very pleased with the job he got through them. Respondents who had sampled other temporary help agencies on their own didn't like them.

...because they were so impersonal, and if you didn't meet their criteria exactly, which basically was, you have to have a year-long work history in order to even qualify; well, if I had a year-long work history, I wouldn't be there (laughs). But the Goals program basically hooked me up with different ideas like the Career Services Center here in Bakersfield.

Reported outcomes. In trying to understand what program participants gained from their experience with the Program, we classified possible outcomes into four categories: attitudinal (confidence, hopefulness), remedial (removal of a basic underlying barrier to employment), educational (activities sparked by the program such as GED instruction, entering college, vocational training), and employment (getting a job or work experience due to the program).

Attitudinal outcomes. Every one of the respondents we spoke with indicated that they were feeling better about themselves and their futures than they did when they arrived. For example:

Very much so. I used to hang my head down when I talked to a person; I'd find myself even more [ashamed]. I can look you in the eye and talk to you because—I *am* somebody!

Respondents were also learning to take responsibility for their own attitudes and behaviors, and for the results they encountered:

If this program works, if you want it to, it's really self-determination, what you want to do for yourself. It's really up to the individual how much they [accomplish].

And it's just really a program where, if you want to change, they really help you change. And if you don't want to change, they send you down the road.

Remedial outcomes. It is difficult to separate the responses we received into ones dealing exclusively with Goals, since it and the residential program are both addressing the goal of enabling participants to overcome their addictions from different directions. For example,

[The program helps] just to show how you can live a sober life, and spiritual life, and—you don't need to run amuck to (laughs) have fun. And, you know, just to get my self back.

Yes, I feel ready to take on a job at this point, as long as I know that I can come back here and cry on somebody's shoulder if I need to, and that's another thing that they do provide for us.

Educational outcomes. Goals instructors encourage students who have not completed their high school educations to study for and take GED exams while they're at Tabitha's House and to consider enrolling in or returning to college. Respondents often take their words to heart:

I never graduated, you know, I was a C- and D and F student when I did go to school, but being a member in that goals class, I'm going back to school.

They also teach you goals for your life, they make you have a brighter outlook on things. They put something in my head to where—I told 'em one day that I would probably never be able to go to school 'cause I have a heart problem, and I was wrong, because now I am a full-time student at Bakersfield College.

I am going back to school. Right now. I'm currently in the process of enrolling at Summit Bible College. ... You can get to work in facilities like this, to teach classes, to be a counselor... There's a lot of different things you can do.

Employment outcomes. As part of the Goals program, students are expected to look for work and it is a proud moment when they find it:

When you participate in Goals, they ask you to job search, too. So I had been job searching, but finally, a job came through, so—I've been working since last Friday! It's really taught me a lot this time... Like I said, when I did the program before, they didn't have Goals, we didn't have Goals, it was just a faith-based program. But now that they have these other options for us, I think that's what really [makes the program work].

As a matter of fact, I gained employment—I think I was here a couple months, and I gained employment [at] the Centennial Gardens as a parking attendant, so it really helped me.

Goals for Life instructors are careful to ascertain the skills and preferences of each respondent before sending them out to look for work, and use the resumé-building process to help bring to the surface all the positive parts of a participant's history and present them in the most positive light possible. Respondents appreciated this intensive assistance and noted that it paid off:

And she [the Goals instructor] really took time, and one-on-one, and searched whatever methods she had to search, and I ended up getting the job, paying more money than... When I got my first job out of Goals for Life, the starting wage was \$18.70, and within three weeks, I think I was making \$29.00 an hour, and I never even worked in that field, but all my experience, and the things I had done in the past, even though I didn't think about going to that kind of work, all my experience and the stuff that I'd been doing my whole life, led right to that would be a perfect position for me. ... She helped me do a resumé on the computer. It looked real nice and professional, and I knew all the information on the resumé... And she just helped me with every step.

One respondent contrasted the Goals approach to her experience with the local CalWORKS office:

Well, CalWORKS, they just wanted me to get into something where I could get a job right away, [not like Goals, where they work with you] to see what you really like, what you're good at... If you do well at it, then you like it, you stick with it, and that's what's they help you with here, they teach you how to keep a job, that means you have to like it in order to keep it. You don't like it, you're not gonna stay.

Participant Perspectives on the Program

Overall impressions. We asked our respondents whether they thought participating in the program had made or would make a significant difference in their lives. Everyone in our sample said that it already had. In addition to the reasons already quoted throughout this paper, several said that they felt that their lives have been saved.

Near the end of each interview, we also asked our respondents to tell us what they thought was the best thing for them about the program and also to make suggestions for improving the program. Their answers follow.

What was the best thing about the program? The following comments reflect the sense of the responses we received to this question:

The morale building and self-esteem, and the fact that they trust—you know, the fact that there's always an open door...

A lot of it, I think, is the teachers that did it...they had went through the same thing I did, so it showed me, you know, that you can still build your life, and get past it, and, you know, have a sensible life.

The best thing is, I guess, how the class is ran. Because the stuff that we do in there, it just helps us individually grow.

I got my confidence back, to get out into the real world to get my job back, you know. ... I'm not the only one, everyone has problems, and it helped me spiritually and through my drug rehab. ... Mostly, though, to get my confidence back, to get back out in the world.

A lot of outlets, I have a lot of outlets right now. Before, I was real negative; now I'm very positive—because of the people that run this [Goals program]. ... Because negative don't get you nowhere.

I guess it's the friendliness of the staff. And the concern that they have that you are there in class and that you are able to succeed.

It was mainly just—help me get a job, especially because I'm a felon, I got all kinds of stuff on my record. I needed that foot in the door, yeah (laughs).

The best thing was... I would say I got sent to jobs that were actually hiring...for the type of work that I wanted, the goals that I had learned to set through the Goals program, and I went to interviews for the jobs that met those. Other programs that I've gone through...they would send you to anything...and it wouldn't matter if it was a minimum wage job. I have a lot of kids and minimum is just not going to cut it; I get more money on welfare than working 40 hours on minimum wage. So, she really understood all that, and really sent me to the jobs that could make a difference, you know.

It helped employ me. I mean, that's really important for everybody in here, 'cause...even if you're not gonna use any more, if you get out without a job—really, where are you? You're right back where you were. You know, unless you're working, and a regular member of society, you're bound for failure as far as I'm concerned.

The best thing about it is that it works. Cause it worked for me. I just gained a sense of responsibility!

How could the program be improved? A number of respondents had some thoughtful suggestions. One was to establish a relationship with an outside job placement agency so that when Goals students or graduates were sufficiently stabilized and felt ready to go to work, the agency would place them, even temporarily, in a job that might already be arranged for the purpose of giving people some experience in the workplace. The author of this suggestion thought that perhaps a temporary help agency might be the appropriate to work on this basis.

Maybe... a little more support in transportation? Even if we start out with, like, bus cards. Jenny, she has transportation for people; you go to her and let her know, we have appointments. [It would help] to give her some financial support in that transportation issue.

The only thing I might be able to say is, to have alternative class times for people like me that are working, and so that I wouldn't have to miss the class times; there would be the availability of actually going in for the hour. ...It wasn't really a problem for me, because like I said, they were willing to help me out with it, but if I had to put in an honest criticism, I would say they have to provide some evening/makeup class or something. And same with the computer class that goes along with Goals—in my opinion, they need to make the computer hours more readily available for the working group.

So it would be really cool if we had...and I don't know if they could do that in a place like this, but like the Internet access to where you can apply online is easier.

I think more assistance with [information for] disabled people. For example, I went up to the college and tried to enroll, I wasn't aware there was a disability office at the college...And then, where I was directed, I wasn't eligible.

Future interaction with the program. When asked whether respondents thought they would remain in touch with the staff after they graduated, this interview sample demonstrated an unusual solidarity when all of them said immediately that they would. We also asked if they would recommend the Goals for Life program to a friend, we received another set of positive responses. A couple of examples:

Oh yes, I recommend them. When I'm on the bus and I see people, I always encourage them to stop by here. And it works.

You betcha. And I have. A lot of the girls I was in jail with this last time I encouraged to find help, and that maybe this would be one source.

And the things that I've learned here, are nothing short of—a miracle of God. This place is—this place is a miracle.

Case Study #6

Wardrobe for Opportunity: Dressing for Success and Pathways to Opportunity Programs

Wardrobe for Opportunity describes itself as “*a volunteer-based nonprofit organization founded in 1996 that provides free business clothing and career support to economically disadvantaged women in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties so that they can project the image and self-esteem to find and maintain employment.*” In pursuing this mission, Wardrobe operates two programs. The primary program, “Dressing for Success,” has dressed almost 5,000 individuals in its first six years of operation Wardrobe. A newer program, “Pathways to Opportunity,” works with a small, select group of women to improve job retention and advancement. The money received from the EDD grant in March, 2002 allowed Wardrobe to hold an extra eight-week session of the Pathways to Opportunity job retention program and to complement the clothing already available through donations with selective purchases of hard to secure items, such as shoes, accessories, or large-sized outfits. Because EDD provides funds to both programs, this descriptive report will give relatively equal attention to each of the two Wardrobe programs, despite their very different size and standing within Wardrobe’s overall operation.

The major facets of this case study as presented here include

1. a detailed description of the CFBI-funded program and the staff members who deliver the program on a day-to-day basis,
2. a profile of the program participants as seen both through our interpretations of interviews with 12 of them and through staff perceptions,
3. an analysis of what the semi-structured interviews reveal about participant experiences while in the program and their progress toward the goal of stable employment.

The Dressing for Success and Pathways to Opportunity Programs

Program description. Dressing for Success, the program that offers stylish professional clothing and accessories, was first established in a small house in Walnut Creek and has since expanded to include a similar (but smaller) boutique in the back of a clothing store in Oakland. Ninety percent of Wardrobe’s effort is devoted to this undertaking. Women come to Wardrobe primarily by referral from public and non-profit service providers and make an appointment to spend an hour choosing two interview outfits in consultation with a trained volunteer “dresser.” Those who succeed in getting jobs are able to return to select another three to five work outfits. While helping clients pick out clothing that flatters them and is appropriate for the interview or job, volunteers explain how to dress and accessorize with skill and panache. The experience is carefully designed to help

participants develop a positive self-image and greater confidence as an applicant and employee.

Pathways to Opportunity is a job-retention program designed for employed women in their initial months of employment. As one staff member stated: “About the time the welfare department is celebrating because someone has found a job is usually the hardest time for the client, who is dealing with new work demands, child care, transportation, clothing, financial issues, etc.” Program brochures describe an effort that *helps “working poor women” overcome workplace, financial, and personal challenges during the first months of employment.* Led by two skilled trainers, a group of about 20 women make a firm commitment to meet on eight (increased from seven by popular request) Saturday mornings for interactive instruction. A flexible curriculum is adapted to reflect the group’s interests. Each group develops an intimacy and a personality of its own, providing peer support and a forum for problem solving. The trainers offer one-on-one coaching sessions to those who want them and arrange a panel presentation of potential role models that is one of the most popular parts of the program. Participants in Pathways who have not already visited Wardrobe for free outfits are invited to do so.

Distinguishing features. (1) Wardrobe has by far the most successful community volunteer program in our study—140 of them (giving 7,000 hours annually) are trained and supervised by the staff Volunteer Coordinator—and receive high marks from the clients with whom they work. (2) The organization is very clever at leveraging its assets—primarily donated clothing and volunteer labor—so that approximately 80 percent of its program funds go “out the door to people,” as the Executive Director describes it. (3) Both the Wardrobe and Pathways programs are exclusively for women, although there is currently some discussion about adding a men’s program. (4) Compared to other CFBI organizations, Wardrobe’s Dress for Success program serves a much larger number of clients each year (albeit in a more limited fashion), illustrating how a nonprofit that occupies a clear service delivery niche can be a valuable partner to many other organizations and have a substantial impact on many lives. (5) Staff report that the experience of working with low-income people has softened the attitudes of volunteers toward this population and has dispelled some unexamined generalizations they formerly held about “poor people.” (6) The clothing must meet extremely high standards of quality and condition before being offered to the clients; this is not thrift-store material. (7) The women we interviewed who have experienced one or both of the programs are uniformly enthusiastic about their experiences. (8) At the annual benefit luncheon, two clients are chosen to be the Women of the Year, an honor that carries with it a cash award, several gifts from local merchants, and the right to pick out a new outfit every month.

Program participants. Wardrobe was established to serve East Bay women who are in low-income situations, although it attracts women in need from around the Bay Area. About half its clients come from Oakland, and of these, about 90 percent are African-American. Pathways participants are largely White, with a couple of African-American and Hispanic women. The age range for Wardrobe clients tends to center around women in their twenties, thirties, and forties, with occasional teenagers and a few people in their

fifties; Pathways participants range from the twenties into the fifties. As one staff person describes it:

Many of our clients have never worn a suit before, some of them have never worked before, some of them haven't worked in 20 years, some of them are - you know, we've had everybody from welfare, generational welfare, to Ph.D.'s, come through here. It's just a matter of circumstances. I like to say to my volunteers when I do an orientation: "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

The Pathways participants we interviewed tended to be older and more mature compared to the respondents in the other five CFBI programs we are profiling. Describing her fellow Pathways participants, one woman noted:

I think the women who come through this program, they're really ready for something, you know, they're really ready, and they're open... to learning, and to communicating, and I just- I just- you know, I'm just like inspired by, you know, how motivated they are. And many of these women have a lot of... you know, barriers to overcome, or have overcome a lot of barriers, and they're fighters, you know, which is very inspiring.

Program Staff and Volunteers. Wardrobe's paid staff includes a full-time Executive Director whose agenda includes considerable fund-raising activities, a full-time Program Manager, a part-time Program Service Coordinator, and a part-time Volunteer Coordinator, plus contract trainers who conduct the Pathway sessions in pairs. All are women of varying ages, and they bring varied work and educational backgrounds to their positions. Uniformly, they bring a strong sense of commitment to the work and enjoy working for an organization that can play such a meaningful role in the lives of other women. As one remarked, "I just wanted to do something that was a passion."

As in many small nonprofits, Wardrobe staff must wear many hats, but each has a primary area of responsibility that is clearly defined. One staff person works with referring agencies to ensure that Wardrobe's policies and procedures are understood and that a more or less steady flow of participants is forthcoming. Given their experience of frequent staff turnover in the referring agencies, program staff resend Wardrobe's packets of materials and revisit agencies regularly to maintain connections. This same person coordinates clothes collection at a variety of drop-off locations around the area.

Another staff person takes the lead in scheduling appointments and matching participants and volunteers. She calls participants the day before to remind them of their appointment—even so the no-show rate is about 20%. This staff person also greets participants when they arrive, extending warm hospitality, and letting them know what to expect.

Another staff person coordinates the volunteers, handling recruitment, orientations, and any problems that may arise. A great deal of care is taken to create the right ambiance so

that clients feel treated with respect, and the experience is fun for both client and volunteer:

So, the client comes in, you check out what they're going to be doing, get an idea of what kind of size they need and everything...you set your boundaries, you introduce yourself and then you start the fun of dressing, because it's an instant gratification thing: "Hi, I'm Joan, I'm going to be your dresser today, I'm glad to meet you, this is going to be fun." You know, set it up, an expectation of making it light and fun, because it should be.

Community volunteers (almost exclusively women) come from a multitude of directions—from the wealthy neighborhood in which the Walnut Creek program is located; from friends of the founder, board members, and other volunteers; from churches and businesses that contribute financially to Wardrobe; from the web site, the annual fund-raising picnic, and word-of-mouth. Besides dressing the clients, volunteers spend their time sorting and inventorying donated clothing and cleaning, ironing, and racking it; shopping for attractive clothing in all sizes so that clients who need extra large or extra small sizes are not disappointed; and assisting the Executive Director with fundraising.

The Pathways trainers must apply to Wardrobe to be facilitators of the Saturday sessions. They work in teams of two. For one popular session the trainers invite in a panel of working women who have succeeded in overcoming challenges to become employed. Otherwise, the trainers use a published workforce preparation curriculum, which emphasizes topics like conflict resolution, dealing with people who are not like yourself, and problem-solving, and adapting these materials to meet the specific needs and interests of the group members.

So when we get into problem-solving, people would look at some of the issues that were happening right then and there, on their jobs, and decide, "You know what? I'm going to start looking to use my skills, my strengths, my ways of communicating, at a different place." They kind of recapture some of their dreams. Which is what is really a heady experience.

The Pathways trainer that we interviewed indicated that she provides her phone number to participants, and invites them to call when the need arises. A few participants take advantage of this and develop a mentoring relationship with the trainer. For example, one participant called some weeks after the training had ended to get advice related to an upcoming job interview.

How Staff Define Success. The basic theory of change underlying Wardrobe's Dress for Success program begins with the premise that personal image as reflected in clothing is a key component of presenting oneself at a job interview. As the program's founder describes it:

I'm a career counselor by profession, and worked in the out-placement business for a number of years, and one of the things that I did with people was work on their professional image. This was very important, because your first impression is almost 60% visual, so when I lay eyes on you, I decide in my subconscious if I'm going to give you an opportunity to present what you have to say, basically. So I got to thinking that for people who didn't have money, this must be a huge barrier for employment.

The free professional clothing provided by the program is intended to help lower income women who would otherwise be at a competitive disadvantage in job interviews. The ultimate goal of the program is to help participants find and keep jobs. The more immediate outcome sought is to boost participants' self-esteem and self-confidence as they embark on a job interview. As one staff member described this goal: "I think just in a very basic level, just having someone find an outfit that they like, and that they go out of here feeling a little bit more self-confident than they did coming in." Asked how she knows if the program is succeeding, another member of the program staff said:

If they're happy, I mean, if they leave with a big, fat smile on their face, and they're excited. Once in a while we'll have a client that will come in, and it's like she's just going through the motions, but then there'll be a client that will come in with like... you know, you see that they have some kind of hope, and so... it makes it more exciting for you, and you want to give them more clothes, you want to help them out more, and when you have that feeling, it's just so much compassion for this person, of wanting to help them even more than you need to. That's it, that's success.

The Pathways program was developed in response to the concern that many participants who succeed in getting jobs have trouble keeping them. The goal of this program is job retention, and the ultimate measure of success is whether a participant can retain their current job or advance to a better job. More proximal measures of success include progress in solving problems or overcoming barriers that impact their ability to keep a job.

For the project director, all this work fits within a larger context of meaning: "For me, it's all about eliminating poverty. So success is helping women and children thrive in California."

Challenges to success.

For program participants. Low incomes are the primary barrier, especially as this impacts participant wardrobes. Although they may be employed, some of the women referred to Wardrobe by service organizations may be struggling with ongoing poverty, mental and physical abuse at home, chemical dependencies, and the challenges of rebuilding their lives after the death or departure of a partner, after incarceration, or after

illness. These are all issues that may block their ability to locate and qualify for better-paying jobs.

For the program itself. As an organization that relies heavily on private and corporate giving, Wardrobe faces difficult fundraising challenges in the current economic climate. The CFBI funds are welcome, but at the same time the programmatic and reporting requirements for the WIA grant are so demanding that Wardrobe has been forced to increase its overhead by hiring a part-time employee to cope with the paperwork and tracking. EDD paperwork—designed for job training programs—does not fit well with Wardrobe’s typical encounter with a client, which takes place in the space of a one-hour appointment in which the client is to be dressed. It appears to make little sense to fill out four different forms as part of that time. In addition, staff fear that the WIA profile forms that clients must fill out will serve as reminders of their difficulties and bring them down with a crash just when the Wardrobe experience was making them feel happy and optimistic about their futures.

The place of faith in the program. Aside from receiving donations and referrals from local churches on occasion, Wardrobe doesn’t have a faith component per se. Some staff members spoke of their own commitment to this kind of work as stemming from a spiritual upbringing and beliefs. As one said, “I think that my- not so much religious, but my spiritual upbringing and spiritual... beliefs... is what draws me to this kind of work and helps me stay in this kind of work.” Other staff indicated they are not particularly religious, and one stated, “I was looking around for some way to give back, with my professional background, in the community.”

Program Participants

Interview Sample. We randomly selected 28 names from the list of 538 program participants provided to us by EDD. The sample was constructed to include 14 individuals who had experienced both Pathways and Dress for Success, and 14 who had only experienced Dress for Success. Of the 28, we succeeded in completing interviews with 12 individuals, nine of whom had been part of the Pathways program. All the interviews were conducted over the telephone.

The participants we were able to interview included nine individuals over the age of 35, and in general these individuals displayed a maturity that exceeded that of participants in the other five CFBI programs we have profiled. By its very nature, the Wardrobe program is dealing with a somewhat selective group of clients—namely, women who are either on the verge of employment or have already become employed. Many of these individuals have had to overcome significant barriers to get to where they are. For example, two mentioned histories of substance abuse. One of the pleasures associated with Wardrobe programs is that they encounter these clients at the point where they are “recapturing their dreams,” and our transcripts reveal the joy and energy that is unleashed in many of the women.

Descriptive profile on Wardrobe participants. For simplicity, we are combining those with and without Pathways experience in the following sections.

Living arrangements. Only one participant we interviewed did not live in an apartment or house (she lives in a shelter for individuals with disabilities). Two live with a spouse and their children; three live alone with their children; five others do not live with children; and two interviews did not reveal the living situation. The ages of the children vary from very young in some cases to a house full of teenagers in another, and at least one participant has two grandchildren. Asked to assess the quality of their housing/living situation, a number expressed misgivings, or aspirations to move into a better situation:

I want to better myself. I want to be able to buy a house, my own, something that I can call my own, yeah.

No, I live in a bad neighborhood, so I stay indoors most of the time.

No, I live with others, yeah, I'm in a share-rental situation where I rent a couple of rooms in a house, condo actually. I've done that for quite some time, there's no other way I can survive.

No, no, actually, I'm - the neighborhood isn't so bad, it's just the complex that I live in, anybody with bad kids, they live in here, you know, got to deal with kids, so I don't let my kids play a lot with them...

Employment. We asked the people interviewed about their employment history, their current job status, and the kinds of work they would like to do in the future. All of the Wardrobe participants for whom we have useable data report previous employment experience, and most were employed at the time of the interview. Three individuals made comments that indicated a work history that might raise questions for potential employers.

Most of those who are employed make between \$10-14 per hour in office, clerk, or classroom aide positions. One woman is a materials handler who loads freight, and another is a food service worker for a school district. One of the participants has a salaried professional job as a disability specialist and housing coordinator. Many of the women who had participated in Pathways were contemplating moving into new types of jobs, drawing on their new sense of confidence. One said:

I'm looking for... and administrative/accounting position. So the job I went to for today was as a sheriff's aide, and... you know, that's many hats, really (laughs). I think it went really well, it was a panel interview, and they asked me some tough questions and I gave them, I feel, very good answers. I think that I would be great for this position, because I'm a people person and I'm into problem-solving, and I don't panic.

Education. More than half of the respondents have either previously completed a post-secondary certificate or degree program, or are currently pursuing such a degree. Three individuals indicated their intent to pursue such a degree in the future (e.g., an AA degree in day care, a RN license, a dental hygienist). None of the Wardrobe participants for whom we have data had less than a high school degree. Wardrobe is the only organization in our study for which this is true.

Social self-classification. We asked our respondents whether they had any difficulty in talking to strangers or making friends. Five indicated this was easy for them, three said that it was difficult, and four gave non-committal responses. One of those for whom this is difficult put it this way:

Uhm... it's not really easy, I'm... I would not do this before I did Pathways, and I wouldn't talk to strangers or anything, because, you know, I'm really shy, or I don't have like the best communication skills, but... now I'm more open to trying to meet new friends, or talking to strangers and just, you know, letting people know who I am.

Personal faith. Seven of the respondents indicated that they were raised in a religious or spiritual tradition, and all but two consider themselves religious or spiritual persons today. Since Wardrobe is not a faith-related organization, we did not explore their perceptions of religious aspects of the program.

Respondents' Experience with the Wardrobe Program. In this section, we report our interpretation of the perceptions of the 12 Wardrobe participants we interviewed about various aspects of their experience with Wardrobe. In some cases, we have drawn on staff interviews as well to present a more complete picture.

Entry into the Program. Ten of the 12 Wardrobe respondents were referred to the program by a public agency, usually a social service agency or a one-stop. The other two were referred by other nonprofit organizations. According to staff, additional referrals come from other community organizations, including churches. The main sources are welfare and/or one-stop caseworkers.

For some, the arrival at Wardrobe is simply an opportunity to take advantage of the donated clothes—clearly welcomed but not life changing. For others, the experience has deeper meaning:

My counselor mentioned it [Wardrobe] to me, she had received the flyer, and she mentioned it to me, and I checked them... first I went to get some clothes, and then through my counselor at EDD, ... I... I became introduced to Pathways, and... then I called the contact, and we talked some more, and I liked her format, and what she had in mind and so forth, and, of course, being unemployed for so long... I... I really needed... an introduction back into humanity. (embarrassed small laugh) I had lost so

much self-esteem and everything, and it was really hard to keep myself going, and... and so that's how. It was like a blessing to me.

Services offered/received. Obviously, the primary service offered is clothing for work. Dressing for Success clients appreciate the attention to details: “They gave me, you know, it's the blouse and the outfit, and the jacket, and the heels, and stockings, and makeup, everything to go with it.” The training and professional demeanor of the volunteers allows them to provide these services in ways that do not feel condescending to the clients, who respond to the experience with enthusiasm and excitement. One client said happily, “They made me feel like a movie star.”

Participants describe the Pathways program as a mix of lecture, interactive discussion, and one-on-one attention. In effect, the program serves as a sort of job retention club that focuses on providing peer support and soft skills, such as goal-setting, work-style analysis, verbal and non-verbal communication, problem-solving/problem-prevention, and conflict resolution. Our respondents expressed particular appreciation for the session in which a panel of professional women come and speak about their experiences, providing positive role models to which they can aspire.

Some other people made decisions to quit the job they were in and go back to school, things they really wanted to do, you know, let this stressful job go and really plant themselves where they really can be more useful, you know. It was a great program.

One participant especially appreciated the way the sessions made reaching goals appear manageable:

It's sort of broken up in little pieces, like, if I wanted to be a surgeon, you know, just thinking about that is huge, and I would say, "I can't be a surgeon," but the way they break it up, they make you feel like, you know, if you take this stuff, and take this stuff, and take this stuff, you can be a surgeon (half laugh).

Relationship with staff and mentors. Dressing for Success participants describe a pleasant experience with respectful staff who combine good listening skills—so they have a good sense of client desires and needs—with an ability to coach the clients with various tips and suggestions. Even clients who are somewhat uncomfortable at first with the idea of being “dressed” by a stranger are won over by the way they are treated:

At first I felt like it was like an invasion, I don't know, I didn't like it. But the person, you know, they, like really grow on you really quick, because they're like nice, and they listen, and, you know, they listen to your opinion, it's not like, "Well, I think you really should wear this, because it really does make a statement," and then, if you say, "No, I don't like it," like I said several times, 'cause I'm not a dress person, but she kept bringing me dresses, and finally I spoke up, and I said, "No, no more dresses," and that was the end of that, but they just really... I don't know

where they come from, but I'm glad they're there when they're there, because it's a real- it's a benefit to those who have a complex about weight, height, you know, the size of their arms, or whatever, they have knowledge on how to make it look good.

Pathways participants we spoke with had high praise for the trainers, though few indicated they had developed especially close relationships with them. More important for some was the peer support network that developed over the course of the group. This dynamic was strong enough that many of the women we spoke with wished the weekly sessions were longer, and that more sessions could be added at the end.

It was really the support-group aspect of it, I think. We had, you know, differences in what we were interested in, but we were all basically trying to improve ourselves and our situations, and the fact that we had support from other people in the group, and definitely support from the leaders, that when we had our one-on-one chats, that was very helpful.

Interaction with other agencies. All 12 Wardrobe participants had previous experience with employment agencies. They appreciated the fact that their caseworkers knew about Wardrobe and had referred them to one or both of the Wardrobe programs. Rather than drawing comparisons between how they were treated in the different types of settings, their interviews suggest appreciation both for Wardrobe and for the linkages in the system that allowed them to become aware of the special services Wardrobe offers.

Reported Outcomes. In trying to understand what program participants gained from their experience with Wardrobe, we coded open-ended interview data, classifying possible outcomes into four categories: attitudinal (confidence, hopefulness), remedial (removal of a basic underlying barrier to employment), educational (activities sparked by the program such as GED instruction, entering college, vocational training), and employment (getting/retaining a job or work experience due to the program).

Attitudinal Outcomes. If our sample is an indication, Wardrobe is promoting significant improvement in participants' outlooks toward work and life. Many clients commented that having better clothes to wear increased their sense of personal confidence.

It gave me the opportunity to look more professional. The clothes make you feel confident, you just feel like I'm wearing this outfit that makes me look like a hundred bucks.

The clothes were really important because I had to go through several interviews. I've gotten several new jobs and raises, and greater and greater responsibility.

When I left out of there I felt—OK , maybe it was time for me to make some decisions, and then I start implementing them and... like I say, might

make my life a little different, a little off key for a minute, but I know in the end it's all worth it.

Most of respondents commented that they were more confident about their ability to find and/or keep a job. For one, this was because she had learned to be more realistic in setting her job goals:

I feel confident in my future inasmuch as I realize that the Bay Area is still stuck in a very bad place, economically. I'm still not going to walk into a company... plop my resume down on the desk, and say, "You need me." This isn't going to work. I think that my future lies in working with a temporary agency...Pathways has opened my eyes a little, brought me into the 21 century.

Another woman finds confidence in being clearer about what she wants:

Just the way I think, my perception of people...just being aware of my likes and dislikes. It's pretty hard to explain...confidence, like I'm running the show pretty much, so you don't have to sit there and take something you don't like.

Others credit the Wardrobe experience with strengthening their personal support system or improving their ability to communicate.

Remedial Outcomes. If they have had significant remedial barriers to overcome, the participants we interviewed appear to have dealt with those prior to arriving at Wardrobe. For example, the two Wardrobe respondents who indicated past histories of substance abuse had made major strides in their recovery before arriving at the program, so that the support they received could reinforce an already established trajectory in their lives.

Educational outcomes. As indicated earlier, the Wardrobe participants we interviewed are older and better educated than participants in the other CFBI programs. About half the respondents are currently pursuing vocational certificates or Associate degrees, and three already have vocational certificates. The types of skills and support provided by Pathways appears to aid the women in juggling work with school, or to give them sufficient confidence to pursue a degree that will lead to a better job.

Employment Outcomes. Three-quarters of the Wardrobe respondents were employed at the time of our interview. It is impossible to know for sure if the clothes provided by Wardrobe make the difference between getting and not getting a job, though this link in the program logic is clearly plausible. While Wardrobe cannot take full credit for the apparently strong employment outcomes—after all, they are dealing with clients who are already job-ready in most cases—the testimonies of our respondents suggest the program plays a very meaningful role.

It's a good head start on getting your foot in the career world, because usually, especially moms, or people that are my age, they're - they get wrapped up in taking care of their kids, and they don't really have a lot of suits, or things, to go out and get work. And I think that that is so nice that there's an opportunity there- because suits are expensive, I mean, if you go to buy a suit, it could cost \$300, you know, and people in the position that I'm in don't have that kind of money to go out and buy a suit. And you really need to look nice if you're going to be going to an interview to get the job, so I just - I see nothing but good things about that whole thing.

I'm wearing some of my Wardrobe clothes today, and I do get compliments on them at work. Dressing for Success is so practical, and it's exactly what you need when you are working...the variety and colors and some nicer blouses and pants, that are not just run-of-the-mill.

I do tax work, and you have to dress a certain way to be able to deal with people's finances. They gave me some great outfits.

Participant Satisfaction with Wardrobe

Overall impressions. All of the Wardrobe participants we asked indicated that the experience had made a significant difference in their life, and that they would refer a friend to the program.

The opportunities that I got, you know, didn't exist for me before. They're out there, and you just have to be willing and able to just get out there and get them, and I just have the confidence within myself to go out and get whatever I need now, it's like... I don't have to be scared, or... you know, because everybody's out there trying to do the same thing, so... they just gave me a lot of confidence... in myself.

It's more of a personal experience for me to become self-sufficient, just because- like to bloom again, as a woman, you know, it's just a woman thing (laughs).

Best Thing about the Program. Wardrobe participants especially valued the peer support provided by the Pathways program, and the personal growth and development that resulted. The careful individual attention in the Dress for Success program also was noted. Examples of client responses are below:

How to say 'no', and to know that I was in charge of my own life, and, you know, my own dealings with my job, and I was able to uh... not feel so pressured in my job. Right now, like today, I can leave my job and it wouldn't even be a problem. That's why I'm going to nursing now.

Yeah. Yeah, I've grown to have... probably 15 new friends (laughs happily). We stay in touch, and, you know, we call each other, and for support, and, you know, if we're doing something different in our lives, and you have a question on it or something, it's OK to call one of the girls, and it's... I liked it.

The makeup was really good for me, because I hadn't worn makeup in years, and everybody was always telling me to wear it, but I never would. And then they provided - they showed us how to do things like pluck your eyebrows, and do all that stuff, that - to make yourself look better on the job, and for the job interview.

Ahhhh... the loving and the caring that... the... employees have... for people...to be honest, for me, it was that support, the people that they have running it.

The best thing about Wardrobe is just - would probably be knowing that there's women out there who are just trying to help other women succeed, and that it was just a really kind environment.

How could the program be improved? [Note: In this section we are merely passing along comments we heard, without judging or endorsing them, for the purpose of providing feedback to program staff.] A majority of respondents could not think of a single constructive criticism to offer the Wardrobe staff, merely repeating what a great experience they had. One Pathways participant offered a criticism that actually is quite complementary:

I had some awesome teachers. But uh... it was just like... we didn't have enough time. I would have loved for the classes to be longer (each Saturday) and with fewer breaks between weeks. Like every 3 classes, we had, like a Saturday that we didn't come. It was like something worth going to on my Saturdays, I really enjoyed going-

One participant noted the distinction in the quality of clothes available at the Oakland site compared to the Concord site, and another noted the relatively cramped quarters in Concord as things that might be improved.

Future interaction with the program. Most respondents do not expect ongoing interaction with the program, which is not surprising given the nature of the program. An exception is one woman pursuing a degree who hopes to come back for clothes when she eventually gets a job, and another who is holding onto her referral as an incentive to losing some weight—something the all-woman organization will understand completely.