EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background information about the project:

On August 22, 1996, The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was signed into law by then President Bill Clinton. This law replaced federal entitlement to cash benefits for families and children (the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children program [AFDC]) with capped block grants to the states (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program [TANF]). Rhode Island's welfare reform legislation, the Family Independence Act, was enacted on August 2, 1996. This landmark legislation provided, among other things, a work support system for families and children, enhanced work incentives, services to prepare beneficiaries for the workforce, child care and health care coverage for beneficiaries and low income families.

Since early 1998, the Welfare Reform Research & Evaluation Project at Rhode Island College School of Social Work has studied and reported on how Rhode Island low income families are faring since the enactment of these federal and state welfare reform laws. This is the final report of this five-year longitudinal study of a representative sample of 638 families who were receiving FIP at the beginning of the Rhode Island Family Independence Program. Data were collected at four points in time over the 5-year period of this study which covers three broad areas of interest: family economic well being, employment status, and child & family well being.

Over the years, funding for this project has come from a number of sources including The Rhode Island Foundation, The United Way of Southeastern New England, Rhode Island
College Faculty Research Grants and the largest contributor has been The Rhode Island Department of Human Services.

**Major highlights of the study**

The 638 current and former Family Independence Program (FIP) beneficiaries included in this five-year longitudinal study is a representative sample of 3.4 percent of all FIP participants at the time the program was first implemented. Baseline interviews and electronic case record reviews were conducted during the period of February 1998 through October 1999. All study participants were receiving FIP at the time of their baseline interviews. This was a requirement for participation in the study. Interviews for the final year of the study were conducted during the period of July 2001 through October 2002. All findings contained in this report are statistically significant at the 0.05 level (or better).

**Families are better off now than they were five years ago**

- The majority of families (55%) were no longer receiving FIP at the end of the study. An additional 23 percent had left FIP at various points in the study but had returned to FIP at the end of the study. About one-fifth of the participants (22%) remained on FIP throughout the study period of approximately five years.

- There was an increase of 36 percentage points in the number of families with total household incomes that were above the Federal Poverty level. Five percent (5%) of families were above the Federal Poverty level at the beginning of the study which coincided with the beginning of the FIP program in Rhode Island (1997-98). Forty-one percent (41%) were above the Federal Poverty level at the conclusion of the study (2002).

**There has been a significant increase in family income through employment over the five-year period**

- Employment rates among study participants more than doubled from baseline to the end of the study. Almost half of the participants were employed at the end of the study (49%). This compares with an employment rate of 22 percent at the beginning of the study.

- There was an average wage increase of $1.34 per hour during the course of the study. Employed family members were earning an average of $7.74 per hour at the beginning of the study. They were earning $9.08 at the end of the study.
The majority of employed leavers are receiving DHS subsidized child care

- Sixty-nine percent of employed participants who were not receiving FIP at the end of the study (leavers) were getting a child care subsidy at the end of the study.

The majority of employed leavers are receiving DHS subsidized medical assistance (RIte Care)

- Sixty-one percent of employed leavers were receiving RIte Care at the end of the study.

Education and training makes a difference in positive outcomes for FIP recipients

- FIP participants who received vocational training or post secondary education as part of their FIP Plan were:
  - significantly less likely to be on FIP at the 5-year mark (69% compared to 53%)
  - significantly more likely to have a higher average hourly wage ($11.37 compared to $8.66).

In sum, the findings from this research suggest that Rhode Island has made good progress toward reaching the goals of assisting families in obtaining sustainable jobs that move them out of poverty and supporting the healthy development of low-income children in our state.

- Employment indicators show significant increases in rates of employment and hourly wages.
- Economic well-being indicators show significant increases in total household income and the proportion of families who are above the Federal Poverty Level, especially among those who are employed, have earnings that have allowed them to exit FIP and who were able to access vocational education and training while they were receiving FIP.
- Child and family well-being indicators show high levels of satisfaction with children’s overall quality of life, the quality of their children’s childcare and their overall living arrangements.

Within the context of these gains, it is important that Rhode Island continue to focus on helping people move out of the secondary labor market and into the primary labor force with better wages, benefits and job security. The need for subsidized childcare and health care continues to be great. Employed families who are no longer receiving cash assistance (FIP) continue to remain at the lower end of the income spectrum in service sector jobs which traditionally pay lower wages and carry smaller benefits packages. We must continue to search for innovative ways to help current and former FIP beneficiaries, as well as other low-income families, in attaining the goals set forth in Rhode Island’s Family Independence Act.
THE FINDINGS FROM THIS STUDY

Background

In August 1996 when President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), the entitlement program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) came to an end. Under PRWORA, AFDC was replaced with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and devolution of the public social welfare system was off and running. PRWORA allowed states a lot of freedom to design and implement their own version of TANF within the broad parameters of the Federal law.

Less than three weeks before PRWORA, Rhode Island enacted its own welfare reform program, the Family Independence Act. Implementation of the Family Independence Program (FIP) began on May 1 1997. While other states emphasized a “work first” philosophy, Rhode Island emphasized preparation for employment.

Looking back, it is important to keep in mind that Rhode Island’s landmark Family Independence Act (FIA) provided, among other things, a work support system for families and children. Thus, it was designed to enhance work incentives; enhance services to prepare beneficiaries for the workforce; enhance childcare for recipients and low-income families; and enhance health care coverage for children under age 18. As stated in the Family Independence Program 2004 Annual Report:

FIA provided clearly articulated goals and guiding principles that substantially altered welfare in this state. Two major goals of FIA are:

- To assist families in obtaining sustainable jobs that move them out of poverty and into economic self-sufficiency, and
- To support the healthy development of low-income children in our state.

The principles guiding the policies and programs under FIA are:

- Poor children should be no worse off than they were before welfare reform, and
- Adults should be able to access education and training if they need to, within the first 24 months of benefits, before they are required to go to work. ¹

The findings from this study are presented in the context of these two major goals and guiding principles.

Goal #1: To assist families in obtaining sustainable jobs that move them out of poverty and into economic self-sufficiency

In order to address this goal within the context of the data available from this five-year longitudinal study, the following variables were analyzed:

- Study participants’ employment rates and their FIP participation rates over the course of the longitudinal study
- Average hourly wage rates over the course of the study
- Total household income over the course of the study
- Frequency data on participants with total household incomes that place their families above the Federal Poverty Level over the course of the study
- Frequency data on employer provided benefits
- Study participants’ primary types of employment
- Study participants’ job satisfaction
- Study participants’ perceptions about their financial situation.

- Study participants’ employment rates and their FIP participation rates

As can be seen in Chart 1 on the following page, there was a dramatic increase in the proportion of employed study participants at the end of the study (Year 4) in comparison to the baseline employment rates. This change represented a 27 percentage point increase in the number of employed study participants from baseline (140 out of 638; 22%) to the end of the study (187 out of 383; 49%). In addition, at all three interview periods following baseline, participants who were off FIP (leavers) were employed at a significantly higher proportion than participants who were employed and receiving supplemental FIP (stayers) at the time of the follow-up interviews (p<0.000). The proportion of employed leavers was at its highest point at the Year 2 interview (86%; 142 out of 165 leavers) while the proportion of employed stayers was at its highest point at the Year 4 interview (31%; 59 out of 188 stayers). When the entire sample of employed respondents is examined, the statistically significant increase in employed participants occurred between baseline and Year 2 with no significant changes from Year 2 to either Year 3 or Year 4. It should be noted that the recent economic recession began in March 2001 ² (which would coincide with the Year 3 data collection period, the period in which there was also a dip in the proportion of employed study participants). Employed leavers showed a marked decrease in employment levels between Year 2 (86%) and Year 3 (71%).

Table 1 and Table 2 on the following page examine more closely the unemployed participants in this study. Table 1 looks at the relationship between unemployment levels at baseline in comparison to unemployment levels at Time 4 (the final data collection period for this study). A cross-tabulation of these two time periods revealed that 42.8 percent of the sample (164 out of 383) was not employed at either time period ($p<0.000$); however, of those, 43.9 percent had cycled in and out of employment in the intervening years (see Table 2). It is important to note that because each data collection is only one point in time, throughout the course of each year between data collection points, the study participants may also have cycled on and off employment. Of those who were not employed at any of the interview dates ($n=60$), 27 (45%) reported that they had been laid off at some time between one of the three follow-up interviews. In addition, because not all study member participated in every interview, the total number of cases where employment data are available across the four interviews (Table 2; $N=107$) is less than the total number of cases where employment data is available for any one year (as seen in Chart 1) or two years (as seen in Table 1; $N=187$). These uneven sub-sample sizes do not
affect the calculations noted above but should be considered within the context of interpreting these findings.

Table 1
Comparison between baseline unemployment rates and end of study unemployment rates

| Employment Status at Time 4 | Employed at Baseline | | | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | yes | no | | | | |  |
| Not Employed at Time 4 | 32 | 164 | 196 |
| 8.4% | 42.8% | 51.2% |
| Employed at Time 4 | 62 | 125 | 187 |
| 16.2% | 32.6% | 48.8% |
| Total | 94 | 289 | 383 |
| 24.5% | 75.5% | 100.0% |

chi sq = 14.634, p<0.000

Table 2
Unemployment trends over the 5-year study period

Unemployment rates at Year 2 & Year 3 of cases that were also unemployed at Baseline & Year 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employed at Year 2</th>
<th>Employed at Year 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi sq = 5.071, p<0.024

note: By subtracting the “not employed” at time periods 2 and 3 (56.1%) from 100%, the percent of unemployed at all 4 time periods is calculated to be 43.9%.
Average hourly wage rates over the course of the study

Chart 2 below illustrates statistically significant increases in study participants’ average hourly wages over the course of the follow-up study period. Unfortunately, baseline wage data were not available for comparison. The most dramatic increases occurred between Year 2 and Year 3 of the study. It should be noted that over the course of this study, Rhode Island’s minimum wage was increased twice; from $5.15 per hour to $5.65 per hour on 7/1/99 and from $5.65 per hour to $6.15 per hour on 9/1/2000. The first increase in the Rhode Island minimum wage corresponds to the Year 2 data collection period and the second minimum wage increase corresponds to the Year 3 data collection period.

Study participants who were no longer receiving FIP (leavers) had significantly higher average hourly wages at every time period in comparison to those who were employed and receiving supplemental FIP. At the end of the study, the average hourly wage for employed leavers was $9.73 [$9.33 median]. In contrast, the average hourly wage for employed stayers was $7.63 [median $7.00] (p<0.000).

Chart 2

Average hourly wage
At three intervals after baseline interview

Note: Increases in RI minimum wage occurred during both Year 2 and Year 3 data collection periods.
Average total monthly household income over the course of the study

There was a statistically significant increase in the average total monthly household income from baseline to the end of the study (p<0.000). The average total monthly household income almost doubled with an increase from baseline of $667 per month to Year 4 of $1331 per month ($1,125 median) for an increase of $664.00 per month. The increase for the employed sample members also increased significantly from a baseline household income of $939.00 to a total monthly household income at Year 4 of $1,843.00 (p<0.000). As can be seen in Chart 3 below, the sharpest increases in total monthly household income occurred between Year 2 and Year 3 with a decrease of $76.00 in total monthly household income for employed respondents between Year 3 ($1919/month) and Year 4 ($1843/month).

![Chart 3](image)

**Chart 3**

Average total monthly household income
At four intervals from baseline to final interview

- **Employed**
- **Entire sample**
Households with incomes above the Federal Poverty Level

As can be seen in Chart 4, there is a substantial and statistically significant increase in households that are above the Federal Poverty Level when baseline and Year 4 are compared. For employed participants there was a 49 percentage point increase from Baseline (19%) to Year 4 (68%) while the entire sample saw a 36 percentage point increase from five percent at Baseline to 41 percent at Year 4.

Not surprising, in all four years households with employed respondents were significantly more likely to be above the Federal Poverty Level than households who did not have an employed respondent.

Chart 4
Households above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

A total of 152 out of 367 study participants had total household incomes that placed their families above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) at the conclusion of the study. Households who were no longer receiving FIP at the end of the study (leavers) were significantly more likely to be above the FPL (66.5%) than FIP stayers (16.8%). See Table 3 on the following page. At baseline five percent of the sample was above the FPL.

10/26/2004  10
Table 3
Comparison between FIP status and household income above the Federal Poverty Level at the end of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FIP status at time of final interview (excluding child only cases)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaver</td>
<td>Stayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABOVE FPL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi sq = 93.499, p<0.000

 ✓  **Employed respondents with employer provided benefits**

Paid vacation time was the most frequently provided benefit with 21.4 percent of employed respondents receiving paid vacation time at Baseline and more than twice that amount receiving paid vacation time at Year 4 (51.3%). Employer sponsored health insurance was the least frequently provided employment benefit with 17 percent of employed study participants receiving employer sponsored health insurance at baseline and 21 percent receiving it at the end of the study (Year 4). For the most part the receipt of employer sponsored benefits increased steadily each year of the study, however, there were a few exceptions. Between Baseline and Year 2 there were percentage decreases in the receipt of health insurance (from 17.1% to 13.5%), sick time (from 20.7% to 16.6%), and family/maternity leave time (from 20% to 14.3%). Between Year 3 and Year 4 health insurance as an employer sponsored benefit again decreased from 27.6 percent at Year 3 to 21.4 percent at Year 4. See Chart 5 on the following page.
At the conclusion of the study, 130 participants who were no longer receiving FIP reported that they had neither RIte Care nor employer sponsored health care benefits. This represented 42.6 percent of all leavers. Thirty-two leavers (17.8%) answered “yes” when asked if anyone in their family was without health insurance. Of those who answered yes, 11 respondents (36.7 %) said they had no coverage for themselves, nine (30%) said it was the whole family without coverage, six said it was a child without coverage (20%) and the remaining four respondents listed partner, parent or other family member (13.3%).

✓ Participants’ primary type of employment

Thirteen different types of employment were reported by respondents at Year 2, 3 and 4 interviews (data were not available for the baseline). Employment types included clerical, retail/cashier, health services, housekeeping, telemarketing, banking, construction, human services, factory work, transportation, teachers’ aide, childcare worker and food service worker. Chart 6 on the following page, presents the top three types of employment reported. At Year 2, clerical and retail/cashier were tied with a response rate of 17.7 percent and health services had a response rate of 15.2%. All other types of employment had a response rate of less than 10 percent. In Year 3 there was a modest increase in the proportion of respondents who were in each of these top three employment types with the largest increase in retail/cashier (24.5% at Year 3). At Year 4, the final year of the study, the retail/cashier employment type experienced a 16.7 percentage point increase to 41.2 percent of the sample.
Employed participants’ overall satisfaction with their current employment was very high at all three time periods reported (baseline data were not available on this item). Those who reported being very satisfied with their employment ranged from 55.1 percent at Year 2 to a high of 66.2 percent at Year 3 before falling back to 55.4 percent at Year 4. Those respondents who reported being very dissatisfied with their employed ranged from a high of 9.5 percent at Year 2 and a low of 5.9 percent at Year 4 (see Chart 7 below).

Chart 6
Types of Employment

Chart 7
Satisfaction with current employment
✓ Participants’ perceptions about their current financial situation compared to the year before

In response to the question, “Overall, how do you feel about your current financial situation as compared to 12 months ago”, the most frequently chosen answer at all four time periods was “About the same”. However, as can be seen in Chart 8, the popularity of this response decreased from a high of 44.6 percent at Baseline to a low of 36.4 percent at the end of the study (Year 4). The response choice “Better” increased from a Baseline low of 22.4 percent to a high at Year 3 of 35.8 percent. There was a slight decrease to 34.5 percent on this item at Year 4.

Goal #1: Summary of findings

Employment rates more than doubled from baseline (22% employed) to the end of the study (49% employed) in spite of the economic recession that began in March 2001. Thirty-one percent of stayers and 69.6 percent of leavers were employed at the end of the study. There was an average hourly wage increase of $1.34 over the course of the study with employed respondents who were off FIP at the end of the study earning significantly more ($9.73) than employed respondents who were in receipt of supplemental FIP ($7.63) at the end of the study. A greater proportion of employed respondents reported that they received sick leave, family/maternity leave and paid vacation benefits from their employer at the end of the study. Employer-sponsored health care was the least available
benefit at all points in the study and went from a receipt rate of 17.1 percent at baseline down to a low of 13.5 percent at Year 2. It then increased as a benefit at Year 3 for 27.6 percent of employed respondents only to decrease again at Year 4 (the end of the study) to 21.4 percent. Most study participants were employed in the service economy in clerical, retail and health services positions. The majority of respondents reported satisfaction with their employment throughout the course of the study.

All households experienced a statistically significant increase in total household income over the study period. Correspondingly, significantly more households were above the Federal Poverty Level at the end of the study. Over the course of this study, Rhode Island’s minimum wage was increased twice; from $5.15 to $5.65 per hour on 7/1/99 and from $5.65 to $6.15 per hour on 9/1/2000. When asked how they felt about their current financial situation as compared to the previous year, study participants most frequently said “about the same”.

**Goal #2: To support the healthy development of low-income children in our state** including Guiding Principle #1 which states that poor children should be no worse off than they were before welfare reform.

This section includes both Goal #2 and Guiding Principle #1 as they are so closely aligned. In addition, this study does not have pre-welfare reform data and most of the data related to the well-being of children were not collected at baseline; therefore, this report looks at how children fared during the first few years of welfare reform in Rhode Island but without a comparison to how they were faring before the Rhode Island Family Independence Act passed in August 1996. Within the context of these limitations, the following variables were analyzed to address this goal and guiding principle:

- Study participants’ report on their children’s health over the course of the study
- Study participants’ report on their children’s academic performance and behavior at school and home over the course of the study
- Study participants’ report on problems or issues that their children were having over the course of the study
- Study participants’ rating of their satisfaction with their children’s quality of life over the course of the study
- Study participants’ perceptions of the quality of their childcare program and how the childcare program has affected their children
- Study participants’ perception of how their own FIP activities (e.g. employment, training, education program) have affected their children
- Study participants’ rating of their living situation and satisfaction with their neighborhood
- Study participants’ responses to questions about food security issues over the course of the study.
✓ Study participants’ report on their children’s health over the course of the study

As can be seen in Chart 9, the majority of respondents (between 63% and 70%) at all three follow-up interviews reported that their children’s health was about the same as it was the previous year. Five percent or less of the study participants reported that their children’s health was worse than last year and between 26 percent and 32 percent reported that their children’s health was better than last year. There were no statistically significant differences in these responses over the 3 year period.

Chart 9
Perceptions about children’s health compared to one year ago

✓ Study participants’ report on their children’s academic performance and behavior at school and home over the course of the study

Study participants were asked a series of questions about their children’s grades and behavior in school, as well as their behavior at home at each of the three follow-up interviews. There were no statistically significant changes in either academic performance or behavior at any of the follow-up periods. On average, at all three time periods, children’s grades were reported to be good and their behavior at home and at school was also reported on average to be good.
Study participants’ report on problems or issues that their children were having over the course of the study

At all three follow-up periods, study participants were read a list of potential problems or issues that might apply to their children and they were asked if they thought that one or more of their children might have any of these issues. Table 4 contains the frequency distribution for each of these items. Of the ten problems or issues listed, all but one (drug/alcohol issues) showed notable variation across the three follow-up interviews. These changes were statistically significant when Year 2 and Year 4 were compared with the exception of the drug or alcohol issues. In addition, except for short-term health issues, Year 4 shows a higher proportion of each of the issues than in Year 2. For a more detailed discussion on how families with children with disabilities are faring see the working paper, “A brief look at a representative sample of Rhode Island FIP beneficiaries: Families with a child(ren) with disabilities by Mongeau and Bromley (May 2003). This report can be accessed at www.ric.edu/socwk/welfarereform.htm.

Table 4
Frequency distribution of study participants’ report on problems or issues that their children were having

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning disability</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral problems</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic illness</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic issues</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term health issues</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental disability</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School attendance issues</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal/juvenile justice issues</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>p&lt;0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug/alcohol issued</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study participants’ rating of their satisfaction with their children’s overall quality of life

There was no statistically significant change between Year 2 and Year 4 in participant’s responses to the question: “Generally how satisfied are you with your child’s/children’s overall quality of life?” Of those who answered this question at all three time periods, 88 percent said that they were either satisfied or very satisfied at each of the three time periods with their children’s overall quality of life.
✓ Study participants’ perceptions of the quality of their childcare program and how the childcare program has affected their children

More than 90 percent of respondents at each of the three follow-up time periods stated that they thought that their childcare program had a positive effect on their children. More than 93 percent also expressed satisfaction with the quality of their children’s childcare program.

✓ Study participants’ perceptions of how their own employment, training and education activities impacted on their children

The majority of respondents (59%) at each of the three follow-up time periods stated that they thought that their own employment, training or education activities had a positive effect on their children. One-quarter of the respondents at each of the time periods (25%) said that their employment, training or education activities had no impact on their children and 16 percent thought that their employment, training or education activities had a negative impact on their children.

A follow-up question asked participants who had said that the impact of their employment, training or education was either a positive or negative impact to give specifics. Table 5 below lists the top three responses at each of the three interviews (all other answers had a response rate of less than 10 percent). The top two most frequent response types (51.9% and 16% of all responses) presented positive impacts while the next two most frequent response types (10.5% or less) suggested negative impacts on their children from the parent’s involvement in employment, training or education.

Table 5
Frequency distribution of study participants’ responses to how their FIP employment, training or education activities affect their children either positively or negatively

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mom going to work or school is a positive role model for children</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are happier</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are unhappy</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>(less than 10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to spend with children</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
✓ **Study participants’ rating of their living situation and satisfaction with their neighborhood**

Most respondents were satisfied with both their living situation and their neighborhood at all three interview periods. Between 76 and 80 percent of respondents said that they were satisfied with their neighborhood in Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 of the study. Between 82 and 84 percent of respondents said that they were satisfied with their living situation at Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4.

✓ **Study participants’ responses to questions about food security issues**

Study participants were asked a number of questions about their family’s food security. When asked if they were ever worried during the past year about running out of food before they had money to get more, between 49 percent (Year 3) and 56 percent (Year 2) responded by saying either “yes, often” or “yes, sometimes”. In Year 4, 51 percent gave one of these two responses. When the question was asked, “In the past 12 months, did you run out of food and you did not have the money to get more” between 31 percent (Year 3) and 38 percent (Year 2) said either “yes, often” or “yes, sometimes”. In Year 4, 35 percent said either “yes, often” or “yes, sometimes” in response to this question. See Chart 10 on the following page.

It should be noted here that 63.3 percent of the entire sample were receiving food stamps at the end of the study. The average monthly food stamp benefit for the entire sample was $222.25. Almost one-quarter of the sample (23.9%) was using WIC, 64.9 percent were using free or reduced school breakfast, and 73.9 percent were using free or reduced school lunch.

When FIP leavers were examined separately, it was found that 18.4 percent of leavers were receiving food stamps at the end of the study. The average monthly food stamp benefit for the leavers sample was $163.58. When leavers who were not receiving food stamps were asked the reason for this, 54.9 percent responded that their income was too high. Twelve percent of leavers were using WIC, 55.8 percent were using free or reduced school breakfast, and 65 percent were using free or reduced school lunch.
Goal #2 and Guiding Principle #1: Summary of findings

Study participants reported that their children’s health, academic performance and behavior at both home and school remained essentially the same throughout the study period. On average, they reported that their children’s academic performance as well as their behavior was good at each interview point in the study.

The most frequently stated problems that children were reported to be having were learning disabilities, behavior problems, chronic illnesses, academic issues and mental health issues. An overwhelming majority of parents (88%) said that they were overall satisfied with their children’s quality of life and more than 90 percent reported that they felt that their childcare program had a positive effect on their children. A majority (59%) said that their own employment or educational program had positively impacted on their children’s lives and over half (52%) said that their own involvement in employment, education or training served as positive role modeling for their children.

A large majority (between 76% and 84%) said that they were satisfied with their living arrangements and with their neighborhood. On a less positive note between 31 percent and 38 percent said that in the past year they had run out of food and at the time, they did not have the money to buy more.
Guiding Principle #2: Adults should be able to access education and training if they need to, within the first 24 months of benefits, before they are required to go to work

In order to examine this guiding principle with the context of the data available from this study, participants who were on FIP at the end of the study and had received FIP for more than 24 countable months were included in this analysis. There were 114 participants who met these criteria. They represented 20 percent of the sample at Time 4 (114 out of 558) and 45 percent of the sample that was receiving FIP at Time 4 (114 out of 253).

As can be seen in Chart 11 below, these FIP stayers who were beyond the first 24 countable months of FIP benefits were proportionately less likely to have received vocational education or training (10.5%) than the study sample as a whole (13.2%). Furthermore, when compared to FIP leavers (17.7%), they were also less likely to have received vocational education or training. For a more detailed discussion on the study’s findings with regard to education and training outcomes see the working paper on this topic by Bromley (March 2003). This report can be accessed at www.ric.edu/socwk/welfarereform.htm.

Chart 11
Vocational education and training

![Chart 11](image-url)
Other outcomes of interest

✓ Relationship between receiving FIP-sponsored education and training and key outcomes at the end of the study

On two out of four key indicators (hourly wage and FIP status), study participants who had received FIP-sponsored vocational education or training were significantly more likely to fare better than those study participants who did not receive FIP-sponsored vocational education or training. As can be seen in Chart 12 on the following page, 69.2 percent of study participants who had received FIP-sponsored vocational education or training were no longer receiving FIP at the end of the study. In contrast, 53.3 percent of respondents who did not receive FIP-sponsored vocational education or training were no longer receiving FIP at the end of the study (p<0.004). The average hourly wage for the group that received this type of education and training was also significantly higher ($11.37) in comparison to the group without this education or training ($8.66). This finding represents an average hourly wage difference of $2.71 between the two groups (p<0.000).

There were no statistically significant findings on two other key variables (employment and household income above the Federal Poverty Level). Almost half of those respondents who did not receive FIP-sponsored education and training (49.4%) were employed at Time 4 in comparison to 46 percent of those who had received FIP-sponsored education and training (p>0.37). Conversely, almost half of those respondents who received FIP-sponsored education and training (48.4%) were above the FPL at Time 4 in comparison to 44.6 percent of those who did not received the FIP-sponsored education and training (p>0.34).
Chart 12

Relationship between receiving FIP-sponsored education or training and employment status, household income in relationship to the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and FIP status

As can be seen in Chart 13 on the following page, those participants who were on FIP at Year 4 had increased their average number of hours employed per week from 22.69 at baseline to 25.43 at the end of the study (Year 4). FIP leavers experienced no significant change in their employed hours per week over the study period. Leavers were employed 35 hours per week at Year 2, 36.27 hours per week at Year 3 and 34.93 hours per week at Year 4. Leavers were employed 9.5 more hours per week (34.93) than stayers (25.43) at the end of the study (p<0.000).
Chart 13
Average number of hours employed per week at four intervals from baseline to final interview

Employed study participants’ suggestions about resources that might help them obtain better employment or get a promotion or salary increase

Fifty-nine employed respondents chose to answer this open-ended question and 42 of those who responded (71.2%) suggested that education and training would be of help to them. The next highest response was “nothing” (13.5%) followed by childcare (5.1%). The rest of the responses were diverse and could not be categorized. It should be noted here that 69 percent of employed leavers were getting a childcare subsidy and 61 percent were receiving RItc Care at the end of the study.

Unemployed study participants’ suggestions about resources that might help them obtain employment

One-hundred and twelve unemployed respondents chose to answer this open-ended question and of those, 56 (50%) suggested that education and training would be of help to them. The next highest response was “help with job search” (12.5%) followed by help with transportation (10.7%), help with childcare (8%), nothing (7.1%), help with health/injury issues (4.5%) and help with housing (2.7%). The rest of the responses were diverse and could not be categorized.
Study participants who have lost or chosen to leave employment of education/training program within the last year of the Time 4 interview

At the final interview of the study, all participants were asked if they had either lost or chosen to leave any job or training/education program during the past 12 months. About one-third of the study participants (36%; 87 out of 242 who answered this question) answered yes to this question. These respondents were then asked, “what was the main reason for leaving?” The top four answers were:

- Difficulty with job, employer or working conditions (22%)
- Laid off, job ended or temporary job (17%)
- Illness or injury (17%)
- Found a better job (13%)

Perceived barriers to participation in employment, training or education activities

Study participants who were not employed or not involved in an educational or job training program were read a list of potential barriers to their participation and were asked to select all the barriers that might apply to them. Table 4 on the following page contains the barriers mentioned by these respondents. Respondents checked an average of five barriers each. The top two barriers that were each chosen by more than half of the respondents included parenting responsibilities that were seen as interfering with the ability to go to work or attend employment-related education or training (78.7%) and the lack of available jobs that pay enough to make work worthwhile (56.2%).
Table 6
Barriers to employment or education: Frequency distribution of responses from study participants who were not involved in education, training or employment at the end of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th># of respondents (169 respondents choose an average of 5 barriers each)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time mother</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>78.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available jobs pay too little</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much stress or mental health issues</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own health problems</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation problems</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal or family problems</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can only find seasonal, temp or part-time</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare problems</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t find any job</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with children’s school schedule</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing problems</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently laid off</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning disability</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language or literacy problems</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence issues</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a separate question, participants who were not employed were asked if they were presently looking for a new job and 25 percent (47 out of 189) said yes.
Conclusion

Rhode Island’s Family Independence Program (FIP) has demonstrated its potential to reach the stated goals of assisting families in obtaining sustainable jobs that move them out of poverty and supporting the healthy development of low-income children in our state. As shown in this report, findings from this research suggest that Rhode Island has made good progress toward these goals, in spite of setbacks during the recession and its aftermath.

On the economic, employment and child well-being indicators from this study that were used to measure the achievement of these goals, a number of successes can be noted.

- **Employment rates more than doubled.** At one point, before the recession began in 2002, 86 percent of participants who were no longer in receipt of FIP cash benefits were employed.
- **Hourly wages increased** from $7.74 to $9.08 per hour (Rhode Island minimum wage increased from $5.15 to $6.15 per hour during the study period).
- **DHS subsidized childcare** was assisting 69 percent of employed leavers.
- **RIte Care** was covering 61% of employed leavers.
- **The proportion of families who were above the Federal Poverty Level increased by more than one-third** from five percent of households to 41 percent of households.
- **More than half of the families in the study (55%) were no longer receiving FIP at the end of the study.**
- **More than three-quarters of study participants (88%) said they were satisfied with their children’s overall quality of life.**

So, how well did Rhode Island achieve its goals? The findings from this study suggest progress but with some cautionary concerns. These include:

1. In spite of the employment gains noted throughout this report, a number of participants in this study were unable, for a variety of reasons, to reach the goal of sustainable employment. Approximately two-thirds of the study participants (42.8%) were not employed at either the beginning or at the end of the study.
2. Very few employed families (21.4%) reported that they had health insurance benefits through their employer. Less than 50 percent had sick leave benefits. It is a tribute to the success of FIP that close to 70 percent of employed leavers were receiving DHS subsidized childcare (69%) and a similar proportion (61%) were receiving RIte Care. On the other hand, these data also suggest that employed families who are earning enough to no longer qualify for FIP cash benefits still remain at the lower end of the income spectrum.
3. Most employed study participants were working in the services sectors which traditionally pay lower wages and carry smaller benefits packages.
4. Close to three-quarters of employed respondents (71%) felt that they would benefit from further education to help them get a promotion or salary increase and one-half of those who were unemployed suggested that education and job training would be
of help to them in obtaining employment. These participant suggestions are particularly important in light of the findings that study participants who had received vocational education or training were significantly more likely to be off FIP and were also significantly more likely to earn a higher wage.

The participants in this study are to be commended for their successes. They are an overall positive and optimistic group. When asked a number of questions about their satisfaction with their employment, their children’s childcare, their housing and their neighborhood, they responded overwhelmingly positively. As we look to the future, we need to support and encourage this optimism and increase these successes.
Appendix A
Description of the sample

Overview of the sample

The 638 current and former Family Independence Program (FIP) beneficiaries included in this five-year longitudinal study is a representative sample of 3.4 percent of all FIP participants at the time the program was first implemented. At the five-year mark, there were 383 study participants who completed the final interview of the study. This represents a 60 percent sample retention rate which is considered to be quite good. Of those who were not available for the final interview, we were unable to contact 184 sample participants (28.8%); 69 participants (10.8%) requested that they be dropped from the study; and two participants (0.3%) had died. Sixty-five of the 184 whom we were unable to contact at the final interview were stayers (35.3%) and 119 were leavers (64.7%).

All study participants were receiving FIP at the time of their baseline interview. This was a requirement for participation in the study. At the time of the final interview, 55.5 percent of the baseline sample was no longer receiving FIP.

Representativeness of the sample

A. Comparison between baseline sample demographic data (N=638) and the baseline demographic data of the 383 study participants at the final interview.

City or town of residence. Approximately 42 percent of participants were from the City of Providence at baseline; 35.5 percent of the final interview sample was from Providence at baseline. Woonsocket represented 9.9 percent of the baseline sample and 9.4 percent of the final interview sample. Newport represented 6.6 percent of the baseline sample and 7.0 percent of the final interview sample. West Warwick was 6.3 percent of the sample at both baseline and end of study. The rest of the cities and towns each represented less than five percent of the sample.

Ethnicity, citizenship status and primary language spoken in the home. At baseline, 78.2 percent of the sample spoke English as their primary language at home; 87.2 percent of the final interview sample spoke English. The baseline sample was comprised of 89 percent U. S. Citizens; this was true of 93.7 percent of the sample members who participated in the final interview. Whites comprised 49.5 percent of the baseline sample and 58.7 percent of the final interview sample. African-Americans were 21.8 percent of the baseline sample and 21.1 percent of the final interview sample. Those who identified as Hispanic were 20.2 percent at baseline and 13.6 percent at the time of the final interview. Asians comprised 4.1 percent of baseline (2.1% at final interview). There were three Native Americans who participated in both baseline interview and the final interview. They represented 0.5 percent of the baseline and 0.8 percent of the final
interview sample. Approximately four percent of study participants at both baseline and final follow-up did not have an ethnic identifier in their electronic case records.

**Gender.** Women comprised 97 percent of both the baseline and final interview sample.

**Household composition.** There were no differences in household composition between the baseline and final interview samples. There was an average of 2 children per household and 93 percent of the cases were single-parent cases at baseline.

**Employment.** Almost 22 percent (21.9%) of the baseline sample of 638 were employed; 24.5 percent of the final interview sample of 383 was employed at baseline.

**Total monthly salary and average weekly hours employed.** The baseline sample had an average total monthly salary of $559.45 and was employed at average of 22.69 hours per week. The final interview sample’s total monthly salary at baseline was $552.40 and they were employed an average of 22.12 hours per week at baseline.

**Total household income.** The baseline sample had an average total household income of $667.45. The final interview sample had a baseline average total household income of $674.22.

**Highest grade completed in school.** There were no differences in between the baseline and final interview sample on this item with an average 11th grade completion rate at baseline.

**Number of times on welfare.** The baseline sample had been on welfare (including time on AFDC) an average of 1.68 times. The average number of times on welfare reported at baseline by the final interview sample was 1.7 times.

**Housing.** At baseline, 37.8 percent were living in subsidized or public housing; 40.7 percent of the final interview sample lived in subsidized or public housing at baseline.

**B. Comparison between Rhode Island Department of Human Services caseload administrative data and the 253 study members who were receiving FIP at Time 4 and participated in the final interview**

In order to examine the representativeness of the sample at the end of the study in relationship to DHS administrative data for the entire caseload, comparisons were made on key demographic data between the participants from this sample who were receiving FIP at the time of their final interview (N=253) and the DHS Administrative Data Report dated July 2002 which would overlap with at least part of the time that the sample’s final interviews were conducted (2/02 - 10/02).
Ethnicity and primary language spoken in the home. English is the primary language for 77.4 of the DHS caseload; this was true for 86.5 percent of the study participants who were receiving FIP at the end of the study. Spanish speakers were 18.7 percent of the DHS caseload in comparison to 6.8 percent of the FIP study participants. Asian languages were represented by 2.4 percent of the DHS caseload and 4.1 percent of the FIP study sample and other languages were 1.5 percent of the DHS caseload and 2.6 percent of the study participants who were receiving FIP at the end of this study. The DHS FIP caseload was 40.6 percent White, 30.2 percent Hispanic, 14.3 percent Black, 3.6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.1 percent American Indian/Alaskan and 11.2 percent not reported. The sample receiving FIP at the end of the study was 47.8 percent White, 23.7 percent Hispanic, 21.7 percent Black/African-American, 4 percent Asian and 2.8 percent were not reported.

Case composition. The DHS administrative data for July 2002 indicated that there were 91.96 single-parent cases (excluding child only cases) and 8.04 percent 2-parent cases. The sample receiving FIP at the end of the study was comprised of 94.1 percent single-parent and 5.9 percent two-parent cases.

Number of times on welfare (including AFDC). According the DHS administrative data, 7.45 percent of the DHS caseload had been on welfare more than 4 times; this was true of 1.2 percent of the sample receiving FIP at the end of the study.

Average monthly benefit per FIP case. The DHS Administrative data for July 2002 showed an average monthly benefit of $432.55 per regular FIP case and $473.25 per two-parent case. The sample receiving FIP at the end of the study had an average monthly benefit of $442.34 per regular FIP case and $479.89 per two-parent case.

Employment. 23.4 percent of the DHS caseload was employed in July 2002. 31.4 percent of the sample receiving FIP at the end of the study was employed.

Note: When the baseline sample of 638 was compared with the State of Rhode Island DHS caseload in April 1997 (implementation of FIP), the 3.4 percent sample of 638 participants emerged as similar on the bases of geographic distribution within the state, ethnicity, education, and family structure. Divergence between the sample and the full population varied from 0.2 percent to 9.6 percent on all but two items: the sample under-represents two-person cases by 12.5 percent and people in their first cash assistance episode by 11.9 percent. The sample also excluded by design child-only cases; the comparison state caseload in April 1997 (16,032) excluded child-only cases also. Further details on the comparisons between the baseline sample and the DHS caseload at the time of FIP implementation can be found in the Rhode Island Family Independence Program Longitudinal Study Baseline Report (1/01). This report can be accessed at www.ric.edu/socwk/welfarereform.htm.
Appendix B

Methodology

Research design
This research study utilized an exploratory and descriptive design to gather longitudinal data that examined the experiences of current and former Rhode Island FIP beneficiaries during the first five years of welfare reform in Rhode Island. Research participants were contacted four times over a five-year period for updates on the experiences with welfare reform.

The baseline sample for this research study consisted of 638 FIP program participants who agreed to be interviewed and to have their DHS electronic case records reviewed by a member of the research team. The baseline sample was drawn during a two-year period, February 1998 through February 2000, with the vast majority of the sample interviewed between August 1998 and August 1999.

The baseline interviews were conducted by trained student interviewers and research assistants mostly at DHS offices around the state. Case record reviews were conducted following the initial face-to-face interview. In the three follow-up interviews of this longitudinal study, case record reviews were also be conducted after an annual follow-up telephone interview.

Prior to the initial contact with the study participants, interviewers and research assistants signed “Statements of Agreement” with regard to the confidentiality of DHS client data in order to protect FIP beneficiaries’ confidentiality as mandated by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services. The signed confidentiality agreement, coupled with the participant’s informed consent allowed the researchers access to each participant’s electronic case record (INRHODES data file). A code number was assigned to each participant’s Case Record Review and Interview Protocol. No names or other identifying data were indicated on any of the data collection forms in an effort to further protect the confidentiality of each participant.

Before the start of each interview, the interviewer reviewed the Informed Consent Form with each participant. At baseline, both the participant and the interviewer signed two copies of the Rhode Island College Informed Consent. One copy of the consent was given to the interviewee and the second copy was kept secure in a locked file at Rhode Island College School of Social Work. As an incentive for participation in the study each participant was given ten dollars for the baseline interview and $25 for each follow-up interview in which they participated.
Sampling

The unit of analysis or the population relevant to the research question included those individuals in Rhode Island who were in receipt of FIP benefits (Family Independence Program) at some time on or after May 1, 1997, the date of implementation of the Rhode Island Family Independence Program. The sampling procedure initially planned for the study was random sampling. Due to logistical difficulties in obtaining a random sample, a non-probability quota sampling technique was used. Quota sampling was used to obtain proportional representation from all areas of Rhode Island and on other key demographic data such as ethnicity, family composition, employment status, etc. The goal was to obtain a sample that was representative of the population of FIP recipients for the entire State. The sample for this study was compared to the DHS aggregate data reports for the State caseload for the same period of time in which the sample was taken.

The study participants were identified and selected using one of the following methods:

1. DHS workers informed the participants about the study or participants saw a flyer/poster about the study in their local DHS office, and they signed a DHS consent form giving the research team permission to contact them about participating in the study.

2. The participant came into one of the DHS offices on a day when the research team was conducting on-the-spot interviews, and agreed to participate in the study while waiting to see his or her DHS worker.

3. The participant attended one of the Employment Options Workshops on a day the research team was conducting on-the-spot interviews, and agreed to participate in the study at the conclusion of the first morning’s workshop. These workshops are held throughout the State by the Displaced Homemaker Center, a division of a community action agency with a subcontract with DHS to conduct these workshops for DHS referred FIP beneficiaries.

4. The participant came into a community based agency serving one or more limited English speaking communities on a day that a bilingual member of the research team was conducting on-the-spot interviews, and agreed to participate in the study.

Data collection

There were two instruments used at each data collection period: the Interview Guide and the FIP Case Record Review. These instruments were developed with input from students and faculty at Rhode Island College School of Social Work, from key staff of the
Rhode Island Department of Human Services and from other knowledgeable Rhode Island welfare reform experts and advocates.

Each interview consisted of forced-field and open-ended items. A copy of the Interview Guide is contained in Appendix C. Sections addressed topics like employment, employment history and views about work; transportation; housing; children, child care and child well-being; health; and socio-demographic data.

The instruments were field tested initially with the Department of Human Services Childcare Advisory group and a later version was field tested with students who were on FIP and involved in a literacy education program at Dorcas Place in Providence, Rhode Island. The field-testing of the Initial Interview Protocol took place in December 1997. Following both field-testing trials, modifications in the instruments were made. The initial instruments were finalized in January 1998.

Each student interviewer was required to participate in a one-hour training program provided by members of the Welfare Research team. All interviewers had to complete this training prior to conducting their first interview. Two knowledgeable DHS staff members conducted the training in the use of the DHS INRHODES system. These staff members have been available to the research team on an ongoing basis as needed.

The interview instrument’s validity was tested in two ways. At the time of its construction, precious little literature existed in the field of welfare reform evaluation; the national policy was in its first year. Internet sites were reviewed for information on instrumentation and design. Second, for concurrent validity, the questionnaires included several items that could be verified through the DHS data base, and the results were highly consistent with those independently-collected data. Finally, the field-test data were compared with the participants’ DHS electronic data files (with their consent) and the results were highly consistent.

**Limitations of the study**

One limitation of this study is the problem of selection bias due to the use of a non-probability quota sampling strategy rather than random sampling. The bulk of the sample was drawn by having interviewers at DHS offices at various times. Signage, interviewers’ visibility and interview settings (i.e., convenient space and privacy), timing during the monthly client-traffic cycles and language translation issues may have contributed to sampling error. During the baseline phase a number of participants may have been motivated by the $10 payment. These factors raise questions about the sample’s representativeness and internal validity factors such as socially desirable responses and other reactive effects. Regarding the former (representativeness),
comparisons were conducted between the sample and the total DHS recipient population during the baseline period, with generally positive results (see Appendix A).

**Ethical issues**

In order to address potential ethical issues which could arise during the course of this study, the research protocol and informed consent procedures were submitted and approved in October, 1997 by the Rhode Island College Committee on Human Participants in Research (IRB). The study was also reviewed and approved by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services Legal Division. During the instrument design and pre-testing stage, questions which the research team or key informants thought could potentially harm the participants in some way were discarded. Confidentiality of data was also a critical concern. The confidentiality of each participant’s data is maintained by assigning a number to his or her case information and maintaining a separate locked file for all forms containing any identifying information (i.e., informed consent forms and receipts for the interview stipends which is required by the college auditor). Informed consent forms, interview guides and case record review forms were translated into Khmer (Cambodian), Laotian, Hmong, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish in order to accommodate the dominant limited English-speaking groups residing in the State.