

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**A Comprehensive Evaluation Report of  
Advancement Plus,  
A Paid Transitional Work Experience Program  
St. Paul, Minnesota**

by  
EnSearch, Inc.  
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Foreword by John Mohr, President, Lifetrack Resources

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## Executive Summary of the Comprehensive Evaluation Report of the Advancement Plus Program

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

They can hold your hand so far and then after you've been introduced you got to go out into the world and scavenge for your own food. It's not like they just are outcasting you, sending you out there, they gave you all these skills and abilities to use and they say you got it, now use it, and that's what we did. (Advancement Plus Trainee)

### Introduction

EnSearch was awarded a contract by Lifetrack Resources to conduct an evaluation of Advancement Plus, a paid transitional work experience program. This comprehensive report provides a description of the Advancement Plus model, the program and its evolution to date; summarizes data collected on the participants who were enrolled from the program's inception through December 2001; studies, in-depth, the 189 trainees; presents the lessons learned so far from this experimental program; and identifies next steps toward future development.

Lifetrack Resources was founded in 1948 as a community human service organization providing services that help adults who are disadvantaged or who have disabilities become employed and support families or live independently, and to help children and youth achieve success in school or in the transition to work.

On May 12, 2000, the organization received funding from The Joyce Foundation. The proposal stated:

The purpose [of this request]. . . is to develop a model and demonstrate the effectiveness of a paid work experience program for persons moving from welfare dependency to work and to disseminate the results . . . The request . . . includes: staff development to benefit from lessons learned in similar programs; incentives to encourage participation; process evaluation . . . and program evaluation; dissemination of information to interested parties [and nationwide networks].

. . . The purpose is to help people with multiple barriers become work ready by developing skills, work values and a recent work history. The program will add paid work experience to the spectrum of public employment services available to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP).

As of Spring 2001, there were three work sites:

**Packaging First**, a division of Lifetrack Resources, was originally developed as a production facility for employing and training people with disabilities. The facility provides packaging and assembly services to local businesses under competitively-bid contracts.

**Science Museum of Minnesota (SMM)** invites "learners of all ages to discover their changing world through science." The Science Museum of Minnesota had been a partner with Lifetrack Resources in the past and was invited to become the second site for the Advancement Plus program.

**Ramsey County** has a mission "to enhance the quality of life for its citizens by providing progressive and innovative leadership which addresses Federal and State directives and changing community needs by delivering services in a responsive, professional and cost-effective manner."

### The Evaluation

EnSearch was awarded a contract to conduct the evaluation of the Advancement Plus program. EnSearch, a specialized evaluation firm founded in 1985, helps businesses, nonprofit organizations and educational institutions evaluate the effectiveness of their processes, programs and materials.

### **Evaluation Design**

The Joyce Foundation funded a process evaluation for continuous improvement of the model and an outcome evaluation to examine how participants have changed or benefited by participating in the Advancement Plus program. The key questions addressed by this comprehensive evaluation report are:

1. What is the Advancement Plus model? What are the most important elements of the program?
2. Who is being served by Advancement Plus? What are their characteristics? How do they compare with other MFIP/TANF recipients?
3. What are the characteristics of the participants who are and are not successful?
4. What do staff, cooperating agencies and participants see as strengths and weaknesses of the program model and operation?
5. Did this project play a role in influencing the perceptions and acceptance of work experience as a tool in making progress for people who are hard to employ? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

**Interviews.** EnSearch conducted 341 face-to-face, telephone and/or small group interviews with participants, Advancement Plus staff, MFIP staff, referring job counselors and intensive case managers, Packaging First staff, SMM staff, and Ramsey County staff.

**Review of Program Documents.** Case files for all 189 participants enrolled by December 31, 2001, were reviewed. Records accessed included the MFIP Family Inventory; Applicant Information Form; Welfare to Work Eligibility Checklist; various versions of the application; Welfare to Work Referral Form; Employment History Form; mental health, chemical dependency and learning disability screening tools; job counselors, intensive case managers, training specialists, and retention specialists case notes; psychologists' or psychiatrists' assessments (when available); and Ramsey County's payroll records for those enrolled at that site.

**Review of Electronic Databases.** Data were obtained from a number of electronic databases including the management information system, often referred to as DATAFLEX; the database MAXIS; the Lifetrack Resources Payroll Database, Check Requisition Database and Daily Payroll Database; and daily e-mail attendance reports. More than 5,900 administrative records, 18,500 attendance records and 439 daily e-mail reports were accessed.

## The Advancement Plus Model

Between Summer 1999 and December 31, 2001, 189 individuals were served in the program.

**Lifetrack Resources.** Lifetrack Resources has an important history in the area of employment services. It has been providing transitional work in the community and community-supported employment for persons with disabilities since the 1980s. Its history in welfare began as a provider in the STRIDE program in Ramsey County from 1993 to 1998. STRIDE was mandatory for two-parent families on welfare and voluntary for single parents. Included in the service-delivery design was a large-scale unpaid Community Work Experience Program, CWEP, which placed approximately 400 individuals per year at various work experience sites.

**Advancement Plus.** Staff of Advancement Plus wanted to explore the effectiveness of paid work experience as a vehicle for helping families make the transition from welfare to work. Although the key elements have remained in place, the time since Summer 1999 has been spent trying various approaches, learning what works and what doesn't and making modifications. Advancement Plus:

- Uses paid transitional work experience as an intervention for people with multiple barriers to employment and self-sufficiency, helping them develop skills, work values and a recent work history.
- Adds paid work experience to the public employment services available to TANF recipients in MFIP.

The Advancement Plus Manual for Paid Work Experience introduced the program as follows:

Welcome to Advancement Plus! Advancement Plus is a 6-month paid work experience that will prepare you for long-term successful employment.

Advancement Plus is a Welfare to Work funded work experience created to assist individuals receiving public assistance in their transition to self-sufficiency.

The goal of Advancement Plus is to assist you in building and strengthening your work experience, workplace behaviors and skills that will assist you in becoming a successful competitive employee . . .

The manual continued:

**Lifetrack Resources pays your wages.** Lifetrack Resources operates Advancement Plus. Advancement Plus will provide you with a positive work experience in which you will learn real job skills and practice good work habits . . .

Advancement Plus offers you three levels of work experience:

**Level One.** Level One work experience offers a wage of \$6.00 an hour and requires no minimum level of English or work experience.

**Level Two.** Level Two work experience offers a wage determined by the work site and requires a higher level of English and skill level.

**Level Three.** Level Three work experience offers a wage determined by the work site and depending on work site could require a higher level of English, education and skill level.

**MFIP Vendors.** Advancement Plus, a resource available to all 15 Ramsey County MFIP Vendors, received referrals from the following: Lifetrack Resources, City of St. Paul Center for Employment and Training (CET), Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicios (CLUES), Ramsey County Career Counseling Unit (CCU) now Workforce Solutions, Ramsey County Job Training Program (RCJTP) now Workforce Solutions, East Metro Opportunity Industrialization Center (EMOIC), Hmong American Partnership (HAP), HIRED, Lao Family Community of Minnesota (LFC), and Wilder JobsFirst.

**Staffing of Advancement Plus.** The staffing configuration provided a support network with individuals specializing in given areas. The Lifetrack Resources MFIP team included the MFIP Director, job counselors, Job Counselor Supervisor, Intensive Case Manager Supervisor, job developers, Curriculum Supervisor, Resource Room Specialist, Child Care Worker and job retention specialists. Advancement Plus added to this team three full-time training specialists, one for each work site, and Work Partners, volunteers from each work site. The training specialists, Work Partners and the job counselors had daily or weekly contact with Advancement Plus trainees. Training specialists were responsible for orientation, intake, daily support at the job site, and professional development sessions. Work Partners provided supervision and support at the work sites by working closely with the trainees, directing day-to-day activities and monitoring progress on the job. Work Partners were to act as mentors and, in some cases, were the work site supervisors. The job counselors from the MFIP vendors referred individuals to Advancement Plus; provided access to other transitional resources such as, but not limited to, transportation and child care; and monitored progress and compliance with MFIP regulations. The staffing of Advancement Plus was complimented by the addition of the Mentoring Coordinator and JobPartners, community members who volunteered their time to provide support, friendship and encouragement to job seekers during their job search and subsequent employment.

**Advancement Plus Work Sites.** Between Summer 1999 and January 2002, 160 (85% of total) trainees were placed at Packaging First. The program was expanded to the Science Museum of Minnesota in November 2000 and to Ramsey County in Spring 2001. As of December 2001, 8 (4%) trainees were placed at the Science Museum of Minnesota and 11 (6%) at Ramsey County. An additional 10 (5%) completed the 2-week orientation but were not placed at a work site because: (a) job placements had not yet been made, (b) they obtained unsubsidized employment immediately following the orientation, or (c) they moved from the area immediately following the orientation.

**The Advancement Plus Orientation.** Orientation was a 1-day session for the Packaging First site. After visiting other paid work experience programs, Advancement Plus staff created a 1-week orientation for the then newly created Science Museum site. Based on what was learned from the Science Museum effort and a site visit to Transitional Work Corporation--Philadelphia@work, a 2-week orientation session was created.

**Advancement Plus Professional Development Activities.** At Packaging First, training specialists held classes twice a week. Trainees who were able to speak very little English (Limited English Proficient) could also attend English classes twice a week. The 2-week orientation and professional development sessions for the mostly clerical positions at the Science Museum of Minnesota and Ramsey County sites included computer training, interviewing skills, proof reading and filing.

**Financial Support.** Support for Advancement Plus came from sources including U.S. Department of Labor Welfare to Work and MFIP (through TANF funds). In addition to supporting staff and the paid work experience, a portion of the resources were used to help trainees with rent, car repair, gas, reconnecting disconnected electricity, obtaining work clothes, psychological assessments, replacing stolen documents and the cost of certification tests such as the GED. The mentoring services were partially supported by a grant from the Junior League of St. Paul. The Joyce Foundation supported incentives, travel for staff to visit other paid work experience sites and the evaluation. An important development as of June 1, 2001, was that trainees in Ramsey County positions were paid from county resources.

### **Who Were the Advancement Plus Trainees?**

Between Fall 1999 and December 31, 2001, Advancement Plus served 189 trainees. These individuals had not yet made the transition from welfare to work. To enroll in the program, they first had to exhaust an 8-week job search and meet the criteria developed by the U.S. Department of Labor. Who were these Advancement Plus trainees? What were their characteristics?

The majority of the 189 Advancement Plus trainees were female (84%). Trainees ranged in age from 20 to 58 with the average being 36 years.

Most trainees were single parents (69%, 130). Nearly a third were married and lived with a spouse (31%, 59).

Family size ranged from 2 (a single parent with child) to 12; the average size was 5.

Households averaged 3 children under the age of 18. The age of the youngest child in the household at the start of the program ranged from less than 1 year to 18 years. Most, 154 (82%), had a child age 10 or younger. Eighty (42%) of the families had a child between the ages of 1 and 5 years.

Advancement Plus served a very diverse population. Many spoke English as their first language (100, 53%). Refugees to the U.S. came from countries including Somalia, Laos, Sudan, Ethiopia, Burma, Cambodia, Columbia, Haiti, Sierra Leone and Vietnam. Languages other than English spoken by trainees included Hmong (37, 20%), Somali (31, 16%), Spanish (8, 4%), Sudanese (4, 2%), Khmer (2, 1%), Burmese (2, 1%), Vietnamese (2, 1%), Oromo (1, less than 1%), Haitian (1, less than 1%), and Themne (1, less than 1%).

Forty-seven percent of all Advancement Plus trainees were Limited English Proficient (LEP).

Minnesota elected to maintain eligibility for MFIP for current legal non-citizens. Non-citizens who lived in Minnesota before March 1, 1997, were eligible for the full MFIP grant that combined the food stamp and cash assistance grant, if they were pursuing English as a Second Language and citizenship. Most (57%, 107) Advancement Plus trainees were U.S. citizens; the remainder were eligible non-U.S. citizens (43%, 82).

The broad race categories of White, Black, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Hispanic used by the government tended to mask rather than highlight the diversity. For this reason, a category labeled "Ethnicity" was used to more fully show the range in cultural identity found among the Advancement Plus trainees (see Table 1).

| <b>TABLE 1</b>                          |     |      |
|---|-----|------|
| <b>Advancement Plus Trainees</b>        |     |      |
| <b>Race and Ethnicity</b>               |     |      |
| Number = 189                            |     |      |
| <b>Race</b>                             |     |      |
| White                                   | 23  | 12%  |
| Black                                   | 105 | 56%  |
| Asian                                   | 43  | 23%  |
| Native American                         | 3   | 2%   |
| Pacific Islander                        | 1   | <1%  |
| Hispanic                                | 14  | 7%   |
|   | 189 | 100% |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>                        |     |      |
| African American                        | 64  | 34%  |
| Biracial                                | 3   | 2%   |
| Burmese                                 | 2   | 1%   |
| Cambodian                               | 2   | 1%   |
| Caucasian                               | 23  | 12%  |
| The Oromo People of Ethiopia            | 1   | <1%  |
| Haitian                                 | 1   | <1%  |
| Hispanic                                | 6   | 3%   |
| Hmong                                   | 37  | 20%  |
| Latina/Latino (Central/South American)* | 8   | 4%   |
| Native American                         | 4   | 2%   |
| Sierra Leonian                          | 1   | <1%  |
| Somali                                  | 31  | 16%  |
| Sudanic                                 | 4   | 2%   |
| Vietnamese                              | 2   | 1%   |
|   | 189 | 100% |

\* Records did not always specify which country.

Fifty-four (29%) of the Advancement Plus trainees had reached the 12th grade in the U.S. school system. More than a third (36%, 68) had no formal education in the U.S. and of these, 46 had no formal education in their former country. Only 51 (27%) of the 189 had a high school diploma or GED.

Most (63%, 119) of the trainees were referred to the Advancement Plus program by Lifetrack Resources Job Counselors.

Ninety-six (51%) of the trainees had been on public assistance (AFDC and/or TANF) fewer than 5 years (60 months); the number of months ranged from 3 months to 201 to 300 months (or 25 years). The average was 70 months.

The number of months on MFIP at the start of the program ranged from 1 to 63. (TANF/MFIP time limits are 60 months; however, in the State of Minnesota extensions are available for individuals with severe hardships. One Advancement Plus trainee had been on MFIP more than 60 months because of a hardship extension.) The average was 29 months. The largest percentage (29%, 55) were in their third year on MFIP.

Trainees tended to follow prescribed employment plans; only 37 (20%) had been sanctioned at one time during their time on MFIP (Most were sanctioned prior to the time spent with Advancement Plus).

Statistics alone fall short of telling the stories behind the numbers. Trainees were on welfare for a variety of reasons and because of a variety of circumstances. The comments of one trainee are similar to comments made by others:

I got on welfare because I had problems with my last child. I used to work at [name] and I was making nice money there. Then to go on welfare because I had a sick baby, it brought me down a lot and I didn't feel too hot about myself . . . I've changed because I feel better about myself. I do more things with my kids now. And [my son is] not really sick [any] more . . . And that makes me feel good. And my kids are happier.

I thought I was better than people on welfare, when I wasn't on it. But I have a different perspective on that now because I've been on it. I know that things had to be hard if they had to get on it. I had problems where I had to swallow my pride and get on it because I just couldn't go to work. I couldn't because of my baby.

. . . I feel better about myself because I am working. Even though I still have to answer to [the welfare system] because I'm still getting some from them. I still have a job. And I get to get out every day, and do something and I know I'm on my way off of it.

Some trainees had to make major adjustments to a new country and a different culture. This was one trainee's experience:

At the beginning welfare was helpful . . . I came because of the war in my country . . . Welfare is begging and asking for money. I would take everybody out of welfare and give them a job and more money. If they are capable of working they shouldn't be [receiving] welfare. But the work and the health part and also the language part, for this we should get assistance. But not paid staying home. Before the war, the city war, in Somalia I never thought when I went to sleep that one night [that] "I'm going to leave my country."

We never worked for the system, for Somali government. We were business people. I used to drive [a] car and have [a] business and we were very wealthy. But we came here with nothing. There is no way to explain [to others about how a] person who had something in their own country and everything in one night was gone. Here we just have to [live] with faith. And we have to pay rent. We have to adjust ourself to being poor . . . (Translation)

### **The Barriers to Moving into Unsubsidized Employment**

Trainees were characterized as having severe and multiple barriers to moving into unsubsidized employment. One staff person said:

The [Advancement Plus] participants . . . have the most severe challenges to moving into unsubsidized employment. Some have issues with anger management, maybe some mental health issues, some chemical issues, and that is a concern working around machines, but some of them are in treatment. Child care and lots of family issues. Not just, I don't want to put my little children in day care. It's, I don't know what to do with my 13-year-old child who doesn't qualify for MFIP child care. He needs child care more than my four-year-old does. Children issues, my child's truant, the social worker needs to see me at school or the teacher needs to see me at school, behavioral issues, children in trouble with the law issues, children with special needs, poor work history, lack of motivation, depression, just getting along with people in general . . .

Language, low basic skills, new to this country. Sick spouses to care for is a big one . . . It's not just one issue, it's multiple. Housing. How can I forget housing. The housing shortage in St. Paul is terrible and the rent is going up even with Section 8 or RAFS, Rental Assistance for Family Stabilization . . .

Not only is housing expensive, but the housing standards are poor. Children sleeping on the floor, no furniture, lead homes, poorly ventilated, cold in the winter, hot in the summer. It's just crazy. They have a roof over their head today, but the home is in risk of being condemned and so they could be out on the street the end of the month.

The staff comment is supported by the statistical data. Consider that of the 189 trainees:

- 95% (180) had no significant work history (worked fewer than 13 consecutive weeks out of the last 12 months in a full-time, unsubsidized job).
- 74% (140) had 2 or more children (the number of children under 18 years of age in the family ranged from 1 to 10).
- 70% (132) used the bus as their primary or only mode of transportation.
- 69% (130) were single parents.

- 64% (121) had attended school in the U.S. -- only 51 of these had a high school diploma or a GED. 36% (68) had no formal education in the U.S. -- only 22 of these had attended school in their former country (years of schooling ranged from 2 to 12).
- 61% (115) had a physical disability, a learning disability or mental illness and/or took care of disabled family members. When the categories of physical limitation and care of ill or incapacitated family members were added to the disability grouping it was learned that 68% (128) had a physical or learning disability, physical limitation, mental illness and/or took care of a disabled, ill, or incapacitated family member.
- 47% (89) had limited English skills.
- 45% (85) had a housing crisis during the time they were enrolled in Advancement Plus. In addition, 24% (45) missed work because of housing issues, 31% (58) moved during the time in Advancement Plus and 15% (28) were homeless with 21 of these living in a shelter.
- 41% (79) had previously held two or more jobs.
- 40% (75) had never had a job outside the home before starting with Advancement Plus.
- 36% (68) had a child-care issue during their time in Advancement Plus.
- 27% (51) were ex-offenders (11 had been convicted of a felony and 40 had been convicted of a misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor) and 16% (31) had a family member who was an ex-offender.
- 26% (49) were victims of domestic violence.
- 18% (34) had chemical dependency issues.

There were 24 barriers to employment isolated in this study:

#### Personal Barriers

- Physical disability
- Physical limitation
- Learning disability
- Mental illness
- Adult literacy -- skills below the 8th grade
- Limited English Proficient (LEP)
- Chemical dependency
- Domestic violence
- Ex-offender
- Attendance -- illness

- Attendance -- major medical issue
- Mode of transportation -- used the bus as primary or only mode of transportation
- No significant work history
- Sanction

#### Family Barriers

- Family status -- single parent
- Family member disabled
- Ill or incapacitated family member
- Family member ex-offender
- Attendance -- school-age child care
- Attendance -- sick-child care
- Attendance -- preschool-age child care

#### Housing Barriers

- Moved during Advancement Plus
- Homeless during Advancement Plus
- Housing crisis during Advancement Plus

Individuals in the Advancement Plus program had an average of 7.4 of these barriers to overcome (the range was from 2 to 14 barriers).

#### **Barriers to Success -- No Significant Work History**

Related to their work, 95% (180) had no significant work history; 40% (75) had never had a job outside the home before starting with Advancement Plus; 41% (79) had previously held 2 or more jobs.

Advancement Plus worked with a bi-modal population with very different needs. There was a group of trainees with no work history and no formal schooling and a group of trainees that had been in and out of a number of jobs and had reached high school. Staff used this information to adapt the program to serving two different groups of individuals with different needs.

#### **Barriers to Success -- Disability**

Some of the most surprising results came from the examination of disability and mental health data.

- At least 22% (42 of the 189 trainees) had a learning disability. Because of a lack of recognized diagnostic tools and professionals trained in assessing diverse multicultural groups, it was difficult to determine the actual extent of learning disabilities in this diverse population.
- 23% (43) of the 189 trainees had a physical disability while an additional 11% (20) had physical limitations. In 2002, care was

taken to distinguish between a physical disability (as assessed by a health professional) versus a physical limitation (which was not yet deemed severe enough to qualify as a disability). Even though the physical limitation was not yet "deemed severe" the physical limitation category should not be disregarded. Only trainees who missed significant amounts of work because of physical issues were included in this category.

- 34% (64) were assessed as having mental illness.
- When the learning disability, physical disability, and mental illness information was examined for all 189 cases it was learned that: 34% (64) had one of the identified disabilities, 21% (39) had two, and 5% (9) had all three.

When reviewing case files and administrative data from the county, it was learned that 18% (34) of trainees were caring for a disabled family member and that an additional 6% (11) were caring for an ill/incapacitated family member.

The most startling statistic came when we examined if the trainee had a disability and/or was taking care of a disabled family member. If trainees were counted only once, an unduplicated count, we found:

- 61% (115) had a learning disability, a physical disability, or mental illness and/or took care of a disabled family member.
- When the physical limitation and the care of a disabled, ill or incapacitated family member variables were added, the percentage rose to 68% (128). In other words, 128 trainees had a learning disability, physical disability, physical limitation, mental illness and/or took care of a disabled, ill, or incapacitated family member.

The severity of the disability issues can be illustrated with excerpts from selected case histories:

**Person D:** "Diagnosis -- borderline general intelligence. Full scale IQ 74, with related weaknesses in verbal, academic and nonverbal domains; personality disorder with passive-aggressive, avoidance and self-defeating features, major depression with accompanying somatic problems, poor sleep hygiene, low energy level, pessimism, hopelessness. Impressions: there is a guarded prognosis in terms of making significant change pertaining to her daily life, parenting skills, social adjustment, mental health status or employability. This is a client with a sporadic work history, few, if any, identifiable transferable job skills and a myriad of problems in her daily life. Her strategy for dealing with her behaviorally disordered children is to ignore them. There is very little incentive for her to change her behaviors unless a crisis arises. Presently she has symptoms of major depression which I suspect will respond, at least on the short-term basis, to medication, however, unless she is highly motivated and takes a conscientious role in the treatment plan with a goal to improve the circumstances of her life, I suspect that there will be little meaningful or

permanent change in terms of her attitudes, values and behavior, thus prognosis for stable employment and economic self-sufficiency would have to be considered guarded."

**Person H:** "Thought about hurting self and others . . . mental health assessment highest score possible." Other barriers, car accident during Advancement Plus and raped before Advancement Plus.

**Person K:** "[Client has] nightmares, unable to sleep, paranoid, depressed, suicidal; . . . 7 years ago had addiction to alcohol, last time she drank was 7 years ago . . . [has] difficulty in filling out forms. Starts, then gets frustrated and stops. At Packaging First she needed to work slowly so she packaged items correctly . . . was unable to assemble products; needs intensive training at any job site; needs help completing paper work. She gets frustrated and gives up. She needs to be alone for a couple of hours. Assessment -- mild retardation, dependent personality type with vulnerable adult status, adjustment disorder with mixed emotional features . . . [Psychologist reports client] should be referred to Social Security Administration for disability determination . . . [because] she is severely vocationally handicapped and presently not competitively employable. [Should be assigned] county social worker that serves the needs of adults with developmental disabilities . . . [may benefit from] eventual placement in sheltered or supported employment opportunities so that she might supplement her social security benefits."

**Person L:** "[Client] acknowledges a history of mental health problems . . . indicates that over the course of an eight-year relationship has regularly endured physical and emotional abuse . . . has been separated from her husband for 10 weeks and maintains custody of her children . . . [She] indicates that her five year old has recently been demonstrating regressive behavior, including [soiling self]. The six year old acts out at home and in the neighborhood. . . [she] acknowledges that she is having difficulty meeting the social and emotional needs of her children and as she describes it, about one-half of the time she wants to retain custody of her children and the other half of the time she would like to give up custody of the children. [She] indicates that since the children have been receiving child care, her level of stress is somewhat diminished and she still struggles with her parenting skills as well as her own psychological problems. Indicates that she sleeps excessively, often feels irritable and many times feels out of control emotionally . . . Diagnosis -- posttraumatic stress disorder secondary to emotional and physical abuse . . . Personality disorder with dependent, passive-aggressive and self-defeating features. Adjustment disorder with mixed emotional features."

**Person N:** Psychologist report stated, "Diagnosis -- mild mental retardation, dependent personality type with vulnerable adult status . . . it seems that her passive, indirect and ineffective parenting style has allowed her [four] children to manipulate, exploit, denigrate and abuse her . . . Recommendations -- in my opinion, [this client] is severely vocationally handicapped and should be referred to disability determination with Social Security Administration. If she is granted social security benefits, it might be beneficial for her to have a representative payee such as a social worker with Ramsey County . . . [Client] can be exempt from employment-related services . . . given her disability status, however, I think it would be reasonable to involve her with the Division of Rehabilitation Services and explore opportunities for work adjustment rating and possibly placement in a sheltered or extended employment position . . . [This client] and her family are in need of mental health services in light of her ineffectual parenting style, dependent personality characteristics and susceptibility for manipulation and exploitation at the hands of her children. Her children have rather entrenched oppositional, defiant and self-defeating behavior and need mental health services as a way of reducing their potential for juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, early school drop out and so forth." The DRS Functional Assessment stated, "[Functional Needs Assessment] FNA was administered in home with [staff] -- able to accomplish some tasks independently, but she has serious difficulties in several test areas, including safety and prevention, kitchen skills, food preparation, money management, task,

skills and prevocational skills. The safety and prevention area was of most serious concern . . . [the client] reacted to her daughter having a serious burn on her legs by doing nothing and once she cut her own hands so severely that she cut through tendons of three fingers and she didn't seek medical attention for over an hour because she was baby-sitting. She held her hand over a bowl and filled three bowls full of blood before she went to the doctor. She demonstrated impulsiveness in a cooking task and had a lot of difficulty completing a task . . . or [following] written instruction. She's had heat and phone turned off due to nonpayment and has difficulty asserting herself with her children if they ask for money. She gives it to them even though she wouldn't have enough to pay bills."

Attendance records and supervisors' observations became important evidence in documenting the severity of disabilities. There were 10 (5%) Advancement Plus trainees who qualified for SSI and in many of these cases the data from the transitional job site at Packaging First was used as part of the evidence justifying this placement. For example, in one application it was written:

I believe the attached documentation should be sufficient to establish disability for [name]. The [psychologist's] evaluation shows [name] to have a valid verbal IQ of 68, a valid performance IQ of 70 and a valid full scale IQ of 67. The Vineland results indicate that [name] is markedly limited in activities of daily living and social functioning, operating respectively at a 13-year-old and 12-year-old level in these areas. [Name's] limitations in activities of daily living are further documented in the letter from [the job counselor] inability to maintain a residence, to manage money in a way that meets her family's basic needs, to care for her own personal hygiene or to appropriately dress her children . . . In addition, [name's] experience at Packaging First establishes a [Functional Rehabilitation Capacity] FRC of zero. [Name] was not able to succeed even in this . . . environment; in particular, she never managed to attend more than three days of each five-day workweek, and despite repeated warnings, she appeared never to grasp the concept that she needed to call in if she was not going to come to work. I do not believe that any competitive employer would retain an employee under these conditions.

### **Barriers to Success -- Low Literacy**

Adult literacy is defined as having basic skills above the 8th grade. During the early years of MFIP the WRAT reading and math assessments were mandated for English-speaking trainees and could be administered for LEP if the Job Counselor desired. In subsequent years many of the MFIP vendors chose not to administer the WRAT when it was no longer mandated or else chose other instruments. Therefore, data were available for only a portion of the trainees and caution should be used when interpreting these results. It is believed, however, that the WRAT assessment and other standardized assessments used may indicate that many Advancement Plus trainees had literacy issues. The range was between 46% and 67%.

### **Barriers to Success -- Limited English Proficiency**

Non-citizens who lived in Minnesota before March 1, 1997, were eligible for the full MFIP grant that combined the food stamp and cash assistance grant if they were pursuing English as a Second Language and citizenship. There were 42% (82) of the Advancement Plus trainees who were eligible non-citizens. In addition, 47% (89) of the trainees were Limited English Proficient.

As indicated in the 2001 Preliminary Report (Stockdill et al. 2001), the trainees who were successful in getting to work at the Packaging First site 90% of the time tended to be Limited English Proficient and eligible non-U.S. citizens. The next step to employment for the trainees was not always immediate and for some, especially those with limited English skills, it appeared to be very difficult.

### **Barriers to Success -- Housing**

Many, 45% (85, unduplicated count), had a housing crisis during the time they were enrolled with Advancement Plus. Specifically:

- 24% (45) missed work because of housing issues (e.g., rental assistance meetings, meetings with Job Counselors to complete Section 8 paperwork, inspections by Section 8 authorities, going to court to address eviction notices, repairs on substandard plumbing, extermination of cockroaches),
- 31% (58) moved during the time spent with Advancement Plus,
- 15% (28) were homeless and of these 21 were living in a shelter; the remainder had found temporary space with a friend or relative -- often moving back and forth between friends and family members.

The evaluators documented the actual addresses for all 189 trainees during the time spent in Advancement Plus and during their time on MFIP. It was learned that:

- 37% (71) did not move -- these individuals frequently lived in public housing,
- 33% (62) moved every 19 months,
- 30% (56) moved every 6 months.

The 2001 Preliminary Report (Stockdill et al. 2001) stated that one of the best predictors of success, when success was defined as "successfully getting to work 90% of the time," was if trainees had stable housing. In other words, individuals with stable housing were most likely to be present at the transitional work site 90% of the time.

## **Barriers to Success -- Child Care**

In the 2001 Preliminary Report (Stockdill et al. 2001), it was learned that 14 of the 78 trainees missed work at Packaging First because of school-age child issues. These included having children suspended from school, kicked off the bus, being arrested for stealing a car. One mother was convicted of a felony because her son took a weapon to school. The attendance data for the 189 trainees showed that:

- 16% (30) missed work because of school-age child care,
- 25% (47) missed work because of sick-child care,
- 9% (16) missed work because of having no preschool-age child care.

Many of the single parents had children with ADHD which meant that they were often pulled from work to deal with the most recent crisis. One trainee had been showing progress -- completed the 2-week orientation, successfully being awarded a job at one of the Level 2 work sites and then her behaviorally-challenged son got in trouble with the law, ran away from home, and then came back into the home. She finally dropped out because, "It just got too hard," although she is now working with her job counselor and seems to be back on track.

A story about an Advancement Plus participant in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* was (May 13, 2001) quoted in the 2001 report but warrants repeating to help readers understand the challenges of keeping a job and yet being a responsible single parent as well.

[Name's] job packaging luggage tags . . . pays only \$6 an hour. Nonetheless, the 35-year-old single mother was glad to be back at work last week. She'd missed more than a week to stay home with her 10-year-old son, who was suspended from school for stealing a fire extinguisher which he took home and tested on a fire he set on the kitchen floor. Just a couple of months earlier, she missed a string of days after her boy punched a brick wall and fractured his knuckles. "I should have been fired a long time ago," she acknowledged during a morning break at Packaging First in St. Paul. [She] has received welfare payments since her daughter, now 11, was born. She has worked, too, but has never held a job longer than a year. Her efforts to keep a job have been derailed by depression, cancer and troubled children . . .

## **Barriers to Success -- Ex-offender**

It was found that 27% (51) of the Advancement Plus trainees were ex-offenders and of these, 11 had been convicted of a felony. Preliminary data indicated that individuals with past felony and misdemeanor records struggled to find work. Since September 11 a number of companies include background checks as part of their screening process. Advancement Plus staff found that this meant that the available job options were greatly reduced and that if a trainee had not revealed being an ex-offender they would be returned to the program, after being placed at a job site, once the background check showed previous-offender status. In some cases the staff were able to refer these individuals to legal services where the record was expunged, but this was not always the case.

One individual had been in the program for 6 months, for a total of 909.25 hours. He was present 93% of the time. He was worried about the next job, however, because he is an ex-offender:

One of the Lifetrack staff told me about the Packaging First program . . . You know, it was a pretty good start for me. It is especially hard for me. I got a background. It's kind of hard for me to get a job. I don't have a GED neither . . . It's a good program . . . I'll just be able to have something. I'll have some reason getting up in the morning time . . . I guess when I wake up in the morning time now, I got something I can depend on. If I get up and five days a week, Monday through Friday, I can come here and work, every day . . . that's a good feeling . . . I got the confidence. I got the positive outlook now on life again . . . I want to get back out in the workforce. I want to stay out there this time.

And "stay out there" he has done. He was hired at an assembly plant and continued to work there as this report was being prepared, seven months later.

### **Advancement Plus Trainees As Compared with other MFIP/TANF Participants**

When the 2001 Preliminary Report (Stockdill et al. 2001) and the 2002 Update (Stockdill et al. 2002) were released, questions were asked regarding how the Advancement Plus trainees compared with the MFIP/TANF populations. Lifetrack Resources was awarded another grant from the Joyce Foundation to examine comparisons using a quasi-experimental design during the 2002, 2003 and 2004 program years.

Available statistics indicated differences between the Advancement Plus trainees and the MFIP population served by Lifetrack Resources in that more Advancement Plus trainees were female, older and Limited English Proficient. In the area of ethnicity, the 189 Advancement Plus trainees were similar to all MFIP clients served in 2001 by Lifetrack Resources.

The comparison with the state-wide MFIP population (*Welfare in Minnesota Facts and Figures*. 2002) indicated that Advancement Plus trainees had larger families, fewer one-child families, fewer single-parent households and fewer with a high school education.

When compared with participants in the study of six paid transitional work experience programs conducted by Mathematica Policy Research (Kirby et al. 2002), Advancement Plus also served a primarily female clientele in their 30s. Advancement Plus was similar to GoodWorks! (Georgia) and TWC (Pennsylvania) in that all served a population with lower levels of education. Advancement Plus served the largest percentage of trainees over 39 years old, served the most diverse population, and served trainees with larger families (median family size was 5).

When the Washington State Office of Trade and Economic Development (OTED) and Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI) barriers to employment study (Yatsko 2002) was examined, it was learned that although there were differences in the individual barriers, there was essentially no difference in the average total number of barriers faced by an individual. OTED/EOI found that the 161 selected participants had an average of 8.0 barriers; the Advancement Plus trainees were found to have an average of 7.4 barriers.

### **Characteristics of Successful and Unsuccessful Trainees**

One of the evaluation questions was: What are the characteristics of the trainees who are and are not successful? So, what does success for the Advancement Plus program mean? The MFIP Director defined success in the following way:

I define success with a lot of variation. For some of our participants being able to walk through the door is a success. Maybe they have never had any employment history at all. They have to be extremely full of insecurities as they come to us for the first time . . . If one is 35 years old, for example, and hasn't had that experience. For that person, simply being able to get over the threshold and to come back the next day is a success. We have other people who have never been able to complete a full week of work. And if they can get to that point of coming in to work every day for 5 days, that is success. For other people who have perhaps never been able to get beyond certain cultural differences in people, if they can be on a work floor in an assembly plant with a variety of cultures around them, maybe a person in a wheel chair, maybe a person who is deaf, maybe a person who doesn't speak their language, or dress the way they do, if they can continue coming to work on a floor that is very diverse like that, for them that is success. I don't define success as having a full-time job but I think that is a wonderful goal, but I think that is only one of the ways that our people succeed. We have a number of participants that have some sort of . . . personality characteristic . . . that keeps them from being able to avoid continuous conflict . . . If we can make any headway with that, or at least help them see that we accept where they are right now, that we are willing to work with them to get to a better place, that is success, too.

A number of statistical analyses (chi-square, analysis of variance, correlation, factor analysis and discriminant analysis) were used to help Advancement Plus staff identify the characteristics of trainees who were and were not successful in the program. The purpose was to help staff identify ways to strengthen the program to make the best use of their and the trainees' skills and efforts. Although the evaluators have confidence in the data presented, the total of 189 trainees means there will probably be fluctuations in the results over time. As more individuals are added to the study over the next 2 years, it is anticipated that the conclusions drawn will have greater stability.

Overall, what do we think was learned? That successful trainees tended to:

- be Limited English Proficient,
- be eligible non-U.S. citizens,
- be older,
- have had fewer years of education in the U.S.,
- be Lifetrack Resources clients,

- be present at work more days,
- have a large number of individuals living in the household,
- work more hours,
- be absent fewer days,
- call in when they were going to be absent,
- follow their employment plan,
- have few (generally less than 7) family, housing, or personal barriers,
- have stable housing,
- have stable transportation or drove a car.

Whereas, unsuccessful trainees tended to:

- be English-speakers,
- be U.S. citizens,
- be younger,
- have had more years of education in the U.S.,
- have a smaller number of individuals living in the household,
- be clients from other MFIP vendors,
- be present at work fewer days,
- work fewer hours,
- be absent more frequently,
- have many (generally more than 7) family, housing, or personal barriers,
- have a chemical dependency,
- have unstable housing,
- be a victim of domestic violence,
- miss work because of school-age child care,
- frequently be a no call/no show for work,
- miss work because of transportation issues,
- have been sanctioned.

As evaluators and statisticians we understand that there is always a chance for error. There are also always individuals who are exceptions to the rule. We believe that

using statistics to indicate potential for success can be useful for staff to also identify factors which may limit a trainee's success.

We believe that some individuals can beat the odds. For that reason we offer the story of one Advancement Plus trainee who statistically should have been identified "unsuccessful" because of the multiple barriers she faced, but who was successfully employed at the end of Advancement Plus and who remained employed through December 2001.

This African American trainee was a single parent with two children, the youngest was 17 years old. She started working with Advancement Plus in December of 1999. She worked at an Advancement Plus site for 122 days, she was absent 41 days, worked 75% of the time scheduled. She had no significant work history, had been unemployed 26 of the 26 weeks prior to working with Advancement Plus. She held at least three jobs before starting the program but was unable to stay with any one for very long. She faced a number of barriers that would have predicted her to be unsuccessful. She had 4 personal barriers, 3 family barriers, 2 housing barriers for a total of 9 barriers. She was an ex-offender, had a family member, a child, who was an ex-offender, had reached only the 9th grade in the U.S. education system, had no GED or diploma. She received support and help from Advancement Plus staff in a number of ways. They understood when she had to leave work because her son was being released from prison, helped her find housing, helped her find a job and continued to offer support after she obtained the job. They helped connect her with a mentor. She was predicted by the discriminant analysis to be in the "unsuccessful category" but she obtained a job in August 2000 and remained employed through December 2001.

### **What Were the Weaknesses, Challenges and Strengths of The Model?**

An evaluation question was, "What do staff, cooperating agencies and trainees see as strengths and weaknesses of the program model and operation?" The data show, in many cases, how weaknesses identified by staff or by the evaluators have been addressed or have the potential to be addressed. Strengths that were observed earlier continue to be reinforced with each new round of interviews.

#### **Weaknesses of the Model and How They are Being Addressed**

Staff have come to understand that the trainees need additional support because they often are unprepared for the reality of the workplace and individual barriers greatly affect both punctuality and attendance. Staff at all sites continue to work toward creative solutions. Sometimes this has meant assessment to better understand the issues, sometimes this has meant making modifications in staffing. The addition of Home Visitors through the Frogtown Family Connections program and the newly developed staff positions of Occupational Therapist and Advancement Specialist have the potential of addressing the punctuality and attendance issues as well as the need to help trainees move from transitional jobs into full-time employment.

## **Future Challenges to The Model**

Future challenges to the success of the model include the funder's requirement of more rigid adherence to the 6-month participation time limit and the difficulty of making the transition out of Advancement Plus a smooth, thoughtful process. A newly-established contract requirement that Advancement Plus work with individuals who had completed 52 of the allowed 60 months of assistance by June 2002 may have an impact on success. Other vendors and the trainees have asked for more variety in work sites and work experiences. Many of the U.S.-educated participants do not have the clerical skills needed for the Levels Two and Three sites, yet they want work experiences other than those available at the Level One site. Questions are being raised whether the individuals with multiple barriers will be able to be successful in a competitive work setting or if an adaptation of the shelter workshop concept is more appropriate. Advancement Plus is a fairly complicated model and it is difficult to ensure that all who need to be involved are involved in the communication loop and the decision-making process.

Advancement Plus alone cannot address all the barrier issues. Transportation, affordable housing, intensive English-language skill development, school-age and sick-child care, appropriate screening for barriers, and more appropriate placement for the very vulnerable are issues with which the public-at-large needs to wrestle.

## **Overall Strengths of the Model**

Supervisors, MFIP job counselors and intensive case managers found that the model held many strengths and described how they and the trainees have learned from the experience. The 2-week orientation for the SMM and Ramsey County sites was seen as a valuable experience both immediately after the orientation and once the trainee was placed at a work site. The comprehensive nature of the model has meant that someone -- at times the MFIP job counselor, intensive case manager, other times the Training Specialist, the Curriculum Supervisor, the Site Supervisor, or the WorkPartner -- pitched in to help a trainee deal with the barriers.

The whole program, [the training specialist], [the curriculum supervisor], all of them. Those guys have been supportive of me. They don't give me no negative feedback, they give me positive feedback. When I'm thinking I can't do it, they'll tell me , "Don't think that way, you got to think positive."

[In one session] the training specialist wrote down [on a flip chart] what she saw as our strengths. I kept that poster up in my home until actually maybe about a month ago . . . it was good to see because I couldn't believe how much she read me, read each of us. And everything she wrote about us was right there, and it was right. It was how somebody could really see what I never knew about me . . . It was positive for me because I've never seen how people looked at me . . . It was very positive . . . very helpful . . .

[I wish people understood] me not being really good educated. I feel kind of scared to write down something. I try to improve. I read every day to the little girls. And they're very advanced for their age. I feel bad because I can read anything and I know what I'm reading, but I can't spell it right. . . I feel ugly about that because I can't do it . . . I've read many books and I just don't know how to comprehend the spelling of things. And I feel bad when I have to give a

message and I try to do the best I can on that. Every time I have to write something she'll [Advancement Plus staff] tell me, "Sometimes I'm not a good speller." And I'm like, Oh! I feel, like I'm not the only one.

Advancement Plus staff helped me to get a place to stay. And they helped so I could pay some bills. I have a car now that was kind of given to me as a gift, but they helped me, this program helped me out because I could get my insurance paid, it has a lot of advantages, even though the pay wasn't a whole lot.

Anytime you really need to talk to somebody, no matter who it is, they take a few minutes out, even if they are really super busy they will stop and say, "Well, let's go talk about it. Maybe I can help you out with this." They are real supportive on that. Most helpful is [my line supervisor]. She is the one I talk to . . . the most because she is real understanding and listens to you close.

[Advancement Plus staff person] has been helpful, real helpful. My coworkers, [name] and [name], have been helpful. Listening when I need someone to talk to. If I'm feeling down or whatever, they ask me what's wrong and I just get to talking and talking and so I feel better. That's one of the things I like about it here. That they like to ask what is going on and what can they do to help and it makes me feel good knowing I could come here and ask them for help when I need it.

[Advancement Plus staff person] . . . a lot of people think they are here trying to get in your business and want to know everything about you but really they are just here to help you. They are asking you, do you need help with something? Is everything okay at home? [Advancement Plus staff person] is real good about this. She makes it a point to go around the floor and ask everybody how they are doing. . . I have to say my [line] supervisor has been real good. Because I told her that I want to go to college and she has been giving me college brochures and things like that. Giving me book titles to go get from the library and read up on this and read up on that. I appreciate her for that because it is showing that these people here really care. I don't think it is a show. I don't think it is just because that is their job title. I think they really care.

### **Site-Specific Strengths**

Each site had unique strengths, although the themes of real pay for real work, a supportive staff, a motivating approach, attention to first-day experiences and opportunities to gain new skills cut across all work sites.

The Packaging First site has the longest history. The strengths of this site included:

- the supportive site supervisors,
- the motivating approach,
- the opportunity to learn about others,
- the careful attending to first-day experiences, and
- it being viewed as an excellent place to gain work experience for those with no work experience or no work experience in the U.S.

The strengths of the SMM site included:

- a positive first impression,
- a supportive interviewing process,
- close attention to first-day experiences,
- real work skills being learned, and
- other supportive elements such as the site staff, coworkers and the job responsibilities.

The strengths of the Ramsey County site included:

- site-specific characteristics such as the funding strategy,
- training support,
- union cooperation,
- the supportive work environment created by the supervisors, and
- the opportunity for learning real skills, hard and soft.

Site supervisors at all three sites indicated that they learned from working with the Advancement Plus trainees. Their comments included:

Actually you get an entirely new perception of [the trainees]. What their struggles are. And what they have to go through to get the kids to school, take care of family issues, try to get to work on time. And it's not always easy for them so you have to actually cut them some slack once in a while. But you have to understand what they're going through on a daily basis, what their real issues are. I've gotten to know some people. And actually it's not an employee-employer relationship, it's the friend-to-friend thing. You've become a lot closer to these folks and understand them and they understand us. So it's a comfortable situation out there now.

Well, I'm sure learning what Lifetrack Resources does . . . how difficult that job is. I'm gaining a new appreciation for the work of helping people make the transition to a work environment, and the difficulties that are faced both by the staff who's involved in the work, and then the trainees themselves. It seems to me that I've learned a whole lot about why people find it difficult to make the transition. What are the obstacles to that, and what qualities they need to overcome those obstacles . . . I think it's an attitude that is an obstacle for some of the people. I think another obstacle is it's tough to make it on six or seven bucks an hour, and I don't know how they do it. It's the whole thing of families working two or three jobs, and if it's a single parent . . . it's balancing everything. All the factors that other parents do, but with the added problem of . . . no income base. And it's often no working partner to contribute. So I see that as a big obstacle. Another would be personal habits . . . self-esteem issues. I've seen that . . . Somewhere they've gotten the message that they have no value . . . that their worth is not that of someone else . . . Transportation is a big issue . . . child care. I guess those would be the biggest obstacles, but it seems to me that the personal ones are probably the most long lasting, and damaging ones -- self-perception, and the inability to know where to find help.

Site supervisors have seen changes in trainees:

[They are learning] to report to work on time and have a good work record in terms of attendance . . . the concept of team work . . . the specifics of what our work is about . . . I've gotten really good feedback from workers in the units who have helped to assign them work.

She didn't appear to have much time on the computer before she came to us and she now is competent in three large computer programs . . . She does a lot of customer service on the phone

both with our clients and with the . . . sites . . . She's had good experience on packaging stuff up and getting it shipped out.

You are looking at people that are hard-core street smart people. Right? And you put them in an environment like ours, the diversity is shocking enough and then the other aspect of not ever working or having so little experience. You sit them down with people of different colors, races and everything you could imagine, it's like they are scared to death. They are scared to death . . . The other thing you will find is they are angry and resentful. I have talked to several of the trainees and they say, "I don't belong here. This isn't where I belong." So you have got to get on the soap box and repeat, repeat, repeat, "Short Term. You are here to prove your skills, what you need to work on. This is short term. Your future is outside these doors, not here." Then all of a sudden they kind of kick back, relax and they look around and they stop feeling sorry for themselves and they look at other people and they go, wait a minute I don't have that bad of a life. And they started doing a little comparison. And the anger subsides.

When they first started they were shy and now they are like one of the gang here and they walk with their head up, they are proud of what they are doing. They want to work very, very badly here. They want to work very much in this agency and I'm trying everything I can to get them in here.

Overall, even though there have been times with some trainees when things have not run smoothly, the site supervisors have seen value in the program:

I think it's an excellent program. I think it's really hard to move into some of these positions when you haven't been active in the work world, and to gain experience to put on a resume, and to get some of the kinks worked out. [Name] is here early every day because there is so much work. I think having real work, and being really needed like [name] is, is important to the success of it. I think, I don't know, again a lot of what happens has to come from within the person. If they're motivated to make it happen, I think this is a really good program to give them the opportunities to get a good job.

It's just a great program. It gives them an opportunity to learn some skills.

Most Packaging First trainees enjoyed working at the site. This was especially true for the Limited English Proficient trainees who reported that this was their first job, or at least their first job in America. Some learned that they could work at a job and be successful. Others, who had worked before, found that Packaging First gave them a supportive place to learn the ins and outs of the American workplace.

I am gaining experience working. This was my first job. Just going in the morning and signing in the time was a new thing for me but now I know when I start to work I have to sign in. I am learning also to work with other different people.

I am really learning a lot. I have been working with other people. I have gained some experience. I have been working here for 8 months now. And I am ready to move on when they find me another job . . . They took me several places. I filled out some applications and I went to 709 and I filled an application and put it in the computer . . .

This is a place for me to start to work because I never worked and didn't know how to work. I never worked outside of the home before . . . At first I worried that I will not be able to do the job. Then I started and I learned it and now I can do it. (Translation)

I learn how to package and do the work and I think I got experience now where if I can go to a different work I have this skill. I really like working. And I really benefited from the experience. I was very bored at home staying home doing nothing. I felt worthless when I was

at home. But now at least I earn some money. Also I get some tax return from my work. And I really enjoy working. I really look forward to go to work. And I worry sometimes about if I'm going to miss the bus. I'm up in the morning and I pray and then I get ready and excited coming to work. What really makes it easier, it is really wonderful thing for me, is that I have Somali day care who lives in the same building. And she comes up to my house to pick up my kids and takes them so I don't worry that much . . . (Translation)

I learn a lot of job experience. I do different things and [when I] get a job outside from here I know what to expect. Because this job was my first time and I didn't know anything about American work . . . I benefited from the experience I gained here. [When I get a] different job it will be easier for me [because] I've seen it and I have had experience . . . I used to be a business person [in my home country] where I had a lot of groceries and a department store in back home. So I worked always, but in America this is my first job. (Translation)

I was really working very hard to get any job that doesn't require the language. I was told this job you will learn the language and you will also learn the skill to get a job . . . I didn't have any skill before. I learn to cooperate with people, to work with people, to understand people. I am learning a lot. I am hoping to get out of here, to get better job that pays better so I won't be dependent on the welfare. I want to get out of it and be self-sufficient . . . The experience I am getting from here is most important for me because I have never worked before. Now I have reference where I can say call that place. (Translation)

Although the statistical data suggest that Packaging First may not have been the best placement for English-speaking U.S. citizens, that was not true for all trainees. Some found the support they needed at this site. One described this support and how she is now ready to move on:

[When I first came here] to me it didn't look too important, like well, whatever. Just toss some junk in [packages]. But after the months went by I realized that they really have something going for themselves here. A lot of people come to them for them to package things for them. Or put things together for them. They have deadlines just like everybody else and things have to be done a certain way . . . I just thought it was just bring some stuff in, you work on it, and it goes out whenever it goes out. But it is a real job. [I thought], "It's just a training program." But it is a real job. This company really has a good reputation and they really take pride in what they do. And that kind of trickles down to you that you start feeling like, "Hey! Wow! We're doing things that are important to people." I mean, there are companies out there . . . products that you see out in the stores and you're the ones that package that and it makes you feel good sometimes seeing the stuff.

[The training specialist] helps me a lot. Like right now she's helping with my resume. She tells me things I need to know and that I don't [know]. She's always the one who says, "Just ask if you need to know something." I appreciate that, too, because I went through a lot of problems. I guess the reason why I was here so long because my baby-sitter had walked out on my kids . . . I had a big problem with that so I had to find child care again. And then I didn't have nowhere to [live] for three months . . . So I think that's why I've been here so long. You know, because my attendance wasn't right, and I can't get a good job with all that stuff going on. [The training specialist] was real supportive of that. My supervisor was real supportive of that. I just let them know what was going on. They respected me for that. And I told them when I could get here I would. And so now I can go on job search. And I respected them for letting me stay here because they could've booted me after the 6 months. They just told me, until you get stabilized you can stay here . . . I'm ready to move on.

Others talked about the various skills and insights into themselves that they have gained because of working at Packaging First:

What am I learning? I would say people skills, accepting differences in people and the job stresses patience. There are a lot of jobs up here and you can't really learn just one skill. There's so many different ones . . . But it's different, but it's good different. There's a lot of things that are bad different . . . I don't really have any disabilities or anything but you learn that just because somebody's different they're not bad different.

I'm learning that my skills are even better than what I thought it was. And I don't even know why I didn't have a job before. Because I'm fast at everything. I used to work, you know, a long time ago, I'm just as fast as I was then. And now I'm 50 years old, but I'm just as fast as I was from the beginning. My hand skills are even better than what they used to be. And getting to work on time, I found I am able to do that. I have a lot of children. . . and I thought it was going to be a big problem that I can't get the kids off to school and work all 8 hours and then come home, and take care of them and everybody else. But so far it hasn't been no problem . . .

SMM and Ramsey County trainees talked about skills, both hard and soft, that they were gaining from the program:

I'm learning more, even though I already know how to communicate, but doing more communication as far as with supervisors, speaking up as far as if there is a problem. In the past I used to just keep it to myself. So now they encourage, not just Lifetrack but at the Science Museum, too, if you have a problem with me, tell me, you can tell me, don't bite your tongue, tell me, and it won't hurt my feelings. I won't take it personally. So I'm learning more to communicate with them and also I'm getting more filing experience and the computer. I love the computer and I'm getting more and more familiar with it.

I'm learning things that are really valuable . . . being on time, being on time is definitely important . . . I think I was kind of relaxed more when I first came here . . . Not really relaxed, but I was . . . 5 or 10 minutes late. And they said it was not a problem, but if they were to hire me really, that would be a problem. So they're letting us fumble through our little mishaps, and they're telling us where our strengths and our weaknesses [are]. I got a great review just yesterday from my supervisor.

The best thing about working here are the opportunities that they give me . . . I've never seen a company that's so willing to help you. If you need some typing test they've got a room set up for you, if you want to take your lunch hour [to practice] you can go type more . . .

I'm not going to lie to you and tell you I was expecting a whole lot out of the program, because I didn't know what to expect from the program. I was just going through, to be honest, to keep my family out of sanction and keep my family within the guidelines . . . They can hold your hand so far and then after you've been introduced you got to go out into the world and scavenge for your own food. It's not like they just are outcasting you, sending you out there, they gave you all these skills and abilities to use and they say you got it, now use it, and that's what we did . . .

I've been learning the state system and the way things run around here, the do's and the don'ts, like at every job. I didn't have any exposure to the MAXIS system, which unless you work here, no one does, but I had maybe a little bit of Out Look and Windows and stuff like that, but it wasn't anything major like it is now . . . We got screens that we have to flip through, different screens, different programs, Reader, Fiver, MAXIS, Prime, Social Security, it's just lots of different systems that we go through . . . It's a well worth experience.

My patience is more . . . That's in every job, your job, my job, every job, you're going to run across people that you are going to have to, you need patience with, . . . I respond to it, but not in the same manner as I used to. I'm more subtle, whereas I used to go flying off the handle. I don't do that at all any more . . . I was tired of having headaches because I was stressing myself out so bad. I didn't want to deal with it because I was frustrated, but I dealt with it. I just grasped that thing differently. Now if somebody says something to me that I find wrong, I won't fly off the handle and get to swearing and all that. I just look at them and ask them what their next question is. I just blow it off and go along about my day.

I picked up a lot more customer service because I have to deal with a lot of clients here over the phone or just guiding them to the direction they are trying to go. Also, I learned how you as a coworker could be valuable to the company because when you're not here it could really put a strain on the other workers for the work that has to be done . . .

## **In Summary**

The strengths and weaknesses of Advancement Plus were talked about in a recent interview. The words seem to capture that this is still a work-in-progress and that in terms of contracts and policies the model will need to continue to evolve. In the interview quoted below an individual pointed out the toll it takes on a staff under constant pressure to help trainees who are often so heavily burdened:

A weakness perhaps lies in still being in our infancy. Even though we are in our third year that still means it's a very young program, a very young program that is taking place during a lot of change in the TANF arena in general. So as the labor market has left us with a TANF population that's heavily barriered, I think the TANF Federal guidelines and State guidelines are in a state of flux. A young program during that state of flux is fragile. There's a certain fragility to it. Simply the combination of the age of the program and the condition of the arena.

Turnover in the staff is a weakness. I think it's a hard program. I think to try to support the staff and support them more is certainly a goal coming out of a weakness. The population as it stands now in Ramsey County is such that we've been very successful in getting people into competitive employment who have been able to. And the people that we have remaining are very challenging for our staff and I sometimes don't know how they manage to get through the day.

Certainly the factors that have promoted the success and limited the success are probably the same thing. The commitment in the staff has been greatly involved in leading to success and the turnover in the staff has been greatly involved in limiting it. If we could have had continuity of staffing and continuity of our learning I think we could have gone further.

Some very great things have happened in terms of good things leading to success. I think the legislature appropriation of dollars specifically for supported work was a very, very good thing. The weakness attachment to that was that they said that everyone using those dollars had to be at 52 months or more of public assistance and I think that's been a detriment in many ways. It's been a detriment because people are long term and they have a lot of barriers and a lot of habits and I wish we could be able to use those dollars for anyone and not just people who are at 52 months. It's a short time to try to turn around 35 years of habits and factors and undiscovered barriers.

Certainly Ramsey County coming forward with the temporary employment line-item dollars was a great help and I think we need to make that happen and happen in other departments.

## **What Role Did Advancement Plus Play in Influencing Views of Transitional Jobs Programs?**

The evaluation was to address:

Did this project play a role in influencing the perceptions and acceptance of work experience as a tool in making progress for people who are hard to employ?

The data regarding the number of ways information about Advancement Plus was disseminated, the number of newspaper, magazine and radio and television news stories on Advancement Plus and its trainees, the fact that local, state and national government officials are seeking information about and from Advancement Plus appear to lend support for the answer to this question being that the project has played a role in helping individuals understand the value of transitional jobs as well as helping them understand the barriers that trainees face. Presentations regarding the learnings from the Advancement Plus program were made at four national conferences, a local policy makers forum, in 11 meetings with local, state and national policy makers as well as in a presentation to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Safety and Training.

National and local media coverage of the program included articles in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, and *The New York Times* as well as a series on Minnesota Public Radio and a feature on WFTC-TV News. One of the three articles included in the full report was published May 29, 2002, in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. This editorial by David Hage, who first came in contact with Advancement Plus during the 2001 Policy Makers Forum at Lifetrack Resources, presents the position that places like Packaging First should "be part of the package when congress reauthorizes its welfare-to-work law":

May 29, 2002

*Minneapolis Star Tribune.*

Editorial: Transitional jobs / Hope for the hardest cases  
by David Hage  
Fourth of five editorials.

At a nondescript warehouse off Plato Boulevard in St. Paul one recent afternoon, about 100 workers seated at tables and benches were packaging shampoo, bath salts, small electronics and other consumer items. It could have been any factory in Minnesota, except for the range of services that employees receive: bus rides to work, shop-floor translators, flexible work schedules and a supervisory ratio six times higher than normal.

Packaging First and places like it once were called sheltered workshops for the disabled, but today they can play a key role in welfare reform: helping the most disadvantaged welfare recipients make the transition to work. They should be part of the package when Congress reauthorizes its welfare-to-work law this summer.

In the six years since Congress overhauled welfare and gave it a new employment focus, states have found that perhaps two-thirds of recipients could find jobs easily enough. But another third have struggled, despite the system's relentless get-a-job message. Now states are finding out why. A recent study by Lifetrack Resources, a St. Paul nonprofit serving Ramsey County welfare recipients, found that among the neediest families, barriers to work are daunting: 59 percent have a physical disability or a mental impairment; 47 percent speak little or no English; 40 percent have never held a job, and 25 percent are victims of domestic violence.

These were the hidden families in the old welfare system, and few employers will hire them. Moving them into the workplace will take more than a bus pass and a few hours in job club.

As states and counties began coping with these families, they turned to an old device -- "supported work" environments such as Packaging First. Four states and more than 30 cities now use some variation on the strategy. They typically test clients for job skills and disabilities, provide supervision and training, then help clients find permanent jobs when their temporary assignments are done.

Such programs are expensive -- they can cost \$8,000 per client, versus the \$1,000 that a Minnesota county might spend helping a typical welfare client find work. But they work. A recent study by Mathematica Policy Research in Washington, D.C., found that, while not all clients complete their transitional jobs, 80 to 90 percent of the ones who graduate obtain unsubsidized employment, a performance that rivals the best welfare-to-work programs.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., wants Congress to set aside about \$2 billion over the next five years to support these transitional jobs programs, and he's right. The new federal system of temporary assistance asks why certain families couldn't seem to leave welfare. Now that it has found out why, it should help them transcend the barriers.

The results of advocacy included:

- An appropriation of TANF reserve funds by the 2000 Minnesota State Legislature designated for paid work experience.
- Lifetrack Resource's funding for the Advancement Plus program was increased for the 2002 to 2003 program year.
- Language from the 2002 Update regarding the barriers trainees face was included in the Chance to Succeed Act, a U.S. Senate bill introduced by Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone.

The evaluators sought input from the National Transitional Jobs Network regarding the role Advancement Plus had played in helping others learn of the value of transitional jobs. A collective response was received from Annette Case, of Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI); Tiana Wertheim, Consultant to the Transitional Jobs Network Program; and Steve Savner, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). They cited the following outcomes as tangible demonstrations of the role that Advancement Plus, along with others, has played in helping policy makers come to understand the potential of transitional jobs:

- Advancement Plus has maintained funding in times of state budget shortfalls. The Minnesota state legislature allocated dollars for statewide expansion of transitional jobs programs. Minnesota also passed legislation requiring a transitional jobs placement for individuals facing TANF time limits.

- Funding for national grants for a minimum of \$80 million dollars for transitional jobs has been passed as part of the Senate Finance Committee TANF reauthorization "Work Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids Act".

It appears that the Advancement Plus project has played a role in helping local, state and national leaders understand the value of transitional jobs. It has also played a role, although not one originally intended, in helping others understand the stories of those who are receiving assistance and the barriers to employment they face.

## **What Is the Promise of the Advancement Plus Model?**

### **Outcomes as Compared with Other Transitional Jobs Programs**

One of the questions asked when the 2001 Preliminary Report (Stockdill et al. 2001) and the 2002 Update (Stockdill et al. 2002) were disseminated was how the Advancement Plus program compared in outcomes with other transitional jobs programs. Advancement Plus placement rates were higher (61%) than for three and lower than one of the four transitional jobs programs (the range was from 48% to 70%) in the Mathematica study (Kirby et al. 2002, p. 62). This level of success was found even though it might be argued that Advancement Plus trainees faced more barriers. As revealed earlier in this report:

When compared with participants in the study conducted by Mathematica Policy Research (Kirby et al. 2002), Advancement Plus also served a primarily female clientele in their 30s. Advancement Plus was similar to GoodWorks! (Georgia) and TWC (Pennsylvania) in that all served a population with lower levels of education. Advancement Plus served the largest percentage of trainees over 39 years old, served the most diverse population, and served trainees with larger families (median family size was 5).

Mathematica also calculated the percentage of successful completers, defined as "those who do not drop out" (Kirby et al. 2002, p. 59), placed in unsubsidized employment. Once again Advancement Plus was well within the range found in the other programs; Advancement Plus had 91% of the successful completers placed in unsubsidized jobs. The range for the four other transitional jobs programs with data in the Mathematica study was 81% to 94%.

Mathematica had access to data for median hourly wage for four of the six programs. GoodWorks! (Georgia) and TWC (Pennsylvania) had data regarding percentage with health benefits (Kirby et al. 2002, p. 62). The data indicate that Advancement Plus compared favorably with the programs in terms of median hourly wage and percentage with health benefits. Advancement Plus trainees were placed in unsubsidized jobs with a median hourly wage of \$8.00. The four other transitional jobs programs with known data ranged in median hourly wage from \$5.75 to \$9.00. A little over half (58%) of the Advancement Plus trainees were placed in jobs with benefits, whereas GoodWorks! placed 47% and TWC placed 53%.

Cost per program participant was examined by Mathematica (Kirby et al. 2002). The results of that study are provided here as a basis of comparison; however, without a true cost descriptive study where the same elements are gathered for each program, including such costs as facilities and value of volunteers such as Work Partners, this data should be used with caution. The Mathematica study reported an average cost per participant ranging from \$2,011 for Community Jobs, Tacoma, Washington to \$14,406 for GoodWorks! Augusta, Georgia (Kirby et al. 2002, p. 49). Advancement Plus administrators reported a cost per participant of \$8,000, a cost that is within the range of the six transitional jobs programs in the Mathematica study.

### **The Promise of the Lifetrack Resource's Advancement Plus Model**

Advancement Plus wanted to demonstrate the effectiveness of a paid work experience for persons moving from welfare dependency to work. They have been successful in serving individuals with multiple barriers, not selecting only those most likely to succeed.

Consider that of the 189 trainees:

- Only 29% (54) had reached the 12th grade and 36% (68) had no formal education.
- Most (69%, 130) were single parents.
- The number of children under the age of 18 years in the family ranged from 1 to 10 with 74% (140) having 2 or more children.
- 95% (180) had no significant work history (worked fewer than 13 consecutive weeks out of the last 12 months in a full-time, unsubsidized job).
- 40% (75) had never had a job outside the home before starting with Advancement Plus.
- 41% (79) had previously held two or more jobs.

Many of the 189 trainees came to Advancement Plus with a number of issues and potential barriers to employment:

- 61% (115) had a learning or physical disability or mental illness and/or took care of disabled family members.
- 68% (128) had a learning or physical disability, physical limitation, mental illness and/or took care of a disabled, ill, or incapacitated family member.

- 70% (132) used the bus as their primary or only mode of transportation.
- 47% (89) had limited English skills.
- 45% (85) had a housing crisis during the time they were enrolled with Advancement Plus. In addition, 24% (45) missed work because of housing issues, 31% (58) moved during the time spent with Advancement Plus and 15% (28) were homeless, with 21 of these living in a shelter.
- 27% (51) were ex-offenders and of these, 11 had been convicted of a felony, 16% (31) had a family member who was an ex-offender.
- 25% (49) were victims of domestic violence.
- 18% (34) had chemical dependency.
- 16% (30) had a crisis with a school-age child. When sick-child care and no preschool-age child care were included, there were 36% (68) who had a child care issue during the time they worked with Advancement Plus.

In 2001 EnSearch concluded,

"The model holds promise for helping individuals with significant and multiple barriers transition from welfare to work or to a more appropriate type of assistance."

That conclusion still appears to have validity.

The promise of the model is seen in the 161 (85%) who had reached some level of success as of December 2001:

- 67 (35%) were employed in a transitional job at Packaging First, SMM, or Ramsey County,
- 45 (24%) were employed in unsubsidized employment,
- 22 (12%) were active in job search,
- 20 (11%) were terminated because of doctors' orders or because they were reassigned to SSI for reasons such as psychosis, borderline personality disorder, or severe PTSD,
- 2 (1%) were successfully following a domestic violence safety plan,
- 4 (2%) were given a hardship extension to care for an ill, incapacitated or disabled family member, and 1 (<1%) was exempted from employment because of age guidelines.

Twelve (6%) moved out of Ramsey County and could not receive the full benefit of the program.

Fifteen (8%) were unsuccessful:

- 2 (1%) were in sanction,
- 1 (<1%) qualified for a one-time exemption to care for a child under 1 year,
- 12 (6%) were "Off Welfare." Many would categorize this as a success, however, in most of these 12 cases the designation seemed less than successful.
  - \* one was off welfare because she gave up custody of her children,
  - \* one was off welfare because she returned to drugs and her whereabouts was unknown,
  - \* one was off welfare because she needed immediate inpatient care but her whereabouts became unknown before she could receive this help,
  - \* two were told they were off welfare because the child in their home had reached age 18 and they thought this meant that they could not receive additional help and it appears they did not receive help with the transition to general assistance,
  - \* one gave up custody of her children so she could return to Somalia and locate the children she had left behind,
  - \* one was off welfare for failing to comply with the employment plan she was following under the guidance of a lawyer who told her that "working" would hurt her chances with SSI,
  - \* one was classified as off welfare and the last contact with her indicated that she was unable to work because of injuries received in a car accident. (The circumstances are not totally clear because case notes indicated she was off welfare and the Ramsey County administrative database showed her as off welfare, yet an explanation was not given as to why she was not classified instead as incapacitated),
  - \* one was told in error that she could no longer be on MFIP,
  - \* one decided not to return to MFIP because, "I don't want to deal with job counselors or sanctions any more."
  - \* the circumstances regarding why the other two were classified as off welfare was unknown.

What is the promise of the Advancement Plus experience? It holds promise for victims of domestic violence as well as individuals who need work experience, individuals who need advanced work placement, individuals with previously undiagnosed disabilities, Limited English Proficient individuals, and individuals with multiple barriers.

**Promise for Victims of Domestic Violence.** The following story of an active Advancement Plus trainee shows how she went from being battered to having her own apartment, furniture, dishes, and children who can now talk about their mom at work.

I know when I go out for another job in the city it's not going to be like this. They're not going to help you get to work, give you bus cards and all this other kind of stuff. I get butterflies thinking about [the next job]. I'm pretty excited about it . . . I can at least say, hey, I stayed at this job for 6 months. I've did my best obviously, hardly missed no days, late a few times . . . When I really think about [what] my job counselor was telling me about the job, she said it's a training. I said, okay. She said it's 6 months and I'm like, what's that for, training for 6 months? . . . training for 6 months, I thought, was pretty long. Well, once that I got here and got to work it's just like it just passed me by . . . For the first probably 3 months I went I was scared of being late and that, it took the extra 2 to 3 months to get me straight. So now the next job, I'm going to be more prepared . . . What has this job done for me? Just prepared me to go out into, it's a big world.

[It helps your relationship with your kids] they're like, oh mom, you was at work . . . It's like, ya, my mom's at work, you know. That's a lot for them to be saying. But to me, that my son knows your mom ain't lazy, she will go out there and work for you all.

. . . now I can't do it, I can't go home and sit at home. Because I slept until 12 or 1 o'clock on the weekend. I'm up at 6 o'clock right now and so I'm just a whole kind of different person . . . I'm just thankful for the opportunity that they gave me, the opportunity to come here for 6 months . . . I did the right thing by coming here.

I've been battered so I have changed a lot to even get to this point . . . I didn't feel that much because I thought, OK, I can't get a job . . . But now it's just like ain't no stopping me. I got responsibilities and I've done my training. All I can think about is I need a better paying job. Because now if I get a better paying job I'm climbing, I'm going higher and higher. I don't care if it's 50 cents extra more or a dollar extra more, I feel like I accomplished something . . . It changed my life. I just feel so much better and just so secure now . . . It's important for them to share those more with people, the kinds of things that are stories of different people and what they've gotten through going through Lifetrack . . . that'll make a person feel like, wow, I can do it. She was on welfare, too, and she just did it . . .

I went from having nothing to an apartment, you know, with furniture. It's not the best but it's furniture. You have beds, you know. You have dishes . . . So it's just like, hey, I did do something and in this 6 months it took me, I'm ready.

**Promise for Individuals Who Need Work Experience.** A trainee referred to the program by another vendor talked about searching for a job and no one hiring her and how she begged her job counselor to let her come to Advancement Plus because she needed to find out if she could get up every morning and make it to work.

... Why am I getting out of bed for \$6 an hour? ... It's a very good program. I'd recommend it. It's a very good program.

I didn't think I could be able to get out of bed and make it here every morning. I didn't think I was going to make it here for the first day. But after the first day, after I got here, I found it wasn't hard. I could do it. I'm like, I should've done it 15 years ago . . . Why did I wait so long. I can do this. I can do this. Why was I at home? . . . I believe it was because everybody told me . . . You don't want to work. How do you know I don't want to work? I [believed] nobody would hire me . . . I had a big fear that I couldn't make it. I didn't think I was going to make it, but my counselor, she had all the faith in me in the world . . . I was like, I can't find a job. [She wasn't sure Advancement Plus was the right program for me because I already had skills.] I was like [name], I can't find a job. If I go over there to the program at least I can see if I can get up and make it to work a whole week at a time. Can I, can I do it? Can I make it down those stair steps every morning with some motivation saying, I'm going to work, and make it here. I need to find that out.

She was able to make it to work 88% of the time. The days she missed were because of a rental housing meeting scheduled during work time, ill children, a car accident, her car breaking down and, with staff approval, searching for a job. Before Advancement Plus, this trainee was always in compliance -- going to MFIP meetings and searching for a job -- but found that no one would hire her.

I would go to my meetings, to MFIP, and I would look for work but nobody was hiring me. [My job counselor] couldn't see why nobody's hiring me. They don't want to give me a chance. I knew if I got a chance that I would be able to do it. Nobody just didn't want to give me a chance. But now I got the chance . . . I get to say, "I worked here before."

I'm motivated now. I'm going to get to where I need to go . . . That's what it was, the first step. That's what I told my job counselors, that's all I wanted was the first step.

She learned a lot about herself in the program and she was hired at \$8.00 hour at an assembly plant.

**Promise for Individuals who Need Advanced Work Placement.** Of the six who were first placed at the Ramsey County site, three obtained unsubsidized employment, one had to have surgery, two went on for additional computer training. One of those started at Packaging First and went to the Ramsey County site to be successful. She spent 1,606.25 hours in Advancement Plus and went from attending 75% of the time at the Packaging First site to 90% attendance once she began the Ramsey County orientation and work experience.

She became an employee of Ramsey County. Her story was printed in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (Beckstrom 2001).

It's 5:30 on a Friday afternoon, and [name] is exhausted. The single mother rose early that day, got her 3-year-old daughter . . . and 8-year-old son . . . ready for the day, and then hurried them to the bus stop for the family's long bus ride to [her daughter's] day-care program. After she dropped off [her daughter], she walked her son to his nearby before-school day-care program, and finally walked to her temporary clerical internship for Ramsey County in downtown St. Paul. It is her last day in the position, and she is worried about finding a permanent job.

The road out of hard times began recently, when [she] became involved with Lifetrack Resources, a St. Paul-based organization that is helping her get off welfare. Through that program, [she] gained work experience at a packaging and assembly operation. But [she] found the temporary assembly-line job unfulfilling, and often volunteered to do clerical work for the company. It was when Lifetrack got her an internship with Ramsey County -- doing clerical work -- that her attitude toward life changed.

"I loved my job -- I had something to look forward to," [she] said. "I liked working and earning my own money for once, and getting a chance to talk to other adults instead of kids all day."

[She] was sad about leaving her job, but got good news early Monday morning: she was offered a full-time position with Ramsey County in the mail room. She started her new job that same day. "I'm excited," she said. "Now I have something to look forward to every day. I'll have my own salary. It means independence."

Her story was posted by United Way as one of the success stories of United Way-funded agencies. In that she talked about the support she received from the program staff, especially the JobPartner mentor, and her move from the mail room to the clerical job in the Family Case Management Department:

. . . My job counselor connected me with Lifetrack Resources, a United Way partner agency, where I enrolled in the [Advancement Plus] Program. They helped me determine what kind of job I might like and succeed at, write my resume and interview successfully. They also gave me the confidence I needed to get back in the workforce.

As part of the program, I worked at Lifetrack's packaging and assembly plant, and then obtained a six-month clerical internship at Ramsey County . . . my Lifetrack counselor continued to coach and support me.

I also joined Lifetrack's JobPartner Mentor Program. It was just starting, and there were about six of us. Now, just two years later, our group is almost 30. I talk with my mentor . . . every week. I tell her how my week went with my job and also talk about my life with my kids. I share their successes, and sometimes, how tough being a single parent is. It's really nice to have someone to just listen to me. There are also monthly meetings addressing issues such as budgeting, parenting skills and how to find community resources.

When my internship ended in December, I got a permanent job in the mail room. Just a few weeks later, the clerical job in the Family Case Management Department opened up. I'm now earning enough that I'm able to save money, and work towards purchasing a car.

As this report was being prepared, it was learned that another trainee placed at Ramsey County in Winter 2002 was hired by the county full time with benefits.

**Promise for Individuals with Previously Undiagnosed Disabilities.** Advancement Plus holds promise for individuals with previously undiagnosed disabilities. One's story was featured in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in April 2002:

[Name] couldn't keep a job, but it wasn't for lack of trying. As a janitor, she confused the portions when mixing cleaning solutions. As a cashier at a fast-food restaurant, she got flustered during the fast-paced rush hours. School had been a struggle, too. She repeated kindergarten, dropped out after ninth grade and couldn't master the basic skills necessary to earn a General Equivalency Diploma.

Finally, a few months ago, she was given a reason for her troubles. She has learning disabilities and a low IQ that had gone undiagnosed for years. The severity of her problems qualified her for Supplemental Security Income, a welfare program funded by the Social Security Administration to support physically and mentally disabled children and adults. The new federal benefits came just in time, a few months before she would face the loss of state welfare payments this summer.

"I felt relief because, I was like, now I know why," said [name], 24, an earnest single mother who is still determined to get a job. "Before I would push myself so hard and couldn't do it."

As the first Minnesota welfare recipients approach their five-year limit on welfare this summer, a small group of parents like [name] are trading one form of public assistance for another. No one knows exactly yet how many people in the Minnesota Family Investment Program will be accepted into the federal Supplemental Security Income program. But welfare planners are watching closely . . .

It is too early to say what will happen to [name] as she moves onto SSI. During the transition, she is still seeing her Minnesota Family Investment Program job counselor at Lifetrack Resources in St. Paul. The counselor hooked her up with an occupational therapist to help her sort out her finances and get some overdue bills under control.

This summer, [name] will finish a six-month training position at the Ramsey County Records Department, filing documents and learning some basic secretarial skills. She is also getting accustomed to the idea that she has a disability and needs some extra time to master new skills. In some ways, knowing about her limitations has only made her more determined to get a job.

"I hope I can get another county job later on or in the future," [name] said. "Like I said, I don't mind working. Hopefully I can just keep a job."

As this report was being prepared, it was learned that MFIP staff were working with the job developer to find a part-time job that would supplement this trainee's SSI benefits and provide a reasonable accommodation for her learning disabilities.

**Promise for Limited English Proficient Individuals.** Although language for Limited English Proficient trainees is a significant barrier, the statistical data showed that Advancement Plus holds promise for them as well. Most were classified as either successfully employed or successful -- more appropriate placement. Two beat the odds in that the discriminant analysis classified them as "unsuccessful" and yet both overcame the LEP barrier, as well as multiple other barriers, to become and remain successfully employed. Their stories follow:

This trainee was a refugee from Somalia. She worked with Advancement Plus for two months and during that time she was present 35 days, absent 12, present 74% of the time scheduled. She was a member of a two-parent household. They had one child three years old. She had reached the 12th grade in Somalia and had been on welfare for only a short time, 26 months. This trainee faced a number of barriers, 5 personal, 1 family, 2 housing, (a total of 8). She used the bus, had no significant work history, was LEP, missed work because of sick-child care as well as major medical issues, had a housing crisis during her short time with Advancement Plus. The training specialist helped her locate housing. The discriminant analysis predicted that she would be classified as "Successful -- More Appropriate Placement." However, she overcame the barriers, was employed in November of 2000 and retained employment through December of 2001, the end of the study.

This Somali woman was with the program only a short time, 2 months. She obtained a job with help of the Advancement Plus staff in August 2001 and continued to be employed through December 2001 at \$8.25 an hour, plus benefits. Given the number of barriers she faced, she could have been predicted to be "unsuccessful", however, it appears she overcame those and is making progress. She had 5 personal barriers, 1 family barrier, 0 housing barriers, a total of 6 barriers. She was a victim of domestic violence, had no U.S. education but had 12 years of education in Somalia. She was a single parent caring for 4 children, the youngest being 10 years old, and two over the age of 18. She had no significant work history and had been unemployed for at least 26 weeks before starting with Advancement Plus. She had held three jobs in Somalia. She did not move during the time she spent with Advancement Plus or MFIP. She had two MFIP financial workers and one job counselor during the 43 months on the MFIP grant.

**Promise for Individuals with Multiple Barriers.** Advancement Plus does hold promise for individuals with multiple barriers. Several stand out as having beat the odds against them. The stories of the ex-offenders were told earlier in this report. The story of another individual who succeeded through determination and the assistance of many people follows:

This trainee started working with Advancement Plus in Spring 2001. She had been on welfare 120 months, and had used 45 of her 60 TANF months. She worked at an Advancement Plus Level 3 site. She was present 151 days, absent 14 days for a 92% attendance rate. She had been sanctioned once during the time on MFIP for 10%, had 5 MFIP Financial Workers. This single mother with 3 children, the youngest 3 years old, had a number of barriers to overcome. She had 7 personal barriers, 1 family barrier, 1 housing barrier, for a total of 9 barriers. These included being a victim of domestic violence, living in a battered women's shelter, being an ex-offender, missing work for a major medical issue, using the bus as her only mode of transportation, having no significant work history, having held eight jobs before starting with Advancement Plus but never being able to hold onto one for any length of time. She received help from Advancement Plus staff in a number of areas including finding housing, work readiness preparation, and finding a job. She was matched with a mentor whom she met with once a week. She found a job and had it for 2 months at the time data were collected for this report. When asked about the Advancement Plus program she said, "I really appreciate them allowing me to be in the program. The [best]

thing about working here is you are getting hands-on work experience. Doing real time work here. It's helping a lot to learn all the different things here." Her dreams? She said, "To own a home and car and to have my own business. I [want] to be the best role model I can to my children. I love and respect them." She obtained a job at \$11.00 an hour, plus benefits.

There has been success and now as the model continues to be stabilized, there is even greater potential for important contributions to state and national strategies in this time of welfare reform.

## **Policy Implications**

In the public debate and as Advancement Plus staff and its partners work on the next steps, these barriers need specific attention:

- As Advancement Plus staff and the public-at-large continue to hold as a goal a successful transition from welfare to employment, effort is needed to create bridges to employment. In a strong economy with low unemployment, finding the next-step job is manageable; however, with the downturn in the economy the task became more difficult, especially for individuals with multiple barriers.
- The most recent data suggest that many served in MFIP have significant physical and learning disabilities and mental illness or that they are responsible for family members with significant physical and learning disabilities and mental illness. Questions regarding a trainee's ability to retain competitive employment arose in a number of cases. For example, one trainee obtained an assembly job at \$8.50 per hour but was accepted back into the Advancement Plus program when, according to the job developer, the "employer felt she did not work fast enough and terminated her." Learning and psychological assessments indicated that many of the TANF recipients may be more appropriately served by SSI or that they are in need of support through staff such as occupational therapists, supportive work sites such as adaptations of the sheltered workshop concept, or reasonable accommodations as called for by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The disability data raises the issue of the impact that the addition of this population will have on rehabilitation system.
- Data point to the critical importance of strengthening language skills of LEP trainees if the goal is to transition them into unsubsidized employment. Creative solutions such as intensive work place literacy programs are needed. These programs would need to go beyond the traditional pull-out classes to make the work site, especially the transitional work site, a place where intensive, English-language immersion can take place. Every task should be seen as an opportunity to teach and to learn English.
- Most individuals less likely to succeed had a housing crisis. The fact that one third of the Advancement Plus trainees moved every 6

months is startling. It is impossible to know the impact these moves have had on children. Most trainees who did not move lived in public housing. Creative solutions need to be examined by the public-at-large, solutions that go beyond addressing the housing stability issue to considering ways to stabilize the schooling for children. St. Paul Public School's magnet program assures that once a child is admitted into a magnet school, that becomes their home school; then, no matter where their families move, transportation is provided to that school. Lifetrack Resources has begun to ensure that all MFIP staff are aware of this option to help stabilize the schooling for children.

- The 2001 report pointed out that for many trainees the lack of public transportation was a significant barrier. In public discussions about welfare reform, lack of public transportation has often been mentioned. Several staff wondered if providing transportation would hurt the trainees as taking public transportation is a skill they need to learn. However, the harsh realities of the parents dealing with children, school, day care, long distances, and infrequent and inconvenient bus runs would suggest that providing transportation during this developmental stage might encourage success. Creative solutions can be explored, one perhaps being on-site drivers' education and practice.
- Difficulty in obtaining day care for pre-school children, sick-child care, and care for school-age children in crisis situations continues to be a barrier. Single mothers are especially vulnerable. School-age child care is an issue that Advancement Plus, and MFIP as a whole, has yet to address. There are implications for public schools as well. Policies that call for suspension from school to the parents' care is problematic and conflicts with the goal of transitioning from welfare to unsubsidized employment. There are cases, not only from Advancement Plus, where a single parent who obtained employment failed to retain employment because s/he was pulled out of work too many times because of sick or troubled children. One approach may be to explore if an in-school suspension program may be an effective solution.
- Many trainees have chemical dependencies, domestic violence issues or mental illness, including post traumatic stress disorder. The 2000 report revealed that chemical dependency was most present in individuals who were unsuccessful. Screening tools and approaches must be found that will uncover these issues early in the TANF experience. It appears that one of the best strategies for uncovering these, and hidden disabilities, may be transitional jobs where individuals are seen on a daily basis.

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