

MARYLAND RISE:  
A FIRST LOOK AT PARTICIPANTS,  
ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES

CORRENE SAUNDERS, PH.D.  
PROJECT DIRECTOR

NICK KOLUPANOWICH, MS  
RESEARCH ANALYST

CATHERINE E. BORN, PH.D.  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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For additional information about the report or the study, please contact Dr. Catherine Born at the School of Social Work (410.706.5134, [cborn@ssw.umaryland.edu](mailto:cborn@ssw.umaryland.edu)) or Letitia Logan (410.706.2479; [llogan@ssw.umaryland.edu](mailto:llogan@ssw.umaryland.edu)). For more information about welfare reform in Maryland, please contact Ms. Rosemary Malone at the Department of Human Resources (410.767.7949, [rmalone@dhr.state.md.us](mailto:rmalone@dhr.state.md.us)).

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For a variety of reasons, Maryland has weathered the so-called Great Recession and its aftermath better than many other states. Even so, many state residents have experienced adverse economic effects, including but certainly not limited to job loss, long-term unemployment, under-employment, and reduction in hours or hourly wage. Perhaps the most telling indicator of the recession's widespread reach is the fact that in Maryland, as elsewhere in the nation, the number of people receiving aid from the means-tested Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) has been at record high levels. Similarly, Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) caseloads, in general decline since the mid-1990s, also have risen, rates of returns to welfare after an exit have crept upward, and rapid exits from welfare are less common. More generally, states have struggled for several years now with significant fiscal challenges on both the revenue and expenditure sides of their ledgers, paralysis in Congress continues, and prognoses for the national economy remain mixed.

These have been and remain troubled times. Much to their credit, elected and appointed Maryland officials, although facing large-scale budgetary issues and recessionary sequelae, have not forgotten about our state's struggling families, particularly those involved in 'welfare-to-work' programs. Despite the greater degree of difficulty now present for virtually all job-seekers, Maryland has not shied away from raising the bar for how success is measured in the world of welfare and employment assistance. Drawing on the insights and help of local employers, educators, and charitable organizations, the state implemented a new initiative, RISE (Reaching Independence and Stability through Employment). RISE is intended to be a collaborative initiative that expands traditional notions of "work-first" case management and presents a new

benchmark that not only considers the quantity of job placements made, but also their quality.

Today's report is the first in a series that describes various aspects of the RISE initiative and the persons placed in a work activity in the RISE era. Specifically, this report presents a foundational overview using administrative data and a sample of more than 10,000 individuals who began an organized work activity between January 2009 and June 2010. The sample includes individuals from the three RISE target groups:

1. Work-eligible Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) caseheads;
2. Teens and young adults aging out of foster care; and
3. Non-custodial parents taking part in the Non-custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP).

This first-ever RISE report hopes to achieve several objectives. The first is to paint a picture of the demographic characteristics, employment, earnings, and program participation histories of the individuals included in the RISE initiative. The second is to describe the number and type of work activities – and the outcomes of those activities – as these are documented in the administrative data. Last, but not least, we hope to offer some useful 'food for thought' to policymakers, program administrators and case managers who are involved with RISE or, more generally, with welfare-to-work programs and programming in our state. Major findings are highlighted below.

**The three target groups (TCA adults, foster teens, non-custodial parents) are all served by RISE and, more generally, by the Department of Human Resources, but have quite distinct demographic characteristics, program utilization patterns, and employment experiences. Thus, tailored, rather than one-size-fits-all, approaches are most likely to succeed.**

Almost by definition we would expect the demographic profiles of the three groups to differ because, in Maryland, work-eligible TCA adults are overwhelmingly female, youth aging out of foster care are in their late teens or early 20s, and the overwhelming majority of non-custodial parents are men. It is also not surprising that differences are found in welfare use and employment as well. Aging-out foster youth, to illustrate, are younger and more likely to be male than TCA clients in our sample. The foster youth have little work experience, but show strong work participation effort as they enter adulthood. Non-custodial parents are mostly male, are least likely to qualify for income support program benefits, and have substantial child support obligations. These RISE participants tend to have work experience, but their work participation and wages tend to be stagnant over time. Finally, work-eligible TCA participants are predominantly females, and many have very young children. They tend to use a broader network of income support services than either foster youth or non-custodial parents, and they also tend to have strong work experience. Over time, however, work participation and earnings among the TCA group tend to be less than those among the NPEP group. The diversity among target groups is acknowledged in the RISE initiative which encourages flexibility in the specific partnerships that local social services offices form with their community partners. Sharing of best practices from around the state is also encouraged but with the caveat that, because of intra-state diversity, efforts that prove successful in

one area may not necessarily be equally successful elsewhere unless adapted to meet local conditions.

**A broad range of work activities are documented in the administrative data, but federally-defined “core” activities directly focused on employment are most prevalent. Concurrent assignment to multiple activities is fairly common, barriers to work are not uncommon among TCA clients, and outcomes are difficult to assess with the WORKS data.**

A diverse array of activities was recorded for work-eligible TCA clients and NPEP participants in the WORKS database. These included everything from having a long-term disability, caring for a very young child, experiencing a family crisis or childcare breakdown, to having unsubsidized employment. The two most commonly recorded activities, however, were job search/readiness and work experience, both of which are federally-defined core activities and, provided certain hours of participation are met, are included in federal work participation rate calculations. Nearly three of every four clients (73.2%) took part in one or the other (or both) of these activities on at least one occasion during our study period. Most commonly, clients were recorded as assigned to two activities simultaneously (32.1%). About one in four had a single activity and about one in five had three. Notably, although RISE is targeted to TCA clients who are work-eligible, a significant minority are documented as having barriers to employment, most notably temporary illness/disability or lack of access to childcare. We also conducted several different analyses of WORKS activity completion rates and completion status codes, but the meaning and programmatic utility of these data are difficult to determine. This is because many coding options overlap and/or are not well-defined or prioritized; most generally speaking, the current coding scheme appears to violate

the “all inclusive, but mutually exclusive” rule.

**The WORKS database was structured with federal work participation rate calculations and reporting in mind. It may serve that purpose adequately, but it is not well-suited or sufficient for tracking individual clients’ activities, progress and outcomes over time. Prospects for this type of client-level tracking should be greatly improved once the Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA) tool is in place and/or if supplemental data from CARES and MABS are obtained.**

Achieving mandated federal work participation rate requirements is not optional because neither our state nor its low-income families can afford the financial penalty that would be imposed on our already strained TANF program budget. Thus, the WORKS database was designed specifically to facilitate the state’s ability to comply with work participation reporting requirements and to track our macro progress throughout the year. However, with multiple work activity codes per activity, multiple activities per client, and multiple records for people across programs, the data are not conducive or sufficient to tracking individual client progress over time. Data from other sources will be needed if program managers wish to be able to adequately track clients’ trajectories from say basic education to upward career mobility or, more generally, to be able to associate a particular activity or vendor service to a particular outcome such as unsubsidized employment. This larger issue aside, however, our “deep dive” into the raw WORKS data suggests that revisions to certain parts of the WORKS coding scheme would be beneficial, as would reemphasizing the importance of timely and complete data entry, and establishing and disseminating a hierarchy for use of coding options, particularly with regard to activity completion status.

These operational issues aside, Maryland has positioned itself to bring long-term economic benefit to vulnerable families and to the state itself by focusing its welfare-to-work programming on the quality of jobs that clients are equipped or aided to obtain, not just on their quantity. This is no easy task in the best of times, and today is unquestionably a formidable one, made even more difficult by the inflexible, all-or-nothing federal work participation rate requirements and associated financial penalties. However, Maryland’s focus on quality as well as quantity, while challenging in the short-run, places our state and its families in an excellent position to thrive in the mid-range future, given quiet, if persistent, national discussions regarding possible changes and adjustments to federal work participation rules. Assuming certain adjustments are made to these rules, such as allowing for partial participation credit or expanded education or skill development, states that are able to quickly identify the status and needs of their clients will be best-positioned to help them succeed and to take advantage of the flexibility provided under new rules. History suggests that Maryland will be in the forefront and will thrive because of its long history of using empirical data to guide program development and its emphasis on local flexibility, collaboration, and accountability as reflected in the RISE initiative.

## INTRODUCTION

Policy experts and economists will likely continue to discuss and argue over the magnitude of the Great Recession and its aftershocks for years to come. Amidst the many statistics presented to us by these experts, it can be easy to become desensitized until we are reminded of the real and lasting impact on people's lives, people in our own communities and families who have lost jobs, homes, and assets, and continue to struggle. For the agencies that have provided public assistance as a last resort to so many of these families, the economic recession and slow recovery has never faded as a relentless challenge. The harshly competitive post-recession job market makes it very difficult for caseworkers to help their customers move from welfare to work. Add to that the first increases in welfare caseloads since welfare reform in 1996 and severe budget cuts at the state and local levels, and the challenge seems almost insurmountable. In order to press on, program administrators have had to think creatively and find new approaches to engaging their customers in the world of work.

In 2008, leaders in Maryland did just that and came together to revisit the prevailing work-first approach. They determined that a broader approach was needed, and they created a new initiative, Reaching Independence and Stability through Employment (RISE). RISE is a collaborative effort to move beyond placing individuals in

low-paying jobs that do not last and to increase opportunities for sustainable employment for Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA, Maryland's version of TANF) customers and other vulnerable individuals. The initiative emphasizes reaching across program and agency lines to share resources and ideas, forming partnerships with community businesses and educators, and utilizing strategic assessment tools to ensure good case management and appropriate placements in work activities.

This report is the first in a series that will highlight various aspects of the RISE initiative and the individuals who receive benefits in the post-RISE era. This report in particular provides a foundational overview using administrative data of a sample of over 10,000 individuals who began a work activity between January 2009 and June 2010, and are in one of three subgroups: 1) work-eligible caseheads receiving TCA; 2) foster children who are aging out of care; and 3) non-custodial parents who are struggling to meet their child support obligations and participating in the Non-custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP). The information presented about their characteristics, work histories, and engagement in work activities is especially important to those who seek to serve these customers and their families, but it could also be quite valuable in the likely case that program rules change and future adjustments in approach or reporting are needed.



## BACKGROUND

The ripple effects of the Great Recession continue to touch the lives of our state's most vulnerable families. Besides the obvious measurable influences like high unemployment rates and stagnant wages, there are also indirect challenges that are more difficult to measure. For instance, the scarcity of jobs in general makes for a harsher and more competitive job seeking process, especially in industries like service and retail that have been slowest to recover and traditionally offered more entry-level and lower skilled opportunities. High unemployment also results in a decreased tax base, and in turn, fewer resources for assistance and income support programs, and at times less empathy for those who may have received assistance before the recession hit.

Those who administer public assistance programs, then, have a particularly difficult task in front of them: to support the movement of job seekers from dependence to independence in a difficult environment with diminished resources. One creative approach is to make use of the time and resources that are available to help prepare individuals for a better economy in the (hopefully near) future, even if they are unable to find immediate job placements. Maryland has embraced this approach through a collaborative initiative called RISE (Reaching Independence and Stability through Employment). Today's report is the first of a series focused on RISE, and provides a foundational overview of the characteristics of customers served through the initiative, and their engagement in activities that support their movement from welfare to work. This chapter provides some background information about the economic and policy environment that influenced the formation and direction of the RISE initiative, and about the central goals of the RISE initiative itself.

## Economic and Policy Environment

Since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), welfare programs have embraced a work-first approach. The approach has wide support and is based on research done in the late 1990s and early 2000s that showed the quickest, cheapest way to get a job was to search for one (Gueron & Hamilton, 2002). However, in the current economic environment, that seems less likely. The post-recession job market is more competitive, with fewer jobs available than before the recession (by nearly one million jobs) and nearly four unemployed individuals per job opening (BLS, 2012). In addition, the jobs that are available are more likely to require higher education and work experience (Loprest and Nichols, 2011). Adaptive welfare program administrators and caseworkers have expressed a desire to shift their focus from job search and placement to job training and re-training, remedial education, and work experience for their customers. However, their efforts are moderated by federal program requirements that are still grounded in the work-first approach.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant has remained essentially the same for ten years. Between 1996 and 2006, states were allowed considerable flexibility in how they applied their TANF funds to a variety of programs aimed at reducing welfare dependence (directly and indirectly), as long as they applied sanctions and time limits. The block grant amount did not change over time, but the diminishing dollar value of the grant was counter-balanced by dramatic caseload declines. In 2006, the rules of the TANF block grant changed in substantial ways. States were given stricter definitions of acceptable work activities for customers, and a higher bar to achieve in terms of the percent of customers engaged in those work activities on a full-time basis (often referred to as the work participation rate).

These increased pressures may have been viewed as fair in a healthy economy. When coupled with the Great Recession and severe budget cuts at the state and local levels, however, they have proven burdensome and have been questioned by welfare experts as running counter to the central purpose of welfare which is to be part of a safety net used as a last resort when families are in dire need and have exhausted all their other resources (Lower-Basch, 2011). The TANF block grant is currently due for reauthorization, and although additional reforms or substantial changes may be unlikely to occur in an election year, there is an ongoing discussion among researchers, policymakers, and administrators about what changes might be needed or appropriate when the time comes. In the meantime, state agencies are doing the best they can to find creative solutions that maximize their diminishing resources, stay within the bounds of federal requirements and targets, and benefit the families that utilize public benefits.

### **Central Design and Aims of RISE**

This report focuses on one Maryland answer to the difficult policy and economic context previously described. It is a collaborative initiative called RISE (Reaching Independence and Stability through Employment). The initiative includes a partnership of state agencies, and is aimed at helping vulnerable individuals, including TCA caseheads, NPEP participants, and aging out foster care youth, to “achieve self-reliance jobs with competitive wages, benefits and career ladders” (GWIB, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Though ambitious, self-reliance jobs are defined as jobs that:

1) pay at least \$10 per hour; 2) offer employer-sponsored benefits such as medical and dental insurance; 3) offer paid leave for illness, vacations, and holidays; and 4) provide the potential for career advancement.

Central to the entire effort is the collaboration of multiple state and local agencies, both rhetorically and practically. After coming together to brainstorm ideas about how to support job-seekers who also seek public assistance, many local offices have shared resources and information with one another, and have also reached out to employers and educators within their local communities. The general approach is to bridge resources and opportunities so that individuals can move from remedial education to job training to unsubsidized employment and ultimately upward career mobility. Most often, we seek to measure outcomes like wages, employment status, and program completion, and by these measures Maryland has had positive success. It is much more difficult to measure the progress of a particular individual along the spectrum, and if the federal rules do shift to allow for partial credit or more flexibility with education-based activities, it will be important to have a long, individual-based view of work participation to supplement the performance-based outcomes.

Today’s report is the first in a series aimed at providing this type of information for Maryland administrators and leaders. It provides an overview of the RISE initiative in its early implementation phase, and includes information on the characteristics and work histories of those participating in work activities, as well as information regarding the number and type of activities most people participate in and what their completion rates are, by population subgroup and activity type.

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<sup>1</sup> The partnership includes the following agencies: DHR (Department of Human Resources); DBED (Department of Business & Economic Development); DLLR (Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation); MSDE (Maryland State Department of Education); DPSCS (Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services); and MHEC (Maryland Higher Education Commission).

## METHODS

This chapter describes the sample, data and methods used to provide an overview of RISE participants in Maryland.

### Sample

To include the broadest sample possible, we looked at all cases with any activity recorded in the administrative data, including work, work-related activities, education and training activities, and activities related to the removal of employment barriers. Our study sample includes those who began an activity between January 2009, giving the RISE initiative a few months to be implemented and established, and June 2010, one year into the slow economic recovery following the official end of the Great Recession. We looked specifically at individuals coded as either a participant in the Non-Custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP)<sup>2</sup>, a Work Eligible Individual (WEI) within the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) caseload<sup>3</sup>, or a foster care child who was aging out and receiving work support services. Of a resulting sample of 10,197 cases, most (n=9,356) were granted TCA-WEIs, a sizable minority (n=800) were NPEP participants, and only a handful (n=41) were aging-out foster care children.

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<sup>2</sup> The NPEP program provides non-custodial parents with supportive employment services who are unable to pay their monthly child support obligation, but able to work.

<sup>3</sup> The WEIs are the individuals receiving TCA benefits who are required to be counted in the federal work participation rate, as opposed to those who are generally excluded from work requirements (i.e. child-only cases).

### Data Sources

Findings presented in this report are based on data gathered from three administrative data systems maintained by the State of Maryland. Individual and case-level demographic characteristics and program utilization data were obtained from CARES (Client Automated Resources and Eligibility System), employment and wage data were obtained from MABS (Maryland Automated Benefits System) and work activities were obtained from WORKS.

### CARES

CARES became the statewide, automated data system for DHR programs as of March 1998, and provides individual and case level program participation data for cash assistance, Food Stamps, Medical Assistance and Social Services. It also provides information on TANF program requirements (e.g. months used toward the TCA 60-month lifetime limit), and exemptions from various requirements.

### MABS

Our data on quarterly employment and earnings come from the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS). MABS includes data from all employers covered by the state's Unemployment Insurance (UI) law (approximately 93% of Maryland jobs). Independent contractors, sales people on commission only, some farm workers, federal government employees (civilian and military), some student interns, most religious organization employees, and self-employed persons who do not employ any paid individuals are not covered. "Off the books" or "under the table" employment is not included nor are jobs located in other states.

In Maryland, which shares borders with Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia, out-of-state employment is somewhat common. According to the 2010 American Community Survey, in some Maryland counties, more

than one of every three employed residents worked outside the state. Overall, the rate of out-of-state employment by Maryland residents (17.5%) is over four times greater than the national average (3.8%)<sup>4</sup>. Out-of-state employment is particularly common among residents of two very populous jurisdictions (Montgomery County, 29.8%, and Prince George's County, 42.4%), which have the 5th and 3rd largest welfare caseloads in the state, and out-of-state employment is also common among residents of two smaller jurisdictions (Cecil, 31.1%, and Charles, 34.6%, counties). One consideration, however, is that we cannot be sure the extent to which these high rates of out-of-state employment also describe welfare recipients or leavers accurately.

Because UI earnings data are reported on an aggregated, quarterly basis, we do not know, for any given quarter, how much of that time period the individual was employed (i.e. how many months, weeks, or hours). Thus, it is not possible to compute or infer hourly wages or weekly or monthly salary from these data. It is also important to remember that the earnings figures reported do not necessarily equal total household income; we have no information on earnings of other household members, if any, or data about any other income available to the family.

## **WORKS**

The WORKS system was developed by DHR to document information related to the participation of Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) and other DHR customers in work and work-related activities. Specifically, since December 2006, the WORKS system has been used to collect and report data used for federal work participation reporting requirements, providing DHR with information that can be used to monitor the results of local work programs, and providing LDSS staff with information that can be used to manage and improve program operations.

### **Data Analysis**

We matched data across the three systems using unique identifiers common to all three systems, and limited our analysis of individual and case demographics to information that reflected activity that occurred during our study period. Program participation data are presented for up to five years prior to the first RISE activity that occurred between January 2009 and June 2010. Employment data are presented for the two years leading up to the activity, and for up to one year afterwards. Participation in RISE activities, and the completion status of these activities, was evaluated through the end of September 2010, three months after the end of our study period. Throughout the report, univariate and bivariate statistics are used to describe the earliest RISE participants in Maryland.

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<sup>4</sup> Data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau website <http://www.factfinder.census.gov> using the 2008-2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates for Sex of Workers by Place of Work—State and County Level (B08007).

## FINDINGS: WHO ARE RISE PARTICIPANTS?

Our findings are presented in three chapters. The first chapter summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample members, including the program type they are participating in, their individual characteristics, and their historical use of income supports such as Temporary Cash Assistance, Food Supplement benefits, Medical Assistance and Supplemental Security Income. The second chapter presents information on RISE participants' employment experiences with UI-covered jobs in Maryland, from the two years leading up to the start of the work activity that brought them into our sample through up to six quarters (or one and one-half years) after the start of that activity. The final chapter delves into the work participation patterns of sample members, including the types of work activities they were assigned to, the number of hours spent participating, and their completion status. We begin this first chapter with a summary of three sample subgroups, based on the program which referred them to RISE.

### Program Type

The large majority of our sample (91.8%) consists of TCA participants, as opposed to non-custodial parents (7.8%) and aging-out foster care youth (0.4%). Thus, many of the basic characteristics of the individuals and cases in the sample, broadly speaking, reflect the TCA population. These findings can be compared, for reference, to our series of annual reports detailing the active TCA caseload in Maryland, *Life on Welfare*. The most recent report in the series is entitled: *Life On Welfare: Characteristics of Maryland's TCA Caseload Since DRA* (Williamson, Saunders, and Born, 2011).

Wherever possible in this report, we separate out the three subgroups of our sample so that the characteristics of the smaller groups will not be overshadowed. These three groups are defined by the type

of program through which individuals were referred to a work or work-related activity during the study period, as recorded in the administrative data system: Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA, Maryland's TANF program); Non-custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP), or Foster Care (FC).

As seen in Figure 1, following this discussion, foster care participants represent only a small proportion of the overall population of individuals with recorded work activities during the study period, and thus our sample; of the 10,197 participants, only 41 (0.4%) were in foster care. The foster care children in this study were all over sixteen years of age and close to aging out. We learned after our study began that many of these individuals were given an opportunity to participate in a summer employment program designed to help them get work experience, and that is why their work activities were recorded in the administrative data system used to track work participation.

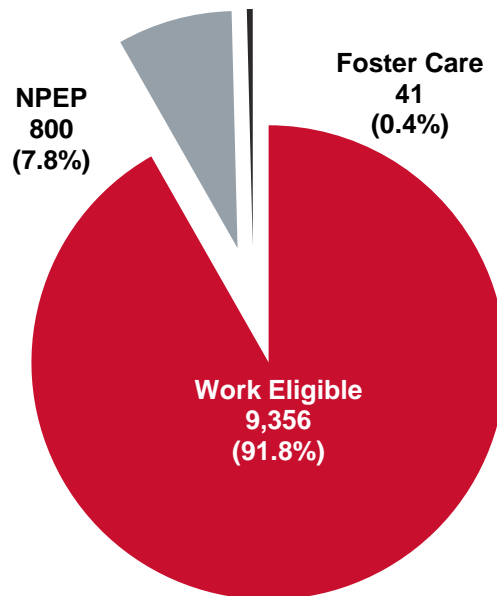
NPEP members comprised 800 of the 10,197 participants (7.8%). NPEP is a statewide effort designed to help non-custodial parents improve their employment and earnings in the hopes that they will then be able to meet their child support obligations. The characteristics, employment, and child support payment outcomes of participants in this program are described in much more detail in our recent NPEP report (Born, Ovwigho, and Saunders, 2011).

As stated previously, and presented in Figure 1, the large majority of our sample for this report consists of TCA Work-Eligible Individuals (WEI). Overall, they total 91.8% of the overall sample, or 9,356 individuals. These individuals were all in the process of applying for or were already receiving TCA benefits at the time they had an activity recorded in the WORKS database. They are not necessarily the universe of TCA participants, as the database does not

always include information for individuals who are excluded from being counted in the federally required and defined “work participation rate”. Those who might be excluded from that rate, such as those with a long-term or permanent disability, those temporarily caring for a small child, or

relatives caring for a child who has been removed from his or her parents, are not likely to have any activities recorded in the work participation database, and thus are not likely to have been included in our sample.

**Figure 1. Program Type**



**Individual Characteristics**

Information on the individual characteristics of RISE participants is presented in Table 1, following this discussion. Overall, the typical RISE participant is an African-American female around the age of thirty who has never married. As we alluded to previously, the profile of a typical RISE participant is most reflective of TCA work-eligible individuals (WEIs) because they make up most of our sample. However, there are important differences among the three subgroups of participants that should not be overlooked. For instance, aging-out foster care youth are more evenly split between genders, with a little more than half (56.1%) being male. Naturally, they are also typically younger than the average TCA casehead. Specifically, the average age for a foster

care youth in this study was just under eighteen years (17.75 years) of age. About one in eight (12.2%) had reached their twenties by the time they started the work activity that brought them into our sample, but the majority were still in their teens. Three-quarters (75.0%) of foster care youths are African-American and all but one (97.5%) had never married.

Nine out of ten (90.8%) NPEP participants are male, and about half of them (49.9%) are 36 and older (average age of 35.74 years). There is not as wide a disparity in race among the NPEP individuals as compared to other groups. Just over half (53.4%) of NPEP participants are African-American, and another two out of five (42.0%) are Caucasian. NPEP participants

tended to be married (14.6%) or had been married (22.6%) at much higher rates.

TCA work eligible individuals were mostly African-American (82.1%) females (95.0%)

around the age of thirty (29.85 years) who had never married (85.2%). On average, work eligible individuals were six years younger than NPEP participants, and there are major differences in gender and race.

**Table 1. Individual Characteristics of RISE Participants**

	<b>FCY</b> (n = 41)	<b>NPEP</b> (n = 800)	<b>TCA-WEI</b> (n = 9,356)	<b>Total</b> (n = 10,197)
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	43.9% (18)	9.2% (73)	95.0% (8,888)	88.1% (8,979)
Male	56.1% (23)	90.8% (720)	5.0% (468)	11.9% (1,211)
<b>Age</b>				
Under 20	87.8% (36)	0.9% (7)	6.7% (624)	6.5% (667)
20-25	12.2% (5)	12.4% (99)	33.8% (3,166)	32.1% (3,270)
26-30	0.0% (0)	19.6% (157)	22.5% (2,108)	22.2% (2,265)
31-35	0.0% (0)	17.3% (138)	14.4% (1,345)	14.5% (1,483)
36 & older	0.0% (0)	49.9% (399)	22.6% (2,112)	24.6% (2,511)
Mean (Standard deviation)	17.75 (1.26)	35.74 (8.58)	29.85 (8.36)	30.26 (8.55)
<b>Race</b>				
Caucasian	20.0% (8)	42.0% (319)	15.4% (1,417)	17.5% (1,744)
African American	75.0% (30)	53.4% (406)	82.1% (7,543)	79.9% (7,979)
Other	5.0% (2)	4.6% (35)	2.5% (227)	2.6% (264)
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Married	0.0% (0)	14.6% (65)	4.8% (445)	5.2% (510)
Never Married	97.5% (39)	62.8% (280)	85.2% (7,917)	84.2% (8,236)
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	2.5% (1)	22.6% (101)	10.0% (930)	10.6% (1,032)

**Note:** Due to missing data for some variables, counts may not sum to the total number of cases.

## Child Support Obligations

One unique feature of the RISE initiative is that it expands programs historically aimed at assisting individuals transitioning off of welfare (typically women), to individuals needing employment assistance in order to meet their child support obligations (typically men). Thus, for this study, in addition to basic demographics, we present basic descriptive characteristics of non-custodial parents' child support obligations, in order to better understand their broader financial situation. These data are most relevant for NPEP participants, as opposed to the other two subgroups. Indeed, in Table 2, following this discussion, we can see that none of the foster care participants were recorded as non-custodial parents in the public child support system during the month they became part of our study sample. Among NPEP participants, approximately two-thirds (64.3%) had one child support case and one-third (32.5%) had two or more.<sup>5</sup> The typical NPEP participant owed \$414 in current support each month as well as \$128 in monthly arrears payments. Since a few cases with higher ordered amounts can distort the mean, the median values (\$330 and \$87, respectively) are also presented and may be a better measure of the typical situation. In total arrears, the average NPEP participant owed an average of \$14,882, though once again, the median of \$8,763 is likely to better reflect a typical case.

Although NPEP participants are a subset of all non-custodial parents who have a child support case registered with the public Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA), these findings closely mirror those presented in the annual updates of our series that describes the entire public child

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<sup>5</sup> A very small number of NPEP participants (3.2%) had no child support cases in the month that their work activity was recorded in the WORKS database. These are anomalies due to differences between the WORKS and CSES (Child Support Enforcement System) databases and the timing of data entry (especially for non-custodial parents with brand new child support cases), as all NPEP participants are required to have a child support obligation.

support caseload in Maryland, *People and Payments: A Profile of Maryland's Child Support Caseload*. In the most recent update, nearly two-thirds of non-custodial parents had a single child support case (67.2%), with an average monthly support obligation of \$435 plus an average requirement towards past-due arrears of \$147 per month (Kolupanowich, Williamson, Saunders, and Born, 2010).

Among TCA work-eligible individuals, less than ten percent were listed as a non-custodial parent on a child support case. This makes intuitive sense, as TCA benefits are contingent on being the custodian of at least one child. Thus, for those who are recorded as non-custodial parents, they must also have at least one child in their care (or be pregnant). Typically those who did have a child support obligation had only one case (6.8%) and a small minority had two or more cases (2.4%). On average, the work eligible TCA individuals owe less in child support than NPEP participants. The average work eligible individual owes less than \$275 (median of \$229) per month in child support and is required to contribute an average of approximately \$100 per month towards past-due arrears (mean of \$95, median of \$60). Overall, the average work eligible individual owes over \$12,000 in arrears (median of \$6,942).

Having reviewed the basic demographic characteristics of individuals in the three subgroups of our sample of RISE participants, and the scope of their child support obligations, we now turn to a review of individuals' use of income supports and their employment history. This information will help to fill out our understanding of the broader economic circumstances of those who we hope will ultimately find self-sustaining jobs through the RISE initiative. It also provides some context for our final chapter, which includes a detailed account of sample members' participation in specific types of work activities.



**Table 2. Non-custodial Parent Child Support Involvement**

	<b>FCY</b> (n = 41)	<b>NPEP</b> (n = 800)	<b>TCA-WEI</b> (n = 9,367)
<b>Number of Active Cases as NCP</b>			
None	100.0% (41)	3.3% (26)	90.8% (8,504)
1	0.0% (0)	64.3% (514)	6.8% (636)
2 or More	0.0% (0)	32.5% (260)	2.4% (227)
<b>Current Support Order Amount (monthly)</b>			
Mean	-	\$414	\$275
Median	-	\$330	\$229
Standard Deviation	-	\$322	\$176
Range	-	\$25 - \$4,511	\$10 - \$1,372
<b>Arrears-Ordered amount (monthly)</b>			
Mean	-	\$128	\$95
Median	-	\$87	\$60
Standard Deviation	-	\$153	\$118
Range	-	<\$1 - \$2,356	\$1 - \$1,121
<b>Total Arrears Owed</b>			
Mean	-	\$14,882	\$12,239
Median	-	\$8,763	\$6,942
Standard Deviation	-	\$22,037	\$14,374
Range	-	\$54 - \$399,449	\$22 - \$106,751

### Income Supports

This chapter began with a review of the demographic characteristics of each of the three subgroups of RISE participants, including a summary of some basic individual characteristics and a broad overview of their obligations as non-custodial parents. Clearly, these three groups are quite different from one another and will benefit most from work programs and opportunities that are suited for their unique circumstances. This includes also pursuing any unearned income or other supports that might be available to customers. Thus, before we move to a discussion of individuals' past work experience and current participation in work activities, this final section provides as much detail as is available in the administrative data about sample members' histories of receiving income supports in Maryland. We include four major means-tested income

supports in Maryland that can, but do not necessarily overlap: Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), Food Supplement (FS), Medical Assistance (MA), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

### Temporary Cash Assistance

Table 3, following this discussion, provides an overview of TCA participation for each of the three subgroups in our sample. In particular, we examine recent participation in the year leading up to the beginning of the work activity that brought them into our sample, and we also examine long-term history by examining the five-year period leading up to the beginning of that work activity. In addition, for an even longer-range view of their TCA participation, we include the TCA counter, which is the number of months of TCA accumulated since October 1996, that have counted

towards the individual's federal lifetime limit of TCA.

Overall, beginning with the five-year period leading up to the start of the sampled work activity, we find that for that, for the sample as a whole, most members had used TCA benefits for 24 or fewer months. The average time that an individual received TCA was just under 20 months (mean=19.67, median=16.00). When we limit our analysis to the one year period leading up to the sampled work activity, we find that, on average, individuals had received assistance for more than half the year (mean=7.70, median=8.00 months). However, these findings tend to reflect the receipt of the work-eligible TCA caseheads within our sample, and not necessarily the non-custodial parents or aging-out foster care youth. Thus, we also present information for these groups separately.

The vast majority of NPEP participants (96.5%) did not have any months of TCA receipt. Among the handful of NCPs that did receive TCA (it is not impossible for an NCP of one child to have custody of another child), none received TCA for more than 36 months during the five years leading up to the work activity that brought them into our study. In the most recent year leading up to the dates of our study, only eight of the 800 NPEP RISE participants received any months of TCA.

Similarly, TCA use is rare for aging out foster care youth, which again has to do with program requirements. Foster care benefits typically "replace" TCA benefits for children through their late teens and into their early twenties. A foster child might receive TCA on behalf of a child they had while in care, or if they left foster care and returned to the care of an adult or family member that received TCA on their behalf. As shown in Table 3, approximately two-thirds (65.9%) of foster care youths in our study did not receive any TCA in the five years leading up to the study. Of those who did receive at least one month of TCA, most

received benefits in less than 24 out of the 60 months. Only four of the 41 foster youth in our sample received any TCA in the year leading up to the study month and for all four, benefits were essentially continuous (i.e., 10 to 12 months). Thus, at least for the very small number of foster youth referred to RISE during the study period, TCA seems to be an all-or-nothing benefit. This may or may not be reflective of the experiences of all aging-out foster youth.

The bottom section of Table 3 presents information regarding the number of months accumulated towards the federal lifetime limit for cash assistance. There is a 60-month lifetime limit on cash assistance received in certain situations and cases, but there are some conditions under which individuals can be allowed to continue receiving assistance past the 60 months.<sup>6</sup> None of the foster care youth in our study had used any months towards the TCA time limit despite a few receiving TCA benefits before this study, likely because they met some criteria for exemption from the limit. Among the few NPEP participants who had received any TCA in the years leading up to their work activity, the average number of months accumulated toward the time limit was only 10 (mean=10.10, median=6.00).

In contrast, just over one third (36.0%) of work eligible TCA individuals had accumulated between one and twelve months of cash assistance towards their federal lifetime limit, while another one-fifth (22.4%) used between 13 and 24 months, and one-quarter (26.0%) had accumulated between 25 and 60 months by the start of the work activity that brought them into our sample. Finally, approximately one in seven (14.0%) had used more than the standard allotted 60 months of cash assistance by the time they were engaged in the RISE initiative. An analysis of the entire active Maryland TCA caseload in October 2009

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<sup>6</sup> A forthcoming report on TCA time limits in Maryland will provide a more detailed description of who is exempt from the time limit, and a discussion of policy options going forward: Logan and Born (2012).

revealed that only one in ten caseheads had accumulated more than 60 months of assistance, so in comparison, our subgroup of work-eligible TCA caseheads engaged in a RISE work activity has a slightly higher

concentration of long-term welfare recipients than the average TCA caseload overall (Williamson, Saunders, and Born, 2010).

**Table 3. Historic and Current TCA Participation**

	<b>FCY</b> (n = 41)	<b>NPEP</b> (n = 800)	<b>TCA-WEI</b> (n = 9,356)	<b>Total</b> (n = 10,197)
<b>Months of Receipt in Last 60 Months</b>				
None	65.9% (27)	96.5% (772)	13.4% (1,255)	20.1% (2,054)
1 to 12 months	12.2% (5)	3.0% (24)	34.3% (3,212)	31.8% (3,241)
13 to 24 months	9.8% (4)	0.4% (3)	25.3% (2,366)	23.3% (2,373)
25 to 36 months	2.4% (1)	0.1% (1)	13.4% (1,253)	12.3% (1,255)
37 to 48 months	2.4% (1)	0.0% (0)	7.9% (739)	7.3% (740)
49 to 60 months	7.3% (3)	0.0% (0)	5.7% (531)	5.2% (534)
Mean	26.43	7.25	19.70	19.67
Median	20.50	5.50	16.00	16.00
Standard Deviation	20.74	6.11	15.01	15.02
<b>Months of Receipt in Last 12 Months</b>				
None	90.2% (37)	99.0% (792)	21.2% (1,987)	27.6% (2,816)
1 to 3 months	0.0% (0)	0.6% (5)	16.4% (1,539)	15.1% (1,544)
4 to 6 months	0.0% (0)	0.3% (2)	14.8% (1,381)	13.6% (1,383)
7 to 9 months	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	14.0% (1,311)	12.9% (1,311)
10 to 12 months	9.8% (4)	0.1% (1)	33.5% (3,138)	30.8% (3,143)
Mean	12.00	3.50	7.71	7.70
Median	12.00	2.50	8.00	8.00
Standard Deviation	0.00	3.38	3.88	3.88
<b>Months Used Towards TANF Time Limit</b>				
No months	100.0% (41)	92.4% (739)	1.5% (145)	9.1% (925)
1 to 12 months	0.0% (0)	5.3% (42)	36.0% (3,364)	33.4% (3,406)
13 to 24 months	0.0% (0)	1.8% (14)	22.4% (2,096)	20.7% (2,110)
25 to 36 months	0.0% (0)	0.5% (4)	12.2% (1,140)	11.2% (1,144)
37 to 48 months	0.0% (0)	0.1% (1)	8.3% (780)	7.7% (781)
49 to 60 months	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	5.5% (518)	5.1% (518)
More than 60 months	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	14.0% (1,313)	12.9% (1,313)
Mean	-	10.10	28.47	28.35
Median	-	6.00	19.00	19.00
Standard Deviation	-	8.58	28.42	28.37

**Note:** Means, medians, and standard deviations exclude those with zero months of assistance.

## Food Supplement

Although many in our study did not receive cash assistance benefits, particularly the Foster Care Youth (FCY) and Non-custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP) participants, many did receive assistance through other programs that have broader eligibility requirements. One program in particular that reaches a much broader population is the Food Supplement (FS) program, which is Maryland's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps). Table 4, following this discussion, displays FS participation for our three study groups.

In the 60 months before beginning their work activity, almost one-half of both the aging-out foster care youth (48.8%) and non-custodial parents in NPEP (48.7%) received FS benefits for at least one month. In total, among those who received any FS benefits, the average number of months of FS receipt for foster youth and NPEP participants in the previous five years was 24.05 months and 14.65 months, respectively. Work-eligible TCA individuals were more likely overall to have received FS assistance in the previous five years (only 4.5% did not), and among those who received benefits, the average the number of months of receipt was markedly higher (mean=34.43 months).

In the most recent 12 months leading up to the beginning of the work activity that brought individuals into our sample, the trend diverges notably for foster care youth, but less so for NPEP and work-eligible TCA individuals. That is, while approximately one-half (48.8%) of aging-out foster care youth had received at least one month of FS benefits in the previous five years, less than one-quarter (19.5%) received any benefits in the most recent year. NPEP individuals were also somewhat less likely to have received FS benefits in the most recent year (35.6%) compared with the previous five years (48.7%) but the difference was less dramatic. Among those who received any benefits in the most recent year, foster care youth received an average of 8.75 months of assistance and NPEP participants received an average of 6.53 months of assistance.

Regardless of time period (i.e., past five years or past 12 months), work-eligible TCA individuals were not only more likely to have used FS benefits, but also tended to use them for longer periods of time. In the year leading up to the work activity in our study period, two-thirds (67.8%) received FS benefits for ten to twelve months, and an additional one-quarter (25.5%) received benefits for an average of one to nine months. Overall, work-eligible TCA individuals received an average of 9.98 months of FS benefits in the previous year.

**Table 4. Food Supplement Participation**

	<b>FCY</b> (n = 41)	<b>NPEP</b> (n = 800)	<b>TCA-WEI</b> (n = 9,356)	<b>Total</b> (n = 10,197)
<b>Months of Receipt in Last 60 Months</b>				
None	51.2% (21)	51.3% (410)	4.5% (425)	8.4% (856)
1 to 12 months	14.6% (6)	28.6% (229)	16.4% (1,537)	17.4% (1,772)
13 to 24 months	19.5% (8)	9.6% (77)	17.1% (1,598)	16.5% (1,683)
25 to 36 months	4.9% (2)	5.8% (46)	15.0% (1,401)	14.2% (1,449)
37 to 48 months	2.4% (1)	3.1% (25)	16.7% (1,566)	15.6% (1,592)
49 to 60 months	7.3% (3)	1.6% (13)	30.2% (2,829)	27.9% (2,845)
Mean	24.05	14.65	34.43	33.59
Median	21.00	10.00	36.00	35.00
Standard Deviation	17.78	13.52	18.91	19.13
<b>Months of Receipt in Last 12 Months</b>				
None	80.5% (33)	64.4% (515)	6.7% (623)	11.5% (1,171)
1 to 3 months	2.4% (1)	10.4% (83)	7.1% (665)	7.3% (749)
4 to 6 months	2.4% (1)	7.9% (63)	8.8% (828)	8.7% (892)
7 to 9 months	4.9% (2)	6.8% (54)	9.6% (901)	9.4% (957)
10 to 12 months	9.8% (4)	10.6% (85)	67.8% (6,339)	63.0% (6,428)
Mean	8.75	6.53	9.98	9.87
Median	9.50	6.00	12.00	12.00
Standard Deviation	3.41	3.91	3.19	3.27

**Note:** Means, medians, and standard deviations exclude those with zero months of assistance.

### Medical Assistance

This next analysis reviews sample members' receipt of Medical Assistance (MA), which is not an income support in the same way as TCA or FS, but is an important benefit program nonetheless. Many entry-level jobs and work experience opportunities do not provide employer-sponsored medical coverage, nor do they pay enough to allow individuals to purchase insurance on their own. Without coverage, individuals might not be able to afford medical care or prescriptions they or their family members need to function and participate in the workforce. While we do not have access to data regarding individuals' access to private medical coverage, Table

5, following this discussion, reveals that many of our sample members had applied for and were covered by MA in the years leading up to the work activity that brought them into our sample.

Since most TCA recipients are categorically eligible for MA, MA participation rates for work-eligible TCA individuals closely mirror those for the receipt of cash assistance. That is, nearly all TCA sample members had received MA at some point in the past five years (98.0%), and the vast majority had received coverage at some point in the most recent twelve months (96.3%). Furthermore, their coverage tended to be for relatively longer periods of time. One-half of work-eligible TCA individuals

received MA coverage for at least 40 out of the previous 60 months (median=40.0 months), and the large majority (69.0%) had participated for ten to twelve months in the previous year.

Most foster care children are also categorically eligible for Medical Assistance, so likewise, we see that nine out of ten foster care participants in our study (90.2%) had MA coverage in the previous 60 months, and on average, they were covered for the entire time (mean=59.41 months). In the most recent twelve months, 87.8% received MA for an average of 11.92 months or, in essence, the entire year.

In contrast to the aging-out foster care youth and work-eligible TCA individuals in our study, the NPEP participants were not

nearly as likely to have received MA. Unlike the other two groups, NPEP participants are not categorically eligible for assistance, and even with expansions in eligibility in recent years, many still probably do not qualify. In the five years leading up to the beginning of the sampled work activity, more than three-quarters (78.6%) of NPEP participants were not covered by MA at all. Among those who did receive MA, the average length of coverage was only 17.79 out of 60 months. Similarly, in the most recent year, nearly nine out of ten (89.3%) NPEP participants were not covered by MA. This difference in MA coverage for NPEP participants versus foster care and TCA participants is an important distinction to keep in mind as we look further at the employment histories, work experience, and work activity participation of these three groups.

**Table 5. Medical Assistance Participation**

	FCY (n = 41)	NPEP (n = 800)	TCA-WEI (n = 9,356)	Total (n = 10,197)
<b>Months of Receipt in Last 60 Months</b>				
None	9.8% (4)	78.6% (629)	2.0% (190)	8.1% (823)
1 to 12 months	0.0% (0)	10.9% (87)	14.0% (1,307)	13.7% (1,394)
13 to 24 months	0.0% (0)	4.4% (35)	15.1% (1,416)	14.2% (1,451)
25 to 36 months	0.0% (0)	3.1% (25)	15.3% (1,433)	14.3% (1,458)
37 to 48 months	0.0% (0)	1.9% (15)	15.9% (1,488)	14.7% (1,503)
49 to 60 months	90.2% (37)	1.1% (9)	37.6% (3,522)	35.0% (3,568)
Mean	59.41	17.79	37.32	37.05
Median	60.00	12.00	40.00	40.00
Standard Deviation	1.72	15.11	19.07	19.20
<b>Months of Receipt in Last 12 Months</b>				
None	9.8% (4)	89.3% (714)	3.7% (348)	10.5% (1,066)
1 to 3 months	0.0% (0)	2.3% (18)	7.8% (733)	7.4% (751)
4 to 6 months	0.0% (0)	2.0% (16)	9.3% (870)	8.7% (886)
7 to 9 months	2.4% (1)	2.3% (18)	10.2% (954)	9.5% (973)
10 to 12 months	87.8% (36)	4.3% (34)	69.0% (6,451)	64.0% (6,521)
Mean	11.92	7.60	9.97	9.96
Median	12.00	8.00	12.00	12.00
Standard Deviation	0.49	3.85	3.28	3.29

**Note:** Means, medians, and standard deviations exclude those with zero months of assistance.

## SSI Receipt

The final income support we will review is Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This means-tested benefit program has much more stringent eligibility requirements than FS or MA, and is available to those who have documented long-term disabilities and very limited income and assets. Table 6, following this discussion, shows SSI application and receipt for our three study groups before and after their critical study date, which is the month in which the sampled work activity began, sometime between January 2009 and June 2010.<sup>7</sup> Due to the complex application process and strict eligibility requirements, it is important to note that an application for SSI can have meaning even if benefits are not approved. That is, an application to SSI reveals that the individual has or perceives him or herself to have a disability that interferes with their ability to find or keep a job. If SSI benefits are eventually approved, that might help explain low employment rates, but even if benefits are not approved, the disabilities still remain as challenges and perhaps barriers to employment.

As shown in Table 6, on the next page, approximately one quarter (23.2%) of all RISE participants, regardless of sub-group, had ever applied for SSI by the time our study ended. This rate was roughly consistent across all groups, ranging from 18.8% among NPEP participants, 23.5% for TCA-WEI clients, and 26.8% among Foster Care Youth. Three-fifths (1,408 out of 2,362) of SSI application filings occurred before the start of the work activity that brought the individual into our study, and two-fifths (954 out of 2,362) of applications occurred at some point in the months between the start of the work activity and the last month for which 551 cases were available for the analysis.

Among those who had applied for SSI, approximately one in ten (255 out of 2,362) eventually received SSI. Overall, this represents less than three percent (2.5%) of the entire sample (including those who never applied for SSI). The highest rate of SSI receipt is among Foster Care Youth (12.2%), though the sample was very small for this subgroup (5 out of 41).

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<sup>7</sup> SSI data were available and evaluated from the end of 2004 through the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2010. The amount of follow-up data varies by individual based on their critical study date.

**Table 6. SSI Receipt History**

	<b>FCY</b> (n = 41)	<b>NPEP</b> (n = 800)	<b>TCA-WEI</b> (n = 9,356)	<b>Total</b> (n = 10,197)
<b>Ever Applied for SSI</b>	26.8% (11)	18.8% (150)	23.5% (2,201)	23.2% (2,362)
Applied for SSI before study date	19.5% (8)	11.1% (89)	14.0% (1,311)	13.8% (1,408)
Applied for SSI after study date	7.3% (3)	7.6% (61)	9.5% (890)	9.4% (954)
<b>SSI Status</b>				
Ever denied SSI	9.8% (4)	15.0% (120)	17.9% (1,677)	17.7% (1,801)
Ever received SSI	12.2% (5)	1.1% (9)	2.6% (241)	2.5% (255)

**Note:** SSI data was available and evaluated from the end of 2004 through the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2010. The amount of follow-up data varies by individual based on their critical study date. Valid percentages are reported.

In summary, the information presented in this chapter has revealed how nuanced the safety net really is. Age, household composition, and personal circumstances (including health and disabilities) all make a difference in the scope and type of supports that are available to a particular individual and his or her family. For those in leadership and case management positions who run programs aimed at moving individuals into self-sufficiency, then, it is all the more important to understand the larger context of the clients in their caseloads. Assessment and screening tools can be invaluable for matching individuals with appropriate support services, work activities, and program goals, though historically assessments have been costly, lengthy, and tend to vary by location. To this end, individuals from the Family Investment Administration in Maryland and the University of Maryland School of Social Work worked together to design a standardized, easy-to-use assessment tool for welfare cases, and the tool has been piloted in nearly a dozen states (Williamson, Saunders, and Born, 2011; Born, Saunders, and Williamson, 2010).

The Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA) tool promises to help caseworkers and program managers uncover and organize information about an individual's personal and unique situation that will hopefully lead to easier and more effective matches for support services, work activities, and ultimately career paths. Scheduled for statewide implementation in the near future, the automated OWRA tool will use basic information, such as what has been presented in this first chapter of today's report, in addition to much more detailed information about an individual's assets and barriers to employment, in order to give a fuller context to information on customers' work and wage experience, and compliance with work activities. These latter outcomes are the focus of the remainder of this report.



## FINDINGS: EMPLOYMENT

This chapter presents our analyses of the previous and current employment status of the RISE participants in each of our three sample subgroups. We begin with an analysis of sample members' past experience with UI-covered employment in Maryland, focusing on the two years (or eight quarters) leading up to the start of the work activity that brought individuals into our sample. We also report on subjects' employment in the first quarter of the work activity and then discuss employment rates and earnings for up to six quarters after the start of the work activity.

Table 7, following this discussion, presents information on the previous eight quarters leading up to the work activity and the quarter in which the activity began. For most of our sample, the work activity began in the first calendar quarter of 2009. Overall, as presented in the far right column of Table 7, about three-quarters (72.2%) of all RISE participants, regardless of subgroup, held a UI-covered job at some point during the two years leading up to the start of the work activity. However, their jobs were apparently not stable or long-lasting, since they worked, on average, only half the time (mean number of quarters worked = 4.12 out of 8.00).

Earnings were also typically low. In a typical quarter, employed individuals earned an average of approximately \$2,600 (mean=\$2,671) with a median earnings of \$1,623 per quarter (indicating that half of the individuals earned less than \$1,623 per quarter). If individuals worked consistently over time, at this rate they would hypothetically earn approximately \$10,000 per year or \$20,000 for the two-year period. Instead, the average total earnings for the entire two-year period was less than \$15,000 (mean=\$14,796) and the median value was substantially less, around \$6,000 (median=\$6,002). Thus, although most of the individuals participating in RISE activities have some work experience, their labor market participation appears, for whatever reasons, to be more sporadic than

consistent and their earnings are generally low.

There are some important distinctions worth noting among the three subgroups. First, the NPEP participants seem to have the strongest work experience, with the highest rate of previous employment (73.9%), the highest average number of quarters worked in the two-year period leading up to the start of the work activity (mean=4.30), and the highest earnings, on average (mean=\$15,100 for the two-year period and \$2,993 per quarter). Readers will recall that most of the NPEP participants are male, owe child support for at least one child, and generally do not qualify for or utilize supports such as cash assistance or medical assistance. In this context, then, their employment rate and earnings still seem relatively low considering their own self sufficiency needs and their child support obligations. It is also important to note that, despite their past strong attachment to the work force, only one-third (33.0%) of NPEP participants were employed in the quarter that the work activity started, and that wages for those that did work averaged only \$1,562 for the quarter. This low level of employment participation in the quarter of the work activity is likely related to the eligibility of the NPEP program which is designed to assist non-custodial parents obtain employment in order to meet their child support obligations.

In comparison, TCA work-eligible individuals worked at nearly the same rate (73.9% vs. 72.2%), but earned less than NPEP participants (median total earnings = \$5,835 vs. \$9,040 among NPEP participants). In the critical quarter, or the quarter that the work activity began, less than one-quarter (24.1%) of TCA work-eligible caseheads were employed. However, for those that were employed, their average earnings were somewhat higher than that of employed NPEP participants. Our analysis of work activities in the next chapter will likely give some insight into this difference. However, it may be that wages were only higher for a handful of participants, as the median value for both groups are about

equal (\$1,107 for NPEP participants and \$1,089 for TCA individuals).

Finally, it is worth including a brief note about the young adults aging out of the foster care program. This relatively small group of individuals (n=41) was included in our analysis because they began a work activity during our study period, and were recorded in the WORKS administrative data as part of the RISE initiative. It was later learned that these few young adults were participating in a summer jobs program that will hopefully lead to even more and better opportunities leading to self-sufficiency, which is a stated objective of the RISE initiative. This being the case, it is no surprise that nearly all of them (95.1%) were

employed in the “critical” quarter, or the calendar quarter in which the work activity began that brought them into our sample. It is unknown why the other five percent did not have wages recorded in the UI administrative data. For those that did have earnings recorded, they earned an average of \$1,182 for the quarter.

Having presented basic information about individuals’ employment and earnings histories, we now examine the employment experiences of individuals in the quarters after the work activity started. This will give us an important context for the information presented in the last chapter, on the types of work activity assignments given and whether the activities were completed.

**Table 7. Employment Leading to Critical Study Date**

	<b>FCY</b> (n = 41)	<b>NPEP</b> (n = 800)	<b>TCA-WEI</b> (n = 9,356)	<b>Total</b> (n = 10,197)
<b>Two Years Before Critical Date</b>				
Percent Employed***	34.1% (14)	73.9% (591)	72.2% (6,753)	72.2% (7,358)
Mean [Median] # Quarters Employed	3.57 [2.50]	4.30 [4.00]	4.11 [4.00]	4.12 [4.00]
Mean [Median] Quarterly Earnings	\$908 [\$557]	\$2,993 [\$2,233]	\$2,647 [\$1,590]	\$2,671 [\$1,623]
Mean [Median] Total Earnings	\$5,612 [\$1,565]	\$15,100 [\$9,040]	\$14,788 [\$5,835]	\$14,796 [\$6,002]
<b>Quarter of Critical Date</b>				
Percent Employed***	95.1% (39)	33.0% (264)	24.1% (2,257)	25.1% (2,560)
Mean [Median] Total Earnings	\$1,182 [\$1,278]	\$1,562 [\$1,107]	\$2,549 [\$1,089]	\$2,427 [\$1,105]

**Note:** Valid percentages are reported. \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

Table 8, following this discussion presents employment data for up to six quarters, or eighteen months, after the start of the participants' work activity. The take-home point of Table 8 is that there is not much change in RISE participants' employment status or average quarterly earnings over the eighteen-month period included in the study. Most of the work activities sampled for this study began in the first quarter of 2009. For that time period the fact that clients' employment and earnings remained static can be viewed positively. In such a tumultuous economic climate as prevailed at that time, one might expect to have seen steep declines in employment once short-term work activities were completed.

Specifically, looking at the entire RISE sample, the employment rate rose from just over one-quarter (28.9%) in the quarter after the work activity began, to one-third (33.3%) in the sixth follow-up quarter. Average quarterly earnings decreased slightly from \$3,409 to \$3,313, but median earnings rose from \$1,861 to \$2,861 per quarter. This trend (a declining mean but increasing median) indicates that over time there were fewer highly-paid outliers, fewer outliers with extremely low wages, and an overall increase in wages for the typical earner.

As discussed previously, since most RISE participants are work-eligible TCA study findings that describe a "typical" RISE participant most closely reflect TCA caseheads rather than the other two smaller subgroups. As seen in Table 8, the profile of the average RISE participants does, indeed, mirror the profile of TCA-WEI subjects. The

employment status for the TCA-WEI subgroup rose only slightly from 28.0% in the first quarter after the work activity started to 33.4% in the sixth quarter after. However, there are notable variations in employment trends for the other two subgroups. Though the sample size is small for aging-out foster care youth, the employment rate for this group rose more rapidly, from 14.6% in the first follow-up quarter to about two-fifths (41.5%) in the fourth follow-up quarter. NPEP individuals experienced an opposite trend. In the first quarter after the critical study date, about two out of five (40.5%) were employed, but by the end of our follow-up period, one in three (33.2%) was employed. Over the same period, average wages for NPEP participants rose by approximately \$1,000 per quarter.

There are several possible scenarios to explain why the employment rate went down but wages went up. For instance, it is possible that those with low-paying jobs at the beginning of the study period became unemployed over time. However, it is also possible that those who were unemployed at the start of the period because they were pursuing unpaid educational or other training opportunities were able to enter the workforce with a higher wage when they finally did start working. Although an in-depth case study of individual participants is beyond the scope of today's report, it would be an interesting future project and could provide important information to program managers about the paths taken by participants, and the relative short- and long-term success of various paths.

**Table 8. Employment after Critical Study Date**

	FCY	NPEP	TCA-WEI	Total
<b>1st Quarter After Critical Study Date</b>	(n=41)	(n=800)	(n=9,356)	(n=10,197)
Percent Employed***	14.6% (6)	40.5% (324)	28.0% (2,621)	28.9% (2,951)
Mean [Median] Total Earnings	\$1,096 [\$797]	\$2,947 [\$2,482]	\$3,472 [\$1,792]	\$3,409 [\$1,861]
<b>2nd Quarter After Critical Study Date</b>	(n=41)	(n=731)	(n=8,971)	(n=9,743)
Percent Employed***	19.5% (8)	40.5% (296)	29.9% (2,681)	30.6% (2,985)
Mean [Median] Total Earnings	\$1,172 [\$961]	\$3,348 [\$2,697]	\$3,479 [\$2,228]	\$3,460 [\$2,277]
<b>3rd Quarter After Critical Study Date</b>	(n=41)	(n=592)	(n=8,578)	(n=9,211)
Percent Employed**	26.8% (11)	37.8% (224)	31.1% (2,665)	31.5% (2,900)
Mean [Median] Total Earnings	\$1,474 [\$1,089]	\$3,432 [\$2,897]	\$3,613 [\$2,413]	\$3,591 [\$2,457]
<b>4th Quarter After Critical Study Date</b>	(n=41)	(n=475)	(n=8,032)	(n=8,548)
Percent Employed*	41.5% (17)	36.0% (171)	30.7% (2,469)	31.1% (2,657)
Mean [Median] Total Earnings	\$1,397 [\$1,200]	\$3,149 [\$2,620]	\$3,696 [\$2,366]	\$3,646 [\$2,387]
<b>5th Quarter After Critical Study Date</b>		(n=359)	(n=7,234)	(n=7,593)
Percent Employed	-	36.2% (130)	33.1% (2,397)	33.3% (2,527)
Mean [Median] Total Earnings	-	\$3,611 [\$3,335]	\$3,189 [\$2,626]	\$3,210 [\$2,644]
<b>6th Quarter After Critical Study Date</b>		(n=214)	(n=5,846)	(n=6,060)
Percent Employed	-	33.2% (71)	33.4% (1,950)	33.3% (2,021)
Mean [Median] Total Earnings*	-	\$4,163 [\$3,501]	\$3,282 [\$2,808]	\$3,313 [\$2,861]

**Note:** At the time of our analysis, employment data was available through the third quarter of 2010. The number of individuals with available follow-up data in each subgroup and time period is presented in the table. The foster care youth outcomes are excluded from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> quarters due to too few having UI-wage information in those quarters. Wages are standardized to 2010 dollars and are only available in quarters, so we are unable to deduce the number of hours worked or hourly wages earned in any given quarter. Valid percentages are reported. \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

## FINDINGS: WORK ACTIVITIES

In the first two findings chapters we reviewed the typical characteristics of individuals in each of three subgroups of RISE participants, as well as information about their obligations as non-custodial parents (if applicable) and their use of various income support programs. We also looked at their employment in UI-covered jobs in Maryland before and after beginning the new work activity which brought them into our study sample. The information presented thus far has revealed that the three subgroups of RISE participants have different demographic profiles, use different support programs, and have different employment experiences. This provides a foundation and context for exploring the available data on RISE participants' work activity assignments, the focus of this final findings chapter.

We limit our analyses here to work activities that were ongoing or began in the sampled month. This approach may seem minimalist compared to some of our other longitudinal analyses of welfare receipt over time, but work participation data is simply not as conducive to longitudinal analyses. Specifically, the work participation database is constructed to capture hourly work participation in a given month at the caseload level and not necessarily to track individual's progress in the journey to self-sufficiency. The federal rules for counting work participation are also complex, and the data reflect that as well. For example, there are different federal and state time limits for certain types of work activities, and conditions that must be met in order for hours to count in one activity or another. Thus, it is not uncommon for a particular activity to be coded multiple times, because some of the hours showed to count toward one category of participation and other hours toward a different category. Then too, the categories are not obviously mutually exclusive, so some activities could fit multiple categories or be coded differently across people and localities even though it is the same type of activity.

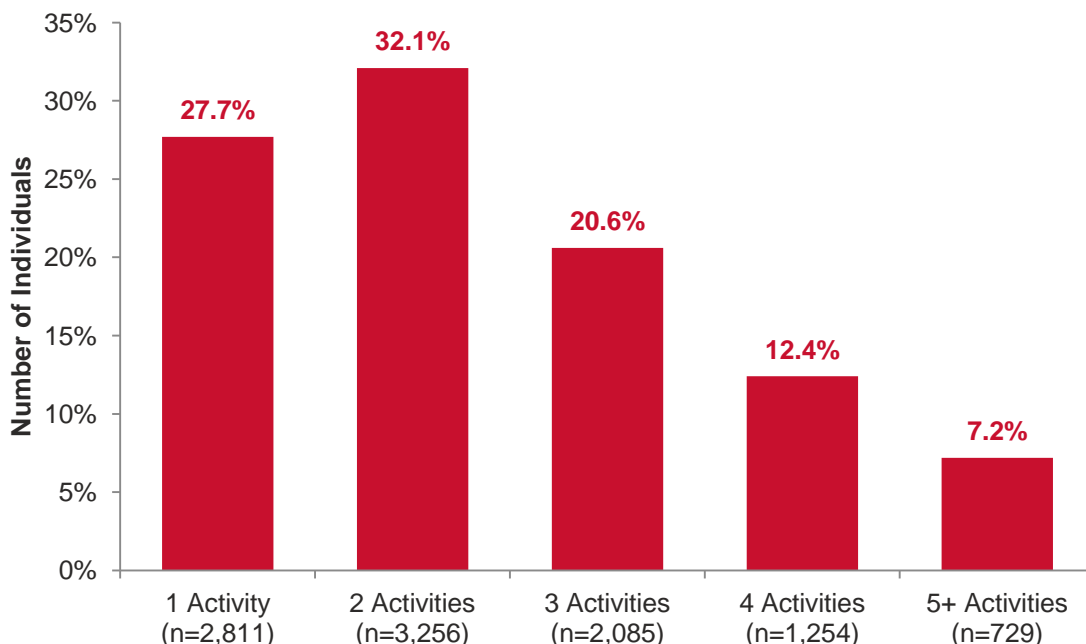
Further, our analyses in this chapter are limited to the NPEP and WEI participants within our sample, for whom the number and type of work activities could be determined ( $n=10,135$ )<sup>8</sup>. There were not enough aging-out foster care youth enrolled in work activities at the time our study was conducted to allow us to present more detailed information about their activity types, hours, or completion status.

These caveats and raw data complexities having been noted, we begin our analyses of work participation with a wide lens. In Figure 2, following this discussion, we summarize the number of work activities RISE participants were assigned to in the sampled month. As shown, most participants were assigned to more than one activity type at the same time, though few had more than three activities recorded. Specifically, one in four (27.7%,  $n=2,811$ ) RISE participants had a single work activity assignment during the sample month. One-third (32.1%,  $n=3,256$ ) of participants had two work activity records, and another one in five (20.6%,  $n=2,085$ ) had three work activities. The remaining participants all had four (12.4%,  $n=1,254$ ) or more (7.2%,  $n=729$ ) activity records in the sampled month.

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<sup>8</sup> Although all the individuals in our study were found to be participating in at least one work activity at the time the sample was drawn, we were unable to determine the number or type of that activity in our subsequent draw of follow-up data for 21 individuals. Thus, they are excluded from the analyses presented in this chapter and valid percents are reported.

**Figure 2. Number of Work Activities in the Sampled Month**



### Types of Activities

We now look more closely at the nature of the activities as recorded in the WORKS database. We begin by identifying the fifteen most common WORKS activities by total enrollment. When reading this table, it is important to keep in mind that participants can be enrolled in more than one activity. They can also participate in a single activity multiple times, but only a client's first appearance in an activity was considered for the purposes of this table. Therefore, the percentages should be read as the percent of individuals who participated in this activity at least once.

Table 9 also notes whether each activity is a federally defined core activity ("Core") a federally defined non-core activity ("Non-Core") or a state-defined activity ("State"). This is an important distinction because, in order to count towards the federal work participation rate, hours must be in a federal core or non-core activity. The core versus non-core distinction is also important because to qualify for full participation, an individual must work a minimum number of hours every week in core versus non-core activities (anything less does not count

toward the work participation rate under current guidelines). All other activities, including state-defined activities, are typically used to track time spent participating in activities that are necessary or productive, but not necessarily directly related to work. For instance, many state-defined activities have to do with the removal of barriers to employment, like pursuing treatment for an illness or disability, securing child care, or working towards obtaining transportation. A brief description of each of the top fifteen work activities (in order of descending frequency) can be found in Appendix A.

As presented in Table 9, the two most commonly reported work activities are "Job Search and Job Readiness" (43.3%), and "Work Experience" (29.9%). Both are federal core activities and consistent with the primary goals of the RISE initiative. They also reflect the traditional work-first approach that circa 1996. The work-first approach has come under fire in recent years, but can be a good of beginning for clients who are willing and able to work right away. Because individuals can be assigned to multiple activities at once, theoretically

they could be conducting a job search and also working toward barrier removal or pursuing vocational education.

The prominence of job search/readiness activities, participated in by more than four of every 10 rise clients (43.3%) and work experience, engaged in by three of every 10 clients (29.9%) is evident when we examine the other activities listed in the table.

Between 12.3% (conciliation) and 17.3% (adverse action of sanction) of RISE participants were assigned to the next seven types of work activities, and include a mix of core, non-core, and state-defined activities. As shown, these are a diverse array of activities including such disparate things as pursuit of additional income supports (14.2%) and short-term incapacity or disability (13.2%), to unsubsidized employment (14.8%). The remaining six types of work activities among the top 15 each account for less than ten percent of

activity assignments. These generally reflect more long-term situations that prevent individuals from working such as long-term disabilities (3.5%), caring for newborn children (4.0%), or experiencing a family crisis (7.1%).

The wide range of activity types, reflected in Table 9, speaks to the range of complex circumstances experienced by individuals receiving benefits or services through NPEP and TCA. Many have barriers that need to be addressed before employment is viable, and others are receiving training or education that will help make them more marketable and hopefully secure better than entry-level employment. Some work-eligible TCA individuals are also going through the sanctioning process for previous non-cooperation with work requirements. This process is intended to keep people on task and most sanctioned clients do return to TCA and become employed (Ovwhigo, Kolupanowich & Born, 2010).

**Table 9. Top 15 WORKS Activities**

<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Total (n=10,135)</b>	<b>NPEP</b>	<b>TCA-WEI</b>
Job Search and Job Readiness (Core)	43.3%	(589)	(3,800)
Work Experience (Core)	29.9%	(7)	(3,024)
Adverse Action of Sanction Period (State)	17.3%	-	(1,750)
Job Skills Training Directly Related to Employment (Non-Core)	15.9%	(7)	(1,608)
Unsubsidized Employment (Core)	14.8%	(246)	(1,255)
Pursuit of Income Supports (Non-Core)	14.2%	(9)	(1,429)
Vocational Educational Training (Core)	13.3%	(73)	(1,270)
Illness/Incapacity/Wellness Rehabilitation < 12 months (State)	13.2%	(23)	(1,312)
In Conciliation (State)	12.3%	-	(1,246)
Breakdown in Childcare/Seeking Childcare (State)	7.6%	-	(767)
Family Crisis/Family Services (State)	7.1%	(3)	(718)
Caring for a Child Under Age (State)	5.7%	-	(581)
Community Service Programs (Core)	4.7%	-	(481)
Prenatal/12 week Postpartum (State)	4.0%	-	(403)
Disabled for more than 12 months (State)	3.5%	(2)	(351)

**Note:** Activities are not mutually exclusive. Foster care youth (n=41) excluded as are 21 other adults for whom the number and type of work activities could not be definitively determined. Valid percentages are reported.

## Completion Status for Top Five Activities

In this final section, we discuss completion outcomes for the five most commonly reported work activities that were ongoing or began in the sampled month. At the outset, it is important to note that there are many possible outcomes for completion status in the administrative database, and it is not always clear which outcome is the best or most desirable. For instance, case closure might be the most desirable outcome for an “unsubsidized employment” activity assignment while starting a new job might be the best outcome for a job search activity. Further, it is not clear how each of these outcomes vary from the more general status of “completed” which is also often reported. In the data with these caveats in mind, in Figure 3, following this discussion, we present the distribution of the top five most commonly reported completion codes, by activity type, for each of the top five work activities.<sup>9</sup>

Overall, approximately one in four participants had “completed” their activity by the end of our study but the use of this particular status code did vary quite a bit based on the type of activity. This outcome was reported most commonly among those assigned to “Job Search and Job Readiness” (37.9%) and least commonly reported for those with “Unsubsidized Employment” (20.2%).

The second set of columns in Figure 3 shows the frequency of use of another completion code (job entry/hired) by activity type. Here we see that this code was used for approximately one in ten participants in “Job Search” (10.0%), “Work Experience” (10.5%), and “Job Skills” (11.8%). Job entries were much less common, and understandably so, among those in the midst of a TCA sanction (0.7%) or who had

already secured “Unsubsidized Employment” (1.8%).

Noncooperation was also among the five most commonly used WORKS completion codes associated with the top five activities to which RISE participants were assigned. It was used for one in four participants assigned to “Job Search and Job Readiness” (25.1%), nearly two in five participants assigned to “Work Experience” (37.6%), and approximately one in three participants assigned to “Job Skills Training” (32.7%). As stated previously, it is possible that many of these participants eventually did participate and cooperate with a subsequent work activity assignment. Perhaps not unexpectedly, another commonly used completion code was “case closed”.

For RISE participants working in an unsubsidized job in the sample month, case closure was the most often used code (38.3%). In this context, case closure is a positive outcome, if we infer that services were ended because they were no longer needed. On the other hand, case closure was also the most common outcome for those coded with an “Adverse Action/Sanction”. Sanctioning is unique to the TCA work-eligible participants, and does not apply to the NPEP program. The purpose of sanctioning is to provide motivation for completing program and work requirements, and other of our studies have found that most participants who are sanctioned quickly return (Ovwigbo, Kolupanowich, and Born, 2010).

Finally, the remaining activities open in the sample month were either ongoing at the end of our follow-up period, or were coded with another less frequently-used completion status code. Overall, less than ten percent of the activities that were begun or ongoing in the sample month were still ongoing at the end of the follow-up period (December 2010).

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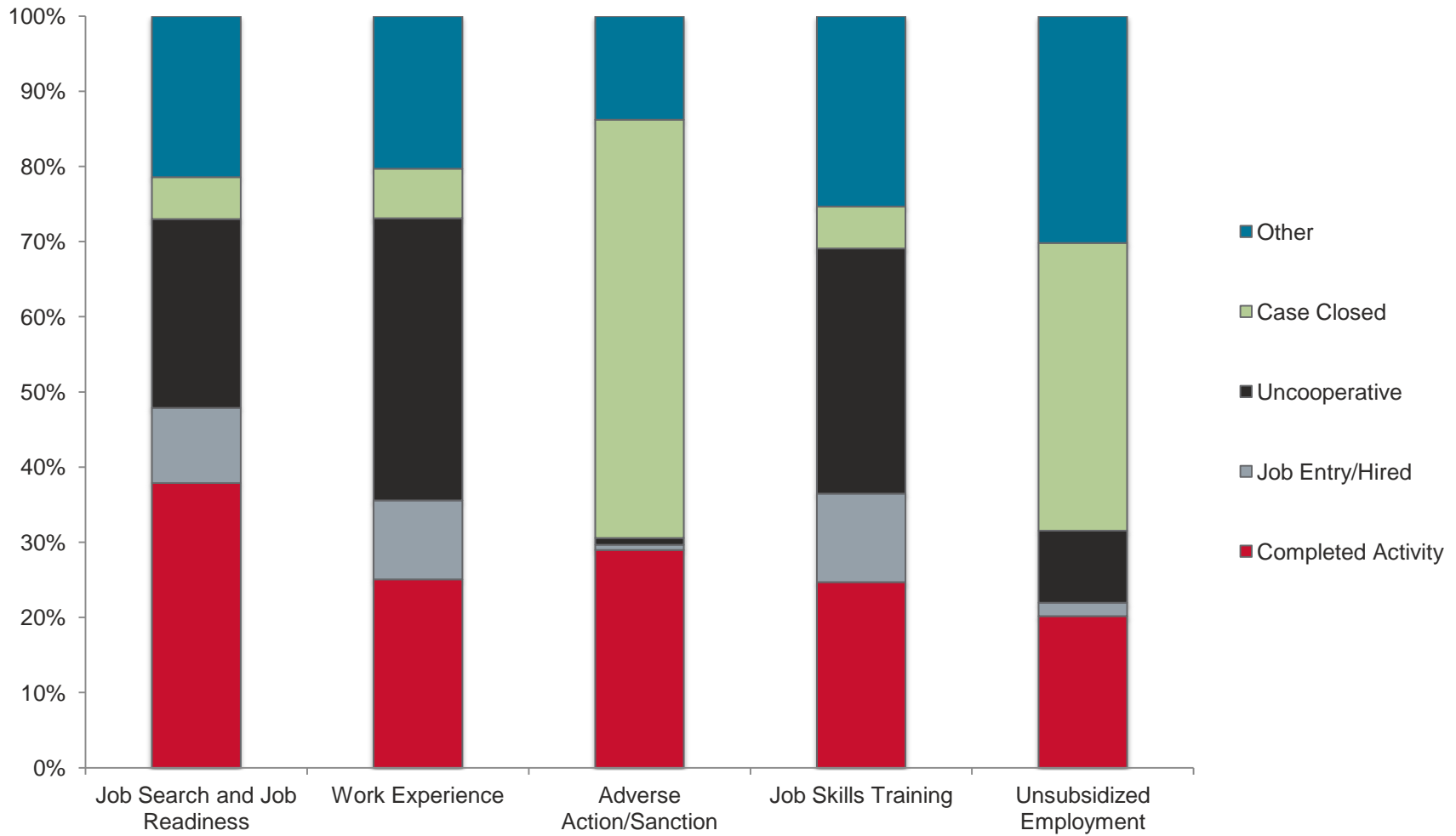
<sup>9</sup> We did conduct a separate analysis, not presented, that compared completion status by activity type for NPEP participants versus Work-Eligible Individuals, but for most of the activity types, the sample size for NPEP participants was too small to make a valid comparison.



These findings about the work activities and activity completion codes of the first wave of RISE participants from the TCA and non-custodial parent populations indicate that, consistent both with federal TCA rules and the RISE rationale, work is clearly the central theme. By sizable margins, the two most common activities to which RISE clients were assigned are job search/readiness and work experience, both of which are activities federally defined. The other three of the “top five” activities also confirm the overarching focus on helping clients to find employment and on requiring them to actively pursue this goal as well: sanctioning; job skills training directly related to employment; and unsubsidized employment. Perusal of the other 10 most commonly assigned activities listed in Table 9 shows a heavy tilt in the direction of work as well, but also that illness, temporary disabilities, child care and other family crises are not uncommon, particularly within the work-eligible population and must be addressed.

The bottom line is that each activity has a unique and specific purpose, and the hours spent in each activity reflect genuine effort on the part of customers and caseworkers to pursue positive outcomes and goals. The irony, of course, is that while front-line case management practice and Maryland’s state-defined activities reflect and attempt to address the multi-faceted complexities of clients’ lives and situations, much of the clients’ and agency’s work is not countable under current federal rules.

**Figure 3. Completion Status for Top 5 Work Activities**



**Note:** 'Other' includes ongoing activity, lost child care, lost means of transportation, illness or injury, substance abuse, child or dependent illness, moved to non-jobs area, address change, family problems, incarcerated, referred/Baltimore Reads, domestic violence, unable to locate, obtained service, or ended for other or unknown reasons.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Maryland RISE initiative is innovative and ambitious. In two important ways it represents an expansion of the “work-first” framework viewed as the gold standard throughout the early years of welfare reform. First, it expands our notion of what is a good job. While experience in any job is important, even experience in minimum wage or short-term jobs, the RISE initiative recognizes that in order to move families out of poverty in the long-term, the best jobs are those that help to build skill sets, provide opportunities for mobility, and offer benefits and living wages. The collaborative nature of the RISE initiative speaks to how overwhelming this higher benchmark really is; the only way to make progress is to recruit the help of local employers as well as community partners that provide education, training and services.

Second, the RISE initiative expands our view of the at-risk population. The primary subpopulation is TCA customers for whom the state must report work participation, but RISE also seeks to include fathers who are unable to contribute to their children’s care because they are unemployed as well as foster care children who are entering their prime working years and need support in order to make a lasting transition off of public benefits. These additional groups are already receiving services through the same local offices as the TCA customers, and including them under the umbrella of RISE can only serve to strengthen whole families within our community.

Of course, the RISE initiative was launched in complex policy and economic environments. The Great Recession was an unexpected and unwanted game-changer for employment assistance programs, and the post-recession market for entry-level jobs is more sharply competitive. At the same time, federal work participation requirements have become more stringent for welfare programs, and state budgets are constrained. There is not as much leeway

these days for counting education or training, or for giving partial credit toward work participation for part-time effort. Although the flexibility of RISE allows for local innovation and creativity, there are still statewide and federal rules that must be followed and work participation thresholds that must be met.

Regardless of the exponentially more challenging policy and economic environments, the RISE initiative does help maintain a focus on things that are ultimately good for families who are in need and helps to set goals to which we should continue to aspire to find solid career ladders for all NPEP, Foster Care, and TCA customers today. Maintaining that as our ultimate goal is important though, so we can think creatively about how to help them move even one step forward on that path, given their and our economy’s current challenges. And it will be especially important to have an empirical record of what has been done along the way, so that we can quickly adapt when economic and employment conditions improve.

Today’s report is the first in series of reports that supports the effort to have empirical data. We explored basic but necessary questions, like who is the target population of the RISE initiative? What are their characteristics? What services do they receive? What are their employment experiences? And what types of activities do they participate in?

First, we confirmed that the three subgroups of clients targeted by RISE are distinct and, though all are served through the Maryland Department of Human Resources, they have unique demographic characteristics, patterns of program utilization, and employment experiences. For instance, aging-out foster care youth are, not surprisingly, younger and also more likely to be male than typical TCA customers. They have little work experience but show strong work participation effort as they enter adulthood. NPEP participants are mostly

male, are least likely to qualify for income support programs, and have substantial child support obligations. They tend to have work experience, but their work participation and wages tend to be stagnant over time. Finally, work-eligible TCA customers are mostly female, and many have very young children. TCA customers tend to utilize a broader network of income support services than foster care youth or NPEP participants, and they also tend to have strong work experience. Over time, however, their work participation and wages tend to be less than that of NPEP participants.

These demographic differences suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to serving these individuals would be less successful than one that is tailored to meet their unique needs and circumstances. The RISE initiative acknowledges this and encourages flexibility in the specific partnerships that local offices form with their community partners. When looking for best practices across the state, however, it is important to keep in mind that efforts that resulted in successful job placements in one locale may not necessarily be successful elsewhere.

The second major finding is that work activity assignments have a broad range, from barrier removal to unsubsidized employment, but the most common assignments are to work-related activities like job search, work experience programs, and unsubsidized employment (especially for NPEP participants). About one-quarter of those enrolled in these activities are recorded as having completed the activity in a relatively short period of time, and an additional one-quarter to one-third are recorded to have other relevant and positive completion statuses. For instance, those in unsubsidized employment are likely to have their welfare case closed, and a substantial minority of those who were assigned to do a job search is recorded as having found a job.

Many RISE participants have multiple work activities, and most are not completing the activities in the short term, or they are finding employment on their own and losing contact with the agency. The sooner caseworkers are able to uncover barriers to employment and help customers address the barriers that are able to be removed, the sooner appropriate placements can be made in various work activities and the more likely it will be for those activities to be completed.

This leads to a third major finding that, although the RISE population is targeted to those deemed ready for work, there are still barriers to employment that present challenges. The importance of quality assessment cannot be understated. Most of the barriers that appeared in the top fifteen work activity assignments related to temporary illnesses or disabilities and caring for young children. Regarding the latter issue, in this difficult budget climate the provision of publicly funded or subsidized child care is likely going to continue to be scarce and remain an obstacle to employment for women receiving welfare for the foreseeable future.

The final major finding is something that was not directly presented in the body of this report, but became clear in our analysis of the administrative data. We found that if program managers want to understand the trajectory of their customers' journey from basic education to upward career mobility, additional or different data collection may be necessary. This is because the data that is collected to track work participation is designed to provide monthly, caseload-level snapshots rather than individual-based progress. This database structure makes sense if WORKS is primarily intended as a tool to facilitate compliance with federal TANF work participation reporting. However, with multiple work activity codes per activity, multiple activities per person, and multiple records for people across programs, the data is not conducive or sufficient on mapping out the story of the

individuals' journeys from one point to another. There may be more hope for our traditional, longitudinal, person-as-unit-of-analysis research and reporting when detailed person-specific assessment tools become available, particularly the Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA). Until then, snapshots of the caseload may be the best we can glean using WORKS data.

Economic conditions and database constraints notwithstanding, Maryland has positioned itself to bring the greatest possible benefit to vulnerable families at the earliest signs of economic improvement by setting its sights on making quality job placements. The RISE initiative also places Maryland at the forefront of national policy discussions regarding possible changes and adjustments to work participation rules of the TANF block grant. Assuming future adjustments are made to these rules (perhaps allowing for partial participation credit or expanding options for educational activities) states that can quickly identify the status and needs of their customers will be best-positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities on behalf of families. We expect that Maryland will thrive precisely because of its history of guiding program development with empirical data, local flexibility, and collaboration, just as is reflected in the implementation of the RISE initiative.

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## APPENDIX A. WORK ACTIVITY DESCRIPTIONS

<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Job Search and Job Readiness	Core	A variety of activities aimed at assisting a TCA parent in locating unsubsidized employment, including skills training, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or rehabilitation activities.
Work Experience	Core	Includes public or private sector work situations where the person has the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to perform a broad array of jobs, including learning about appropriate work habits and behaviors.
Adverse Action/Sanction	State	The 10 day adverse action period before the TCA closes or is reduced.
Job Skills Training	Non-Core	Includes training or education for job skills required by an employer to provide an individual with the ability to obtain employment or to advance or adapt to the changing demands of the work place.
Pursuit of Income Supports	State	Case is assigned this activity when they need to take care of situations that deal with any of a wide range of support services. These may include appointments with a housing authority, TANF and food supplement redeterminations, etc.
Illness or Incapacity/Wellness Rehab	State	Recipients who are disabled less than 12 months may have good cause for non-cooperation with a federal work activity but must be active in a state defined activity, usually wellness rehabilitation.
Vocational Educational Training	Core	Includes organized educational programs related to preparing the individual for employment in current or emerging occupations.
Unsubsidized Employment	Core	Full or part-time employment in the public or private sector that is not subsidized by TANF or any other public program.
In conciliation	State	A one-time only, 30-day time period allowed prior to sanctioning to determine why the customer is not complying with work requirements.
Breakdown in Childcare/Seeking Childcare	State	The participant can use this code for a maximum of 30 days in order to find appropriate child care.
Family Crisis/Family Services	State	Individual or their family is in crisis. Examples: eviction, homeless, school issues with a child or the family is in counseling to resolve a crisis.
Caring for a Child Under Age 1	State	An exemption that may be used for up to 12 months following the baby's birth.
Community Service Programs	Core	A structured activity that provides a direct benefit to the community (public or non-profit organizations).
Prenatal/12-week Postpartum	State	An exemption that is allowed for the first 12 weeks immediately following a baby's birth.
Disabled for More than 12 Months	State	Recipients who are disabled for 12 months or longer and must apply for SSI.