



From short-term safety net to multi-generational income source

*An analysis of varied welfare use patterns over two
decades by Vermont families*

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June 29, 2013

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Summary

When looking at their 20-year history, use of Vermont's welfare programs varies dramatically between families. Over half of the families who used Reach Up in 2012 showed indicators of long-term, generational poverty in which welfare had been part of their lives, first as children and later as parents. On the other hand, half of the 2012 families had received assistance for relatively short periods of time (fewer than 24 months).

Although each family's unique situation ultimately determines how often it needs welfare during its child-rearing years, some family types have a greater likelihood of using it for long periods of time: large families, single-parent families, families with work participation deferments or identified barriers, and families with generational poverty as evidenced by a parent who received welfare as a child.

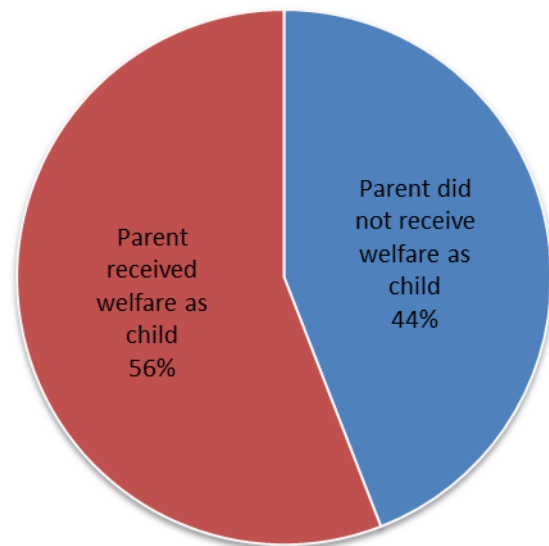
Approximately 7,800 families received Reach Up assistance at some point during 2012.¹ This study took a unique look at these families' long-term history receiving welfare in Vermont. Using comprehensive electronic case data from the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) as far back as it is available (January 1991), we examined families' longitudinal patterns of receiving Vermont welfare assistance.² This enabled us to tally the total months since 1991 that a family had received assistance.

In addition to tabulating the total months that families had received assistance over the long term, we examined the frequency, length, and patterns of welfare stays or "episodes." Many families receive assistance for a period of time, leave the program, and then return months or years later, generating multiple welfare episodes.

Result highlights

- More than half of 2012 families (at least 56%) include parents who received welfare in Vermont during childhood. This "generational welfare" significantly increased the odds of returning to Reach Up and of having relatively long histories of receiving welfare assistance as parents. Families headed

Figure 1: More than half of 2012 families include parents who received welfare during childhood



¹ Excluding child-only families and the small number of families who participated in the post-secondary education program. Families participating in the Reach First and Reach Ahead programs in 2012 are included.

² Vermont's welfare program assumed the name "Reach Up" in 2000 when the state implemented changes made to the federal Temporary Aid to Needy Families program as well as other changes.

by parents who had received welfare in Vermont as a child were 1.7 times as likely to return to Reach Up after an exit as families with parents new to the welfare system.³

- About 23% of the 2012 Reach Up families had received welfare in Vermont for a total of more than 60 months. Prior DCF reports about families on Reach Up and TANF for more than 60 months have focused exclusively on family case history since 2000 when the Reach Up program began. Since this study counts welfare receipt back to 1991, the numbers of families with more than 60 months of assistance reported here is higher than in prior Reach Up program reports.⁴
- Thirty-nine percent of the 2012 cases had only one episode of receiving welfare in Vermont so far. Of the families that had received more than 60 months of assistance, only 9% had stayed in the program consistently, without breaks. Most families who received more than 60 months of assistance have “churned” in their participation in Vermont’s welfare programs, entering and exiting multiple times in a one year period or coming and going from the program with more extended breaks between participation.
- Certain types of families have an increased chance of experiencing longer, more frequent welfare stays: large families, those with generational poverty as evidenced by a parent who received welfare as a child, single-parent families and families with work participation deferments or identified barriers.
- Families who leave Reach Up before income from other sources is in place are more likely to “churn” and return again to the program relatively quickly. Families who left Reach Up in the first quarter of 2012 with no identified income were 1.6 times as likely to return to the program later in the year as those with some income, when other family characteristics were held constant.
- In contrast, sanctioned families who left the program in the first quarter of 2012 were less likely to return to the program later in the year when compared to similar families without sanctions. This is likely due to the fact that the monthly benefits of sanctioned families have been reduced, thereby making return to the program less beneficial.

³The prevalence of parents who received welfare as children is actually likely to be somewhat higher than 56%, but we were limited to examining only a portion of the caseload (those young enough to have been under the age of 18 in 1991) due to the lack of comprehensive, electronic data prior to 1991.

⁴A report completed by Black-Plumeau Consulting LLC for DCF and the Vermont legislature in January 2013 on receipt of Reach Up assistance in excess of 60 months states that 15% of the September 2012 cases received more than 60 cumulative months of Reach Up assistance since 2000—substantially less than the 23% reported here when time spent on Vermont welfare back to 1991 is considered.

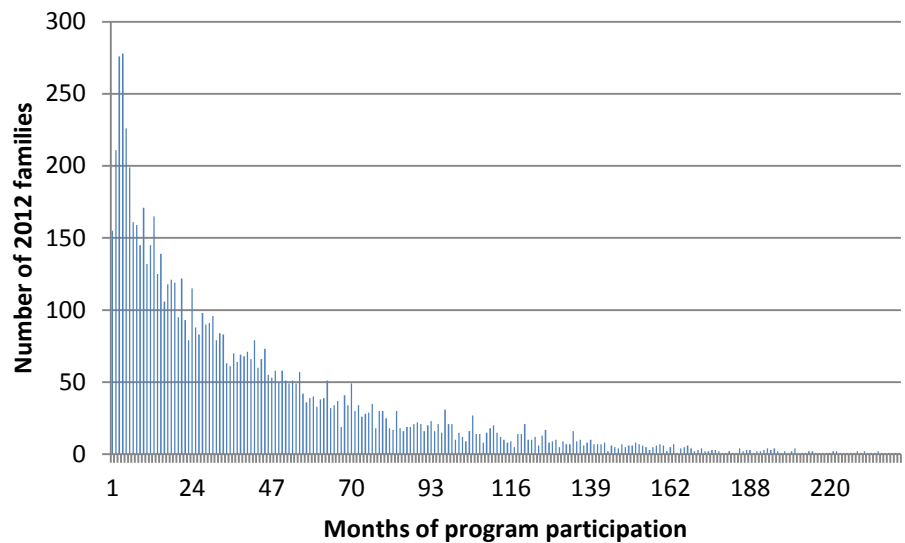
Overview of welfare history patterns

Since the intent of this study was to take a long-term look at each family's welfare history beyond the Reach Up program's implementation in 2000, the number of months of welfare shown in this report is expanded to include months in both the prior AFDC program as well as the current Reach Up program. This means that the number of months of welfare associated with each family and the number of cases reaching thresholds such as 60 months or more of assistance will be higher in this study than in prior studies that looked exclusively at months since 2000 (in the Reach Up program).

Total months receiving Vermont welfare program benefits

Counting all months of participation in Reach Up and AFDC since 1991, 23 percent of the 2012 families had participated for more than 60 months. This includes both consecutive and non-consecutive months of assistance.

Figure 2: Total months of program participation

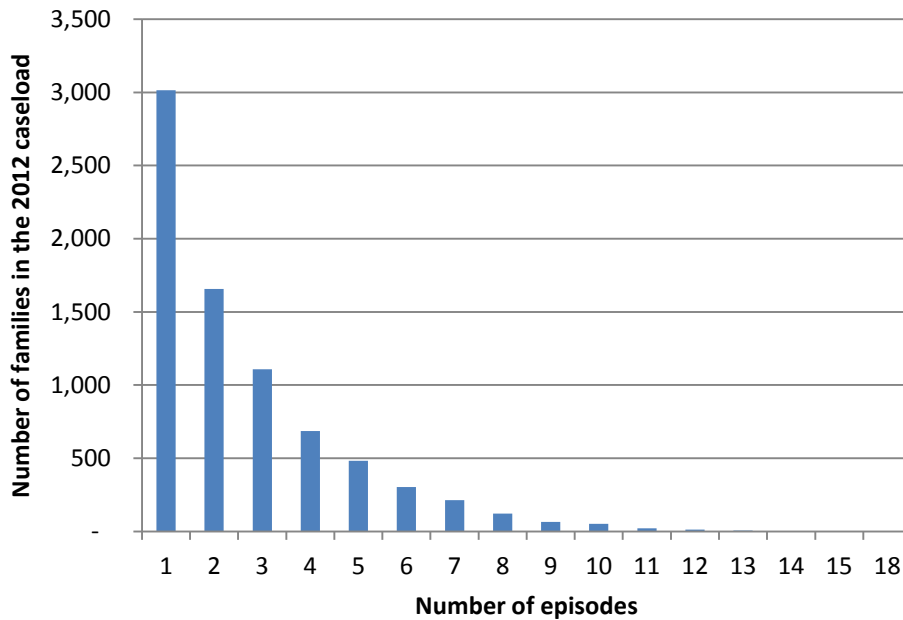


Assistance episodes

Many families receive welfare assistance, leave the program, and then return to it in the future. In this study, a completed episode was defined as any receipt of Vermont welfare program assistance followed by two or more months not receiving assistance. The median number of welfare episodes so far by the 2012 families is three (i.e. half of the families have experienced three or fewer episodes and half have experienced three or more episodes).

The more years that a family has spent child rearing and receiving welfare, the more likely it is to experience multiple welfare episodes. Families with more than 60 months of welfare history had an average of 5 episodes, while those with fewer total months in the program have an average of 2 episodes.

Figure 3: Total number of welfare episodes

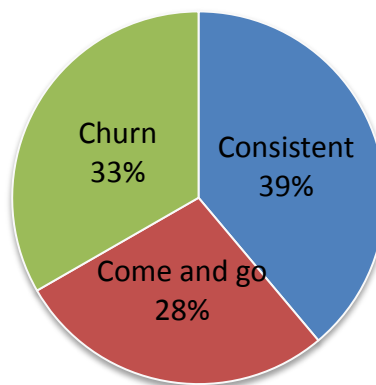


By the end of 2012, about 3,000 families (39%) in the 2012 caseload had not yet completed their first Vermont welfare episode. More than half (55%) of these single-episode families are relatively new to Reach Up, entering the program for the first time less than a year earlier. On the other end of the spectrum are families that have stayed on welfare consistently for an extended period. We found few of these cases of uninterrupted, long-term welfare receipt. Only 5 percent of the single-episode families had been in the program for five or more years (168 families).

Welfare history pattern group

The welfare history patterns of the 2012 Reach Up families can be described as “consistent”, “churning,” and “comes and goes.” “Consistent” welfare participants stayed in the program without interruption, “churning” families had multiple episodes in a single year and families which “come and go” had multiple episodes with at least 12 months between episodes. The 2012 families are divided fairly evenly between these groups, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Welfare history patterns of 2012 families



Consistent: Stayed in program consistently (i.e. no breaks).
Churn: Multiple episodes in a single year
Come and go: Multiple episodes but with at least 1 year in between.

Since the “consistent” group includes many families that started Reach Up recently, some of them will likely shift to the “churn” or “come and go” categories with future years of experience child-rearing. The average

cumulative years of welfare among the consistent group was 2, while the “come and go” and “churn” groups had much higher average cumulative years of assistance—4 years and 5 years, respectively.

The reasons families exit and subsequently re-enter welfare in Vermont are difficult to identify. However, we do know that certain factors increase the likelihood of returning after exiting. Sixty-two percent of the families who left Reach Up in the first quarter of 2012 had no income when they left. However, these families were 1.6 times as likely to return to the program later in the year as similar types of families who left with some income. This demonstrates the powerful connection between the lack of income at exit and the likelihood that a family will become a Reach Up “churner.”

Multi-generational welfare

A long-standing concern is that welfare participation in one generation may contribute to welfare participation in the next generation. Indeed, nationwide studies have shown a positive relationship between the welfare receipt of children and their later participating in welfare programs as parents.⁵ However, few studies have explained the underlying reasons for this correlation. On one hand, welfare use might be “passed down” from generation to generation if parents on welfare teach their children about how to use the program and reduce its stigma. On the other hand, since poverty or poor health is correlated across generations, the use of welfare as children and then later as parents may be a direct indicator of economic needs created by multigenerational poverty. In this way, multi-generational welfare may be more an economic than cultural phenomenon.

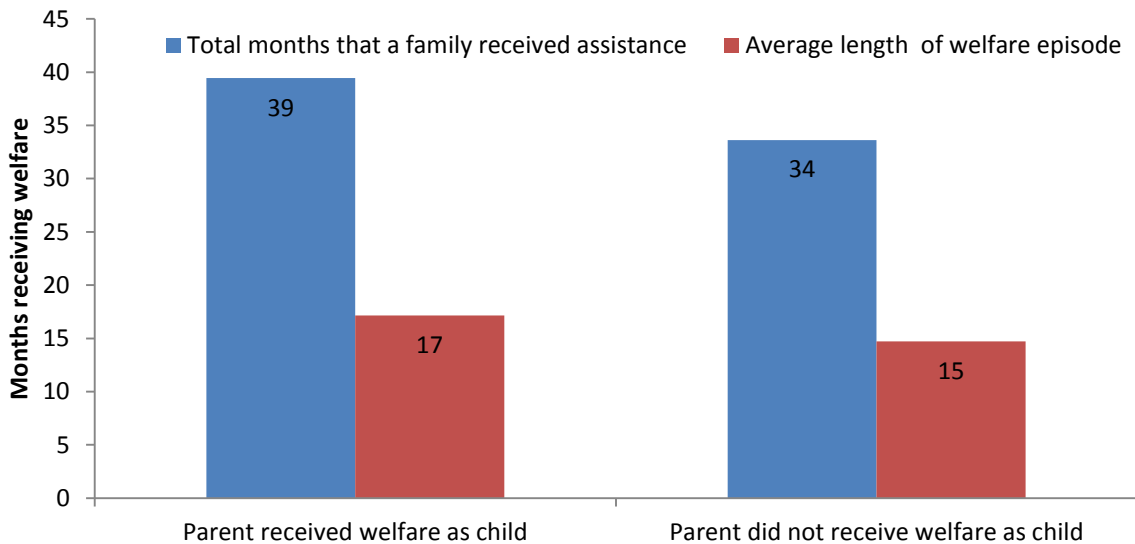
Unfortunately, intergenerational welfare is no less prevalent in Vermont than the rest of the country. More than half of the 2012 families (56%) included a parent who had received welfare in Vermont as a child. Since comprehensive program data prior to 1991 were not available in electronic format, only parents who were young enough to have been a child under the age of 18 in 1991-2012 were included in this “generational welfare” analysis. There are likely to be even more families in the 2012 caseload experiencing generational welfare than we were able to identify due to data limitations.

Among the families who left the Reach Up program during the first quarter of 2012, those with parents who had received welfare in Vermont as a child were 1.7 times more likely to return to the program than families without signs of generational welfare, even when other characteristics, such as income, were held constant.

Furthermore, Vermont families with a parent who had once received welfare as a child had more cumulative months of welfare assistance on average than families without signs of multi-generational welfare (39 months vs. 34 months). They also had longer average welfare episodes (17 months vs. 15 months).

⁵*New Evidence on Intergenerational Correlations in Welfare Participation*, Marianne E. Page, University of California, Davis and Joint Center for Poverty Research April 2002, <http://www.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/mepage/w-corrapr02.pdf>. This study found that women who experienced a spell of welfare receipt during childhood are almost three times as likely to become welfare participants as adults as are women whose parents did not receive welfare using long-term nationwide data. This report also reviews the results of many prior studies.

Figure 4: Families with multi-generational welfare have longer, more frequent welfare stays



*These differences were significant at the 95% level.

Relationship of family characteristics to welfare history patterns

To learn more about why some families stay on welfare consistently for a relatively long time, why some cycle on and off the caseload, and why some stay on only for a single, brief episode, we examined the correlation between family characteristics and welfare history indicators. Although some families have been on welfare for many years, we focused this portion of the study on their characteristics in the most recent month in 2012 in which they participated in Reach Up.

Family size

About a quarter (26%) of the 2012 Reach Up families had four or more members. On average, these families had more frequent and/or longer stays on welfare.

Figure 5: About a quarter of 2012 families had at least 4 members

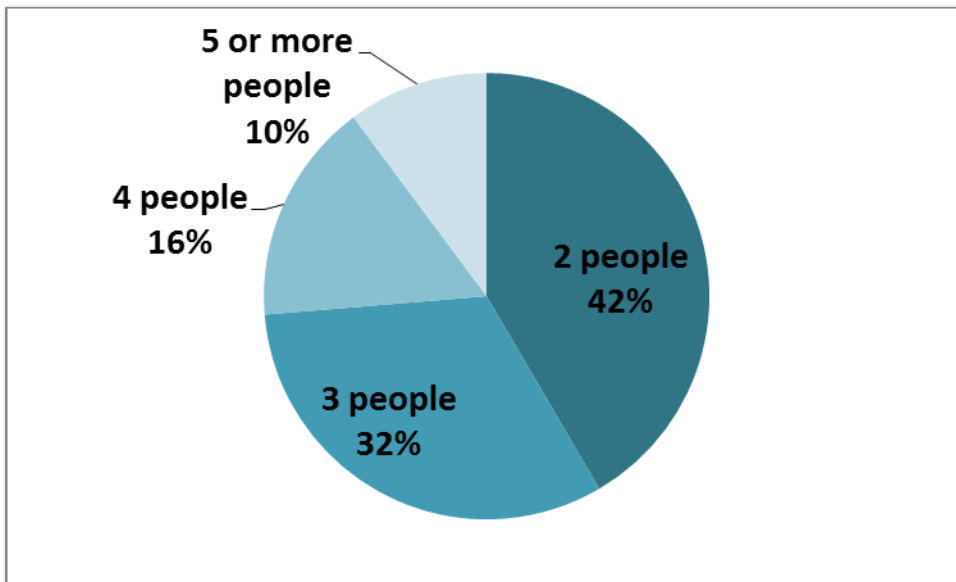
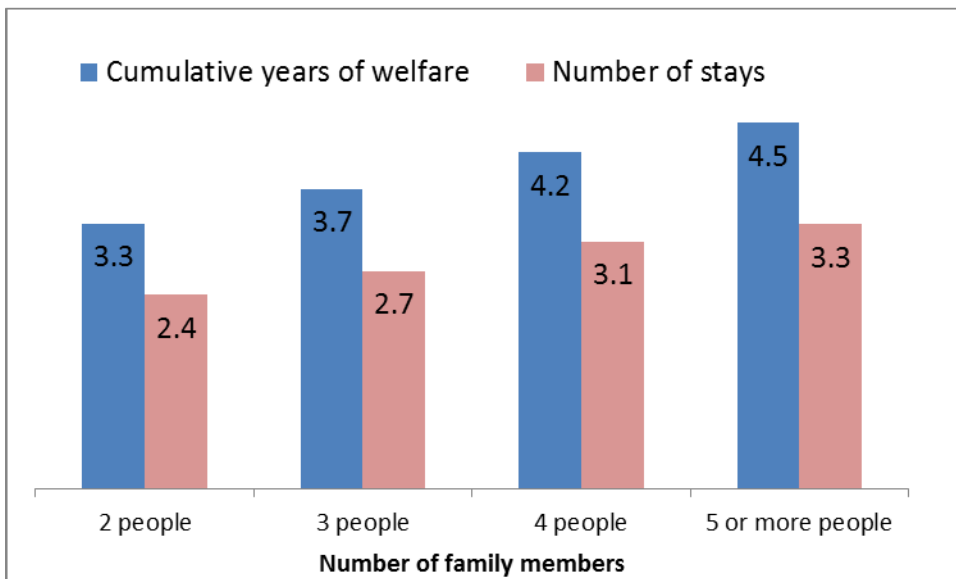


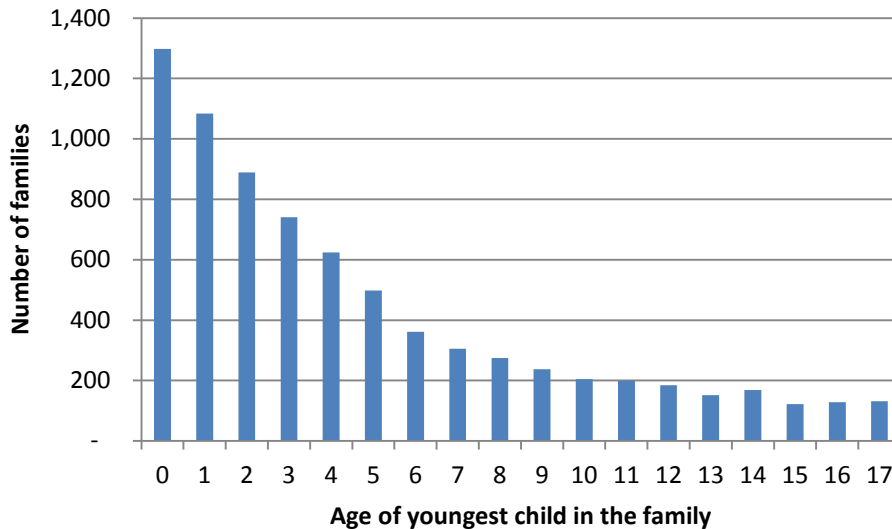
Figure 6: Larger families are likely to have longer, more frequent welfare stays



Age of family members

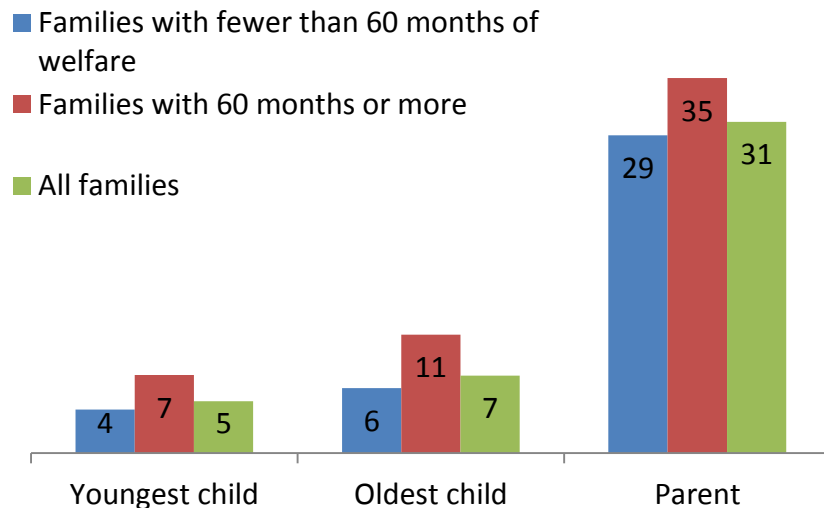
On average, the 2012 Reach Up families had their first child at age 23. Although parents who have children at a young age might be expected to have a greater need for financial assistance, we found that the age of parents when starting their child-rearing years has no significant correlation with the length of a family's Vermont welfare history.

Figure 7: Age of youngest child



More than half of the 2012 Reach Up families (52%) had a child who was aged three or younger. The age of a family's members has a direct and important relationship to its welfare history. The more time a family has spent child-rearing, the greater the number of potential months it has to have been on welfare. Consequently, we found that the older the children and parents in a family, the more months on welfare they were likely to have and the more likely they were to have reached the 60-month mark.

Figure 8: Average age of Reach Up children and parents



Single-parent families compared to two-parent families

The vast majority (79%) of the families receiving Reach Up in 2012 were single-parent families. These families received welfare assistance for an average of 42 months since 1991—significantly longer than two

able-to-work parent families (that received assistance for an average of 29 months). A small portion (4%) of the 2012 families included two adults who were not both able to work. These families had longer average months on welfare than either of the other two family type groups, perhaps due to the presence of a work participation deferment for at least one parent.

Figure 9: Single parent families comprise 79% of 2012 Reach Up families

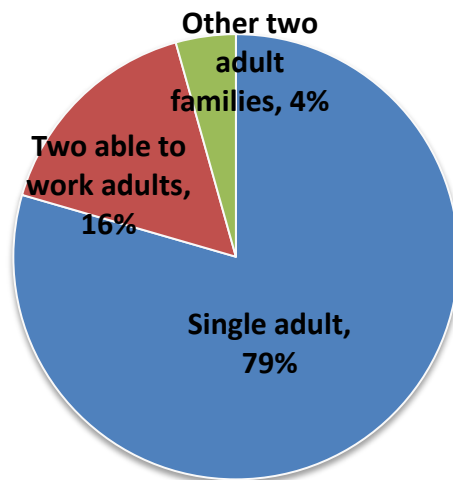
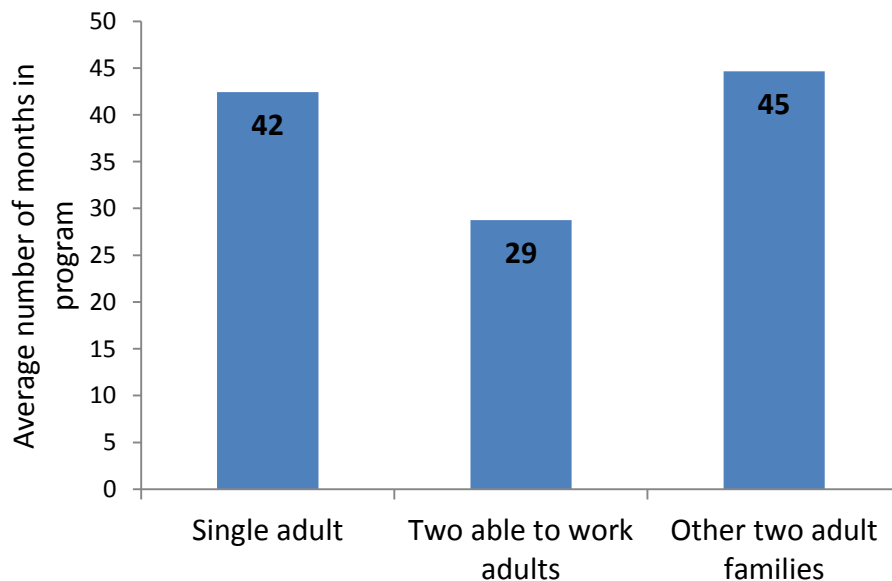


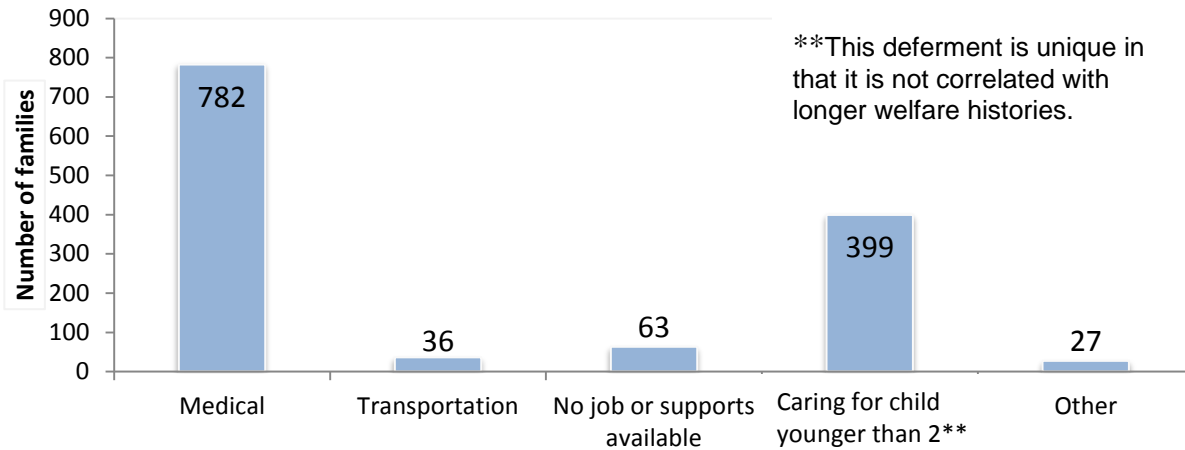
Figure 10: Months of participation by family type



Deferments

Of the 7,800 families in the Reach Up program in 2012, 17 percent were deferred from the program's work participation requirement.⁶ The most frequently cited justifications for deferment from work participation requirements involve medical reasons. For more information on deferment types, see Appendix Table 3.

Figure 11: Most common deferment is for medical reasons



As expected, most types of deferments were accompanied by prolonged stays on Reach Up. Families with child care deferments were an exception to this. These families, with children under the age of two, are generally younger, with younger parents and children. They are likely to have spent less time so far child rearing and in turn to have had fewer months of opportunity to need Reach Up. It is not surprising that these younger families have shorter welfare histories so far, as discussed earlier in Figure 8.

Families with medical deferments are likely to have the longest welfare histories, when compared to other types of deferments. On average, these families had 5.7 cumulative years of welfare history (68 months).

⁶Deferments include both those that are based on state law and those based on federal rules.

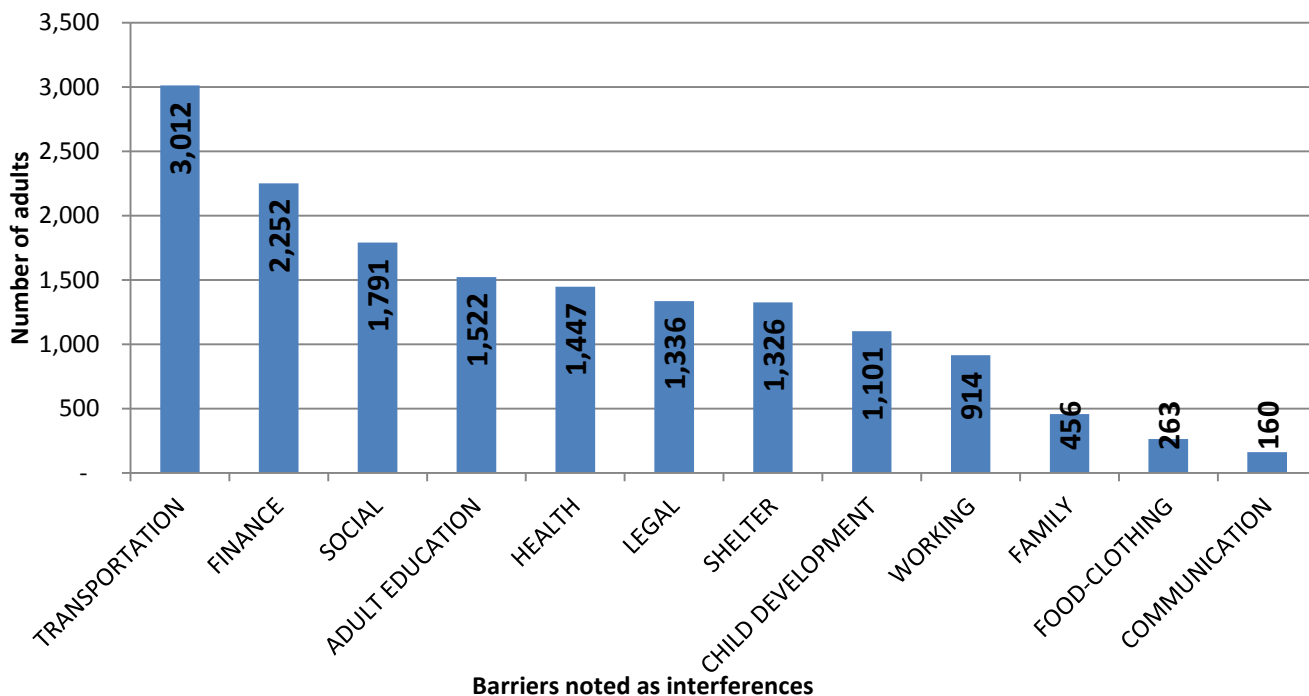
Figure 12: Families with medical deferments have longer welfare histories than other types

Deferment type	Average cumulative years of assistance	Average length of stay	Average number of stays	Average total months of assistance	% of families with 3+ years in last stay	% of families with 5+ years
Medical	5.7	28	3	68	27%	48%
Transportation	4.7	20	3	56	8%	42%
No job or supports available	4.6	22	3	55	17%	28%
Caring for child younger than 2	2.3	14	2	28	7%	11%
Other	4.1	26	2	49	19%	33%
None	3.1	15	3	38	11%	21%

Barriers

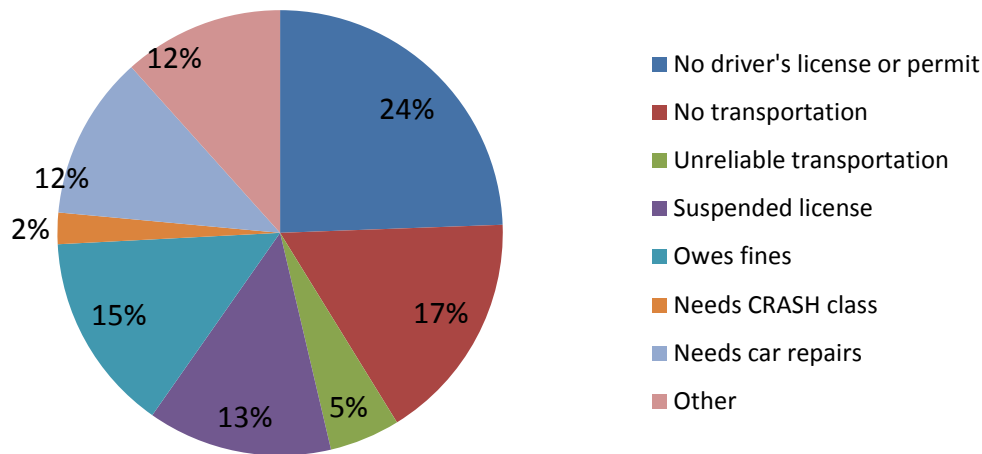
Of the 2012 Reach Up families, 71% of the families had at least one barrier interfering with their ability to be successful in the program. More than 3,000 of the adults among the 2012 families experienced transportation as a barrier. This was the most frequently cited interfering barrier among the 2012 families, followed by finance and social barriers.

Figure 13: Barriers experienced by adults in 2012 families



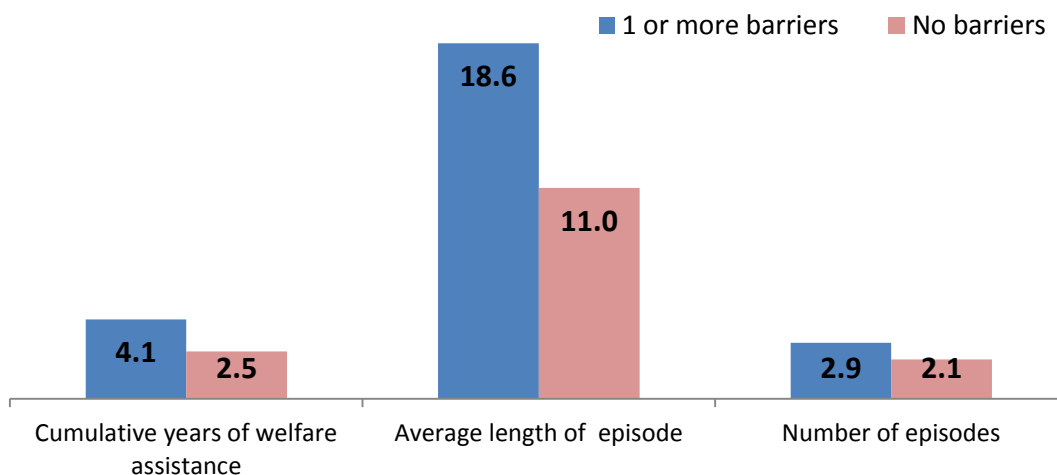
The most common type of transportation barrier is the lack of a driver's license or permit, although many families experienced a range of other problems, including lacking reliable transportation and owing fines or having a suspended license. For information on the specific barriers in other groups, see Appendix Table 4.

Figure 14: Range of types of transportation barriers experienced by adults in 2012 families



Families with barriers are far more likely than families with no barriers to have received at least 3 cumulative years of assistance. Fifteen percent of the families with at least one barrier had received this much assistance as compared to six percent of the families with no identified interfering barriers. Families with barriers had received welfare for an average of 47 months, compared to 24 months for families with no barriers.

Figure 15: Families with barriers have longer, more frequent welfare episodes



More than one barrier was identified as an interference for 4,300 of the 2012 Reach Up families. On average, families had two interfering barriers.

Figure 16: Number of barriers among 2012 Reach Up families

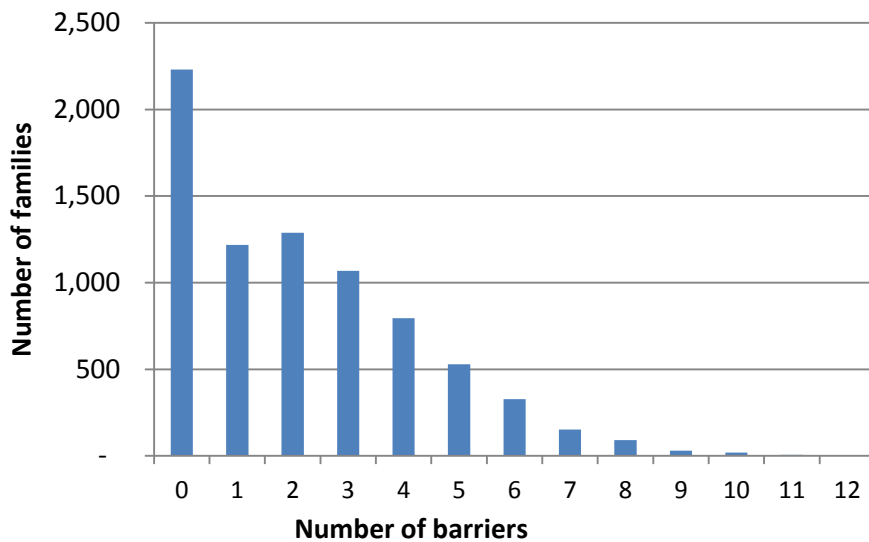
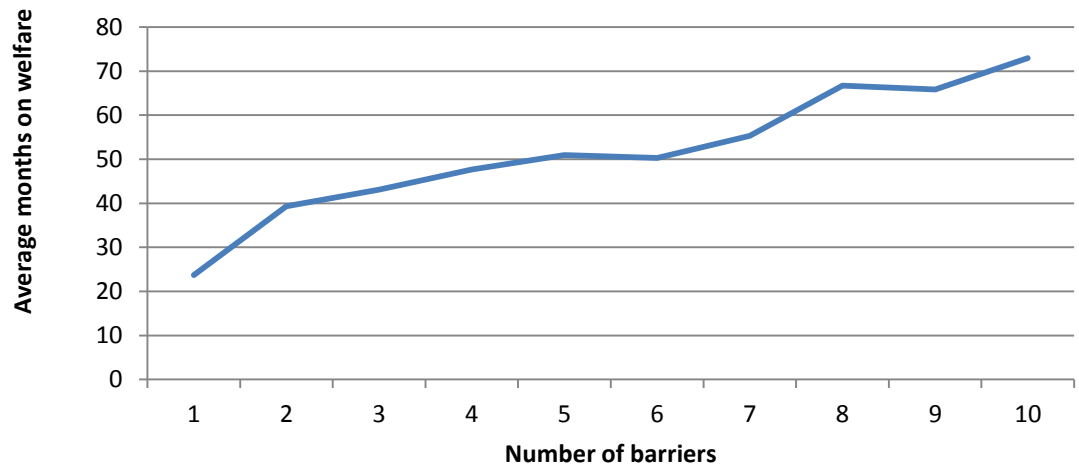


Figure 17: Each additional barrier increases the likelihood of more time on welfare

Not surprisingly, the more barriers a family experiences, the more likely they are to have a longer history of receiving welfare, longer episodes and more frequent episodes.



Family income

In a study of the Reach First program completed in December 2012, Black-Plumeau Consulting, LLC reported that a family's wages was positively correlated with its likelihood of avoiding a future return to

Reach Up.⁷ This study found a similar effect when looking at characteristics of the families that left Reach Up.

Sixty-two percent of the families who left Reach Up in the first quarter of 2012 had no income when they left. These families were 1.6 times as likely to return to the program later in the year as similar types of families who left with some income.

Prior studies have sought to explain why some families leave Reach Up with no apparent replacement income source. A 2011 study conducted by Black-Plumeau Consulting, LLC found that a third of the families who left Reach Up in 2008 had no income through typical forms of employment for the year following their departure. Although a substantial portion of these families returned to Reach Up, the remaining families likely experienced one of several scenarios that prevented them from returning to the program, such as mental health barriers, aging out of the dependent child, the start of federal disability benefits or working “under the table” for wages that are unreported.⁸

Sanctions

Six percent of the families receiving Reach Up in 2012 were in sanction during the most recent month. These 436 families had slightly longer average welfare stays (18 vs. 16 months) and more months of assistance (49 vs. 40 months) on average than families with no sanctions.

Of these sanctioned families, those who left Reach Up in the first quarter of 2012 were significantly less likely to return later in the year than leaver families without sanctions but with similar income levels and family characteristics. Sanctioned families may be less likely to return to the program because their monthly benefits have been reduced, thereby making return to the program less beneficial.

Methodology

This study examined the experiences of all families that received assistance through the Reach Up program in 2012, with the exception of those families who participated in the Post-Secondary Education component of the program and child-only cases. Families in the Reach First and the Reach Ahead components were included.

To look at the long-term experiences of these families, we merged 2012 DCF monthly extract data with historical information on the members of families that received welfare in Vermont from 1991 (the earliest year for which this data was available electronically) through 2011. Historical data were also obtained from DCF monthly caseload extracts. For the 22 year period, extract data existed for 258 months, but was missing for 10 months in 1993 and in 1998-1999. Missing months were simply not counted (i.e. if a family was on

⁷*Vermont's Reach First Program: Findings of an analysis of families participating in the program in 2010-2012*, January 2013, prepared by Black-Plumeau Consulting, LLC for the Vermont Department for Children and Families.

⁸*How did Vermont families fare after leaving welfare in 2008? Findings of a study of leavers from the Reach Up & Post-Secondary Education program*, June 2011, prepared by Black-Plumeau Consulting, LLC for the Vermont Department for Children and Families.

AFDC the month before and the month after a month for which extract data is missing we assumed that they stayed on during the missing month in terms of counting episodes. However, we did not count missing months when totaling the length of time on assistance or per episode. An episode is defined as an interval between a start date and an end date or a start date without an end date meaning that the case continued through December 2012. An episode was considered to have ended if it was followed by two consecutive months of not participating in the welfare program.

To estimate the prevalence of generational poverty, we extracted the social security numbers of each of the parents in the 2012 caseload who were aged 38 or younger in 2012. People in this age group (38 or younger) are the ones who might possibly have been children at some point during the period for which we had historical data (1991-2011). We then searched the historical case records to determine if any of these current parents had also received welfare earlier, as children. For this portion of the study, we focused on families headed by parents in this age group because we would have needed data from years prior to 1991 to look at older parents.

Parents who were 38 in 2012 would have been 17, still a child for welfare purposes, in 1991, so it's possible that we might find that some of them were children in that year's extracts, if their family was receiving AFDC benefits in 1991. However, if that family happened to avoid welfare in 1991 but received it earlier when this now parent was younger, we would not be able to detect multi-generational welfare because the data for years prior to 1991 are not available.

Similarly, a parent who was 37 in 2012 would have been 16 in 1991. If they had been on welfare at age 15 or younger in 1991, we would not be able to identify the multi-generational welfare occurring for this individual. Since we lacked data from the full historical period during which parents at the older end of the included spectrum (up to 38) were children, we expect that our analysis somewhat underestimates the percentage that were on welfare as children.

Because parents who were 39 or older in 2012 were already adults (age 18) by 1991, we could not determine if multi-generational welfare existed for their families.

To identify correlations between other family characteristics, such as family size and type, and welfare history, we used data from the most recent month in 2012 in which the family participated in Reach Up to inform us about family characteristics. For families who were in the program consistently throughout the year, we used December 2012 data to inform us about the family's characteristics.

Appendix: Detailed Tables

1. Profile of average Reach Up family

	All families <i>Average</i>	Families with fewer than 60 months of welfare <i>Average</i>	Families with 60 months or more <i>Average</i>
Family size	3		
Age of youngest child	5	4	7
Age of oldest child	7	6	11
Age of parent when oldest child was born	23		
Age of parent	31	29	35
Monthly income	\$396	\$430	\$286
Last grade of school completed by parent	12		
Number of barriers	2	2	3
Is there any deferment?	No		
Total months receiving welfare	40	22	101
Number of welfare stays	3	2	5
Length of most recent stay	17	13	30

**For two-parent families, statistics relating to the parent who is the case head were included. Only averages that are significantly different between families with fewer than 60 months of welfare and those with more at the 95% level are included in the table.*

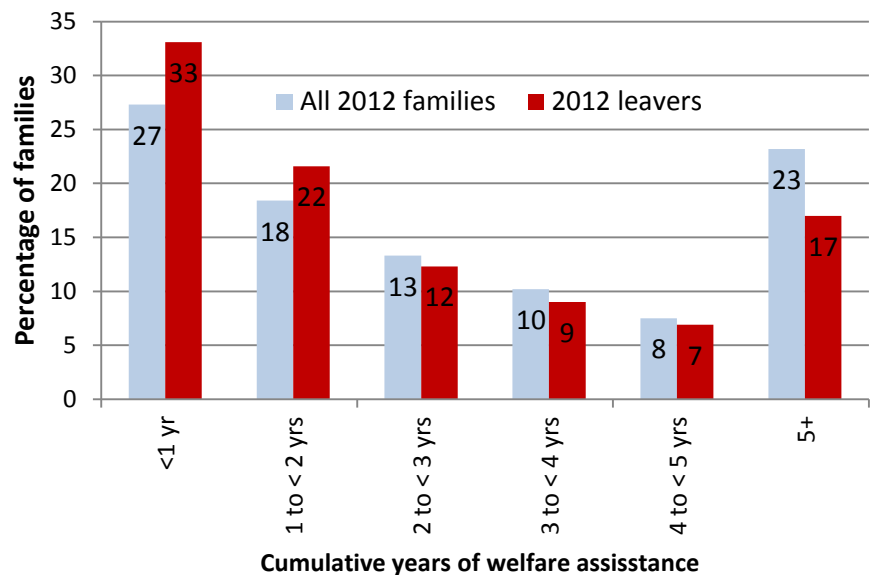
2. Families who left Reach Up in 2012

Not atypically, 44 percent (3,500) of the 7,800 families, left the Reach Up program at some point during 2012. Although many of these “leaver” families remained out of the program, many also returned later in the year to begin a new Reach Up episode. To learn more about the connection between types of families and Reach Up participation patterns, we conducted several special analyses focused on families who had left Reach Up at least once during the year.

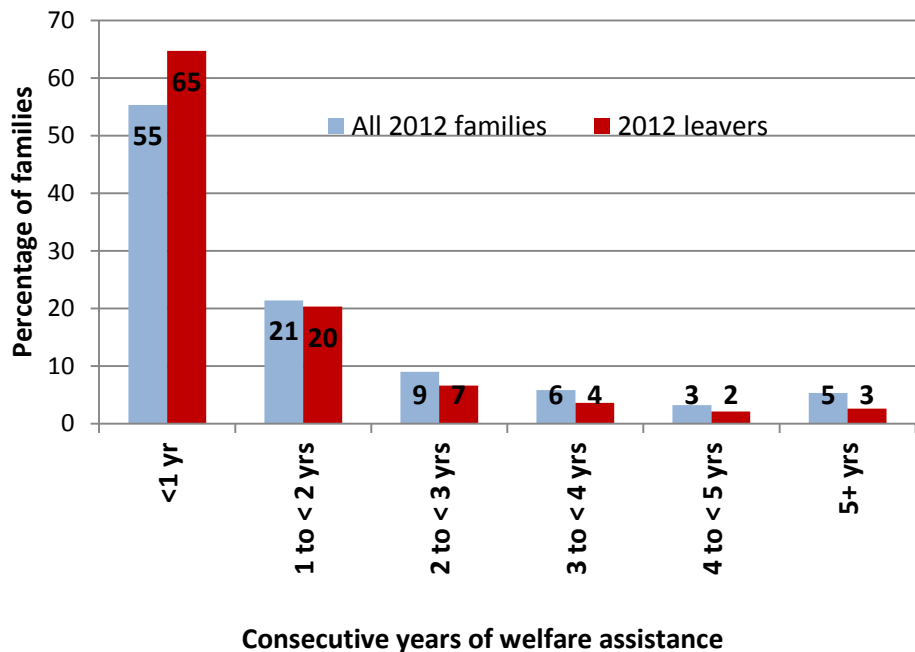
We found that leaver families had received fewer months of assistance on average than the 4,300 families that stayed on consistently through the year.

For families with only one stay on Reach Up, those that left the program in 2012 also tended to have shorter episodes than those who stayed on consistently.

Years of program participation



Length of episode among single-episode families



3. Deferment groups

DEFERMENT TYPE	NUMBER OF 2012 FAMILIES
MEDICAL	782
MEDICAL DEFERMENT - 1-3 MONTHS	98
MEDICAL DEFERMENT > 3 MONTHS	488
MEDICAL DEFERMENT - SSI/AABD OR TERMINATED BY VR	111
ABLE TO WORK PART TIME (MEDICAL CONDITION)	39
ACCEPTED TO VR WAITING LIST	46
TRANSPORTATION	36
TRANSPORTATION NOT AVAILABLE	36
NO JOB OR SUPPORTS AVAILABLE	63
NO SUBSIDIZED OR UNSUBSIDIZED JOB AVAILABLE	1
OTHER SUPPORTS NOT AVAILABLE	28
CHILD CARE NOT AVAILABLE	34
CARING FOR CHILD YOUNGER THAN TWO	399
PRIMARY CARE GIVER FOR CHILD > 6 MOS & < 24 MOS	274
PRIMARY CARETAKER OF CHILD < 6 MONTHS	107
NEW BABY (13 WEEKS)	18
OTHER	27
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BARRIERS	7
ABLE TO WORK PART TIME (DOMESTIC VIOLENCE)	1
ABLE TO WORK PART TIME (NEEDED IN HOME)	2
60 OR OLDER	7
REQD IN HOME, CARING FOR FAMILY MEMBER	9
20+ AND IN EDUCATION 25+ HOURS PER WEEK	1
Total	1,307

4. Barrier groups

A single family can have multiple barriers within a single barrier category as well as barriers in more than one category.

Number of barriers experienced by 2012 families	
Shelter	1,614
Homeless/living in Shelter	369
Dangerous/inadequate housing	105
Lack of affordable housing	359
Owes back rent	251
Shelter: other	530
Transportation	5,446
No driver's license or permit	1,330
No transportation	914
Unreliable transportation	279
Suspended license	730
Owes fines	787
Needs CRASH	124
Needs car repairs	648
Transportation: other	634
Food and Clothing	317
Inadequate clothing	202
Inadequate nutrition	36
Food and clothing: Other	79
Finances	2,501
Severe debt problems	556
Poor or no budgeting skills	394
Bankruptcy	24
Finances: other	1,527
Health and Safety	1,760
Physical health issues	1,150
Lack of medical providers	57
Needs dental work	87
Health and Safety: other	466
Child Development and Education	1,622
Serious developmental delays	134
Serious behavioral problems	297
No child care available	261
Disabled child	184
Child has IEP	324
Other	422

Social and Emotional	2,422
Alcohol abuse	139
Drug abuse	366
Mental health issues	1,367
Social and emotional: other	550
Family	501
Frequent conflicts among family	1
Domestic violence	168
Needed in home	15
Family interactions: other	317
Legal	1,695
Legal or court proceedings	464
History of criminal activity	784
Legal: other	447
Community Relations	215
Poor relationships with neighbors	54
Isolated from community/services	78
Community relations: other	83
Adult Education	1,716
No diploma or GED	1,363
Does not speak English	107
Difficulty learning	2
Learning disability	92
Adult education: other	152
Adult Employment	1,771
Skills not needed - local market	50
Poor or no work history	1,256
No employment opportunities	154
Adult employment: other	311
Work Skills	1,536
Lacks hard skills	665
Lacks soft skills	672
Work skills and habits: other	199