

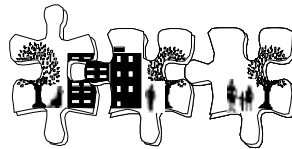


A Profile of Income Assistance Recipients in Winnipeg's Inner City

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WINNIPEG INNER CITY RESEARCH ALLIANCE



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Table of Contents

Preface	iii
Executive Summary	v
Introduction.....	8
Methodology.....	11
Background Information of Respondents.....	14
Age.....	14
Time on Assistance, Work history and Education.....	16
Reasons on Welfare.....	24
Educational Background.....	26
Experience with Welfare System.....	29
Understanding of System.....	29
Helpfulness of Officials.....	30
Sources of Information.....	31
Incidents of Harassment.....	34
Home Visits	37
Transitions to Work: Obstacles and Support.....	39
Training Programs.....	44
Conclusions.....	47
Appendix 1, Interview Questions	51

Preface

This research project grew out of a conversation myself and my colleague Jim Silver had over two years ago. Jim told me of a small grass roots organization that was struggling to provide advocacy services for welfare recipients in the inner city. The organization was called the Low Income Intermediary Project (LIIP) and it was run by an individual named Harold Dyck. Harold has been a long time community and anti-poverty activist in Winnipeg. Jim, knowing that I had previously done research on social assistance programmes in Ontario and the United Kingdom suggested that I might want to do a WIRA project with Harold's organization.

Harold and I met on a number of occasions to discuss the parameters of the project and eventually a grant application was formulated. As community partners and co-investigators we brought on board David Northcott, who was then running Winnipeg Harvest and Sid Frankel of the University of Manitoba. Sid was also active with the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg although it was not in that capacity that he joined the project.

The object of the project was to provide a window on the experiences of social assistance recipients. At the same time, it was also designed to build the capacity of LIIP, to provide it with some resources and stability that would allow it to grow and develop its capacity to advocate on behalf of its constituency. The report that follows documents the information received from almost 100 welfare recipients who were interviewed. The conclusion also outlines some of the capacity building implication of the project for LIIP.

There are a number of people who require thanks and acknowledgment. David Northcott and Sid Frankel were invaluable in the early stages of the project. David's experience of the inner city and the situation facing those living in poverty was very important in drafting and designing the questionnaire that was administered to the interviewees. Mid-way through the project David left Winnipeg Harvest in an unsuccessful bid to win a seat in the House of Commons during the federal election of 2004. Sid Frankel was also an important asset in designing the research methodology and had numerous suggestions that improved and strengthened the overall project.

Harold Dyck was an invaluable asset. Harold was employed as the project manager. He organized and coordinated the interviews, worked with the interviewers, and generally kept the project moving along. Our two interviewers were Troy Myers and Claudette Michell. At the time they were both students in Red River College's Aboriginal Government Administration programme. Kevin Warkentin, a student at the University of Winnipeg was also of tremendous assistance, taking the interview responses and transforming them into a usable spreadsheet that greatly assisted the analysis of the data.

Finally thanks must also be extended to the over 100 individuals who contributed their time and consented to be interviewed for the project. The final analysis of the data was primarily my responsibility. Consequently, any errors of interpretation, omissions or other missteps must be laid at my doorstep.

This research was financially supported by the Winnipeg Inner city Research Alliance (WIRA) which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). The Institute of Urban Studies provides administrative support for WIRA. The opinions of the authors found herein do not necessarily reflect those of WIRA, the funders or the Institute of Urban Studies.

Byron Sheldrick, Winnipeg, Nov. 2004.

A Profile of Income Assistance Recipients in Winnipeg's Inner City

Executive Summary

The objective of this study is to examine the experiences of welfare recipients with the welfare bureaucracy in the city of Winnipeg. For many inner city residents some form of income assistance is a vital part of their overall income and necessary for basic subsistence (food and rent). Consequently, the decisions of welfare officials are tremendously significant for these individuals and the treatment they receive at the hands of those officials will help structure their attitudes about the state, their conception of their place in society as citizens and their own sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Through a series of structured interviews with welfare recipients this study attempts to provide a picture of the nature and experience of those inner city residents that make use of the welfare system. It documents who these people are, the types of problems they experience with the welfare bureaucracy, their understanding of the welfare system, and the need for improved advocacy programmes to better enable them to navigate the system. Finally, it provides a glimpse at what welfare recipients understand to be the barriers and obstacles they face in moving away from welfare and into paid employment. To many, the results of the interviews will not come as a surprise. However, it is important to document in these results in a systematic way in the hopes that they will have an influence on policy makers.

Ninety-five welfare recipients living in Winnipeg's inner city were interviewed for the project. This included 68 Aboriginal respondents and 27 non-Aboriginal respondents. The respondents were also distributed amongst the major categories of income assistance recipients: single mothers, the disabled, and those classed as single employable. The average age of respondents was 38 years.

The study discovered that many individuals in the inner city rely heavily on income assistance as a prime source of income for themselves and their families. Forty-one percent of all respondents had been on income assistance longer than 6 years, and 22 percent had been on assistance longer than 11 years. This problem was particularly acute for single mothers where 61 percent had been on assistance for longer than 6 years. While single males appear to have been on assistance for less prolonged periods, a closer look at the data suggests that their reliance on income assistance is broken up by periods of short-term, low wage employment. The data clearly indicates that for those income assistance recipients with experience in the labour force, that experience has primarily been in very low wage and insecure forms of employment. Retail, food services, and unskilled manual labour were the main categories of employment identified by respondents. Thirty-two percent of respondents indicated that they had no experience with paid labour.

At the same time, the data indicates that many respondents were active in their community and volunteered regularly. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they had volunteered and many had taken on more than one volunteer job in the community.

Respondents clearly identified a number of factors as contributing to their reliance on welfare. Health and disability was reported as a factor by 18% of respondents, while for single mothers the need to support their children was frequently cited as the primary reason for relying on welfare. Sixty-six percent of single mothers indicated that the absence of affordable childcare prevented them from finding paid employment. Finally, lack of education and training was cited by many as a factor that prevented them from finding paid employment (46%), as was an absence of good, full time jobs in the inner city (33%).

Education continues to be a major problem in the inner city. Nearly 15% of the respondents had less than a grade 9 education, while only 21% had achieved a grade 12 level. Given these relatively low levels of educational attainment it is difficult to move these individuals into jobs in the most promising growth sectors of the economy, which generally require much higher levels of education. It is also difficult to provide incentives for companies in these sectors to locate in the inner city given the lack of skilled employees. A much more targeted system of education and training for the inner city is needed to overcome these obstacles.

Income assistance recipients' experience of the welfare system is generally a negative one. Most recipients have a very poor understanding of how the welfare system works, and a poor understanding of their entitlements and responsibilities. Nearly 50% of respondents indicated that they did not understand the system very well, while only 7% indicated a very good understanding of the system. More troubling, 66% of respondents indicated that their caseworker was not helpful in explaining things to them. Caseworkers, which should be a primary source of information and assistance for recipients, do not appear to be performing this job very well. Sixty percent of recipients indicated that their primary source of information about income assistance came from friends and family members, while nearly 30% relied on personal experience.

Despite indications that welfare officials were not very helpful, most recipients did not indicate that they had been subjected to racism, sexism, or other forms of harassment. Many recipients did, however, indicate that they found their treatment at the welfare office to be demeaning and humiliating. This indicates that the welfare office may have structural problems in terms of how it is set up to deal with clients, but that there is little evidence of overt racism and/or sexism.

Based on the research, then, the following conclusions can be identified:

- § Most welfare recipients are not young, but rather the average age is quite a bit higher than most stereotypes of welfare recipients.
- § Individuals in the inner city depend on welfare for a great proportion of their income.
- § Individuals on welfare in the inner city tend to have been on the system for a considerable period of time. This may not be in one continuous period, but rather reliance on the system is often broken up by periods of short term employment

- § Employment for these individuals is precarious at best. Jobs in the inner city are largely part time and temporary in nature. They are frequently low wage and low skill jobs.
- § The individuals in our survey had relatively low levels of education, which is a major factor in preventing them from securing better paying, more stable employment.
- § Many people in the survey identified health issues as a major factor that kept them from finding employment. This was not restricted to those who identified themselves as having a disability.
- § For single mothers, childcare was a major concern and the lack of reliable, affordable childcare viewed as an obstacle to moving off of income assistance.
- § Individuals had very low levels of understanding regarding how the income assistance system operated. Their sources of information regarding the system were generally unreliable.
- § Welfare caseworkers were generally viewed as very unhelpful, frequently rude and occasionally harassing.
- § Generally, though, most welfare recipients did not say that their case workers acted in an overtly racist or sexist fashion.

This suggests that reform of the welfare system should focus on several key areas:

- § greater advocacy and information services for income assistance recipients;
- § improvements to the case workers “information” and “assistance roles”. This may mean reductions in the caseloads of workers, so more individualized service can be provided.

Beyond the welfare system itself, if a transition to paid employment is to be considered a realistic goal, the following needs to be pursued:

- § Greater educational and training opportunities;
- § Job creation and economic development in the inner city;
- § Improved access to affordable childcare.

The Inner City suffers from structural economic problems. This is one of the primary reasons so many of its residents rely on income assistance. Changing the welfare system B either to make it more punitive and restrictive, or to add workfare type requirements B will simply add to the poverty of the area, unless concrete steps are taken to address these broader structural problems.

A Profile of Income Assistance Recipients in Winnipeg's Inner City

Introduction

The objective of this study is to examine the experiences of welfare recipients with the welfare bureaucracy in the city of Winnipeg. For many inner city residents some form of income assistance is a vital part of their overall income and necessary for basic subsistence (food and rent). Consequently, the decisions of welfare officials are tremendously significant for these individuals and the treatment they receive at the hands of those officials will help structure their attitudes about the state, their conception of their place in society as citizens and their own sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Through a series of structured interviews with welfare recipients this study attempts to provide a picture of the nature and experience of those inner city residents that make use of the welfare system. It documents who these people are, the types of problems they experience with the welfare bureaucracy, their understanding of the welfare system, and the need for improved advocacy programmes to better enable them to navigate the system. Finally, it provides a glimpse at what welfare recipients understand to be the barriers and obstacles they face in moving away from welfare and into paid employment. To many, the results of the interviews will not come as a surprise. However, it is important to document in systematic way these results in the hopes that they will have an influence on policy makers.

While there have been numerous studies of welfare systems, and no shortage of recommendations for change and restructuring, relatively few studies (or policy makers for that matter) have asked welfare recipients for their opinions about how to change the system. The 1989

report of the Ontario Social Assistance Review Committee entitled *Transitions*, was considered groundbreaking for having working groups made of up social assistance recipients and for incorporating into the final report quotations from recipients. The framing of the Committee's recommendations around these "voices" distinguished it from many such policy documents. There are a number of advantages of hearing about these issues from the perspective of the welfare recipient themselves.

First, the experience of the service recipient and those responsible for delivering the service may vary considerably. The problems and difficulties that a welfare caseworker might identify may not be the same as those that are of concern to the welfare recipient. In other instances both might identify the same problem, but see two completely different solutions. At the end of the day, however, it is the welfare recipient whose life is most profoundly affected and structured by the welfare recipient. That is not to say that the opinions of front line workers and policy analysts are not important. It is to say, however, that this is only one perspective on a complex problem. While the welfare recipient may lack technical expertise about the way the system operates, they may possess considerable social expertise from living within the system. This is a valuable body of knowledge that needs to be documented and incorporated into policy discussions on this issue.

Second, from a democratic perspective it is important that those whose lives are affected by policy decisions have some opportunity to participate in the making of those decisions. Generally welfare systems are structured in an extremely undemocratic fashion. While many state policies are both developed and delivered in highly undemocratic ways, in the case of welfare categorizations of the poor as "deserving" or "undeserving" have operated to reinforce and exacerbate the undemocratic nature of policy delivery. It is frequently assumed that welfare recipients are undeserving, have little knowledge or experience that is worthwhile, and therefore that they are not entitled to participate in discussions about the nature of welfare policy or how welfare should be delivered. As a result, they are frequently treated in a manner that is little more than the mass processing of people by welfare officials who have little capacity to engage the individual in creative solutions to their problems, and even less inclination to try. Many welfare offices appear to be little more than a bureaucratic version of Dickensian poorhouse. The processes may be different, paper and forms may have replaced forced labour, but the despair and alienation the structures create is very similar. That despair is reflected in the responses of people interviewed for this project as to how their dealing with welfare officials made them feel.

Finally, one of the objectives of this project was to examine the need for advocacy services for those on welfare. In part this was to be achieved through an examination of how much welfare recipients feel they understand the system and to what extent welfare officials provide them with assistance. As well the project made use of the resources of the Low Income Intermediary project (LIIP). LIIP is a grassroots, community based organization that provides advocacy services for income assistance recipients in their dealings with the welfare office. In some instance this involves fielding phone calls and requests for information, and meeting with welfare recipients to explain their

entitlements. In other instances it involves advocating on behalf of the individual with welfare caseworkers. In some cases LIIP workers appear on behalf of welfare claimants in welfare appeal cases. LIIP approaches its mandate from a self-help perspective. It attempts to empower individuals to represent themselves. However, in many instances it needs to intervene and provide direct assistance and representation. The research project was housed at LIIP, which has its offices in the Workers' Organizing Resource Centre in downtown Winnipeg. Interviews were conducted at the organizations offices. Utilizing LIIP as the vehicle through which the research took place provided an important window on the difficulties and experiences of welfare recipients and highlighted the lack of advocacy services available to these individuals and the tremendous demand/need for those services.

Methodology

The intention of the project was to generate a random sample of welfare recipients who would be interviewed. The interview respondents would be selected from amongst LIIP clients and would be representative of major categories of welfare recipients. The 3 primary categories to be examined were single mothers, disabled welfare recipients, and single employable welfare recipients. This final category refers to those welfare recipients whose claims are adjudicated on an individual basis and who are deemed able to work. In total 95 welfare recipients were interviewed.¹

In the end the interview sample was not rigorously random in nature. In addition to those selected to be interviewed from amongst the LIIP case files, a number of individuals simply appeared

at the LIIP offices seeking to be interviewed. Interviewees were paid a small honorarium of \$20.00 and this led to a number of people coming for interviews who were as much interested in the money as they were the project. Some people were simply not interviewed. If individuals fit within the parameters of the research project, however, they were interviewed.

In total 62 women and 33 men were interviewed. As well, 68 of the interviewees were aboriginal and 27 were non-aboriginal. These figures, in part, represent the nature of welfare in the inner city, as well as the nature of LIIP's client base. The population of the inner city is largely aboriginal, and so it is no surprise that aboriginal people make up a considerable percentage of those from the inner city in receipt of benefits. As well, it appeared that women were more interested in participating in the survey. Almost all of the women interviewed had children and most were on their own. Arguably, these women had a stronger interest in the welfare system and greater stake in seeing changes to the welfare system than the men who were interviewed.

In total, 31 single mothers, 26 disabled individuals and 38 single employable individuals were interviewed. For each category we attempted to ensure a representative sample of aboriginal and non-aboriginal claimants. It was important to ensure that aboriginal voices were heard in the survey. As indicated above, it proved difficult to have equal numbers of each category simply because of the nature of LIIP's client base and the demographics of inner city welfare recipients. The following table indicates the total number of respondents for each category.

¹Total number was actually 110, but a number of interviews were sufficiently incomplete that they were discarded.

Table I Interview Respondents by Category

	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Total
Single Mothers	25	6	31
Disabled (Female)	6	7	13
Disabled (Male)	9	4	13
Single Employable (Female)	14	4	18
Single Employable (Male)	14	6	20
Total	68	27	95

The number of respondents in some categories is too small to provide reliable statistical results. However, the responses of these individuals did provide interesting and important insights into the nature of life on welfare in Winnipeg's inner city and, by and large, were consistent with the responses of most of the other respondents. In conclusion, despite the small number of respondents in some categories, taken as a whole the results of the interview data can be viewed as providing a reasonably representative result.

The interviews were designed as open-ended interviews that invited the respondents to elaborate and offer their own opinions and insights. A sample questionnaire is provided in Appendix I of this report. Each interview lasted anywhere from 30 - 90 minutes in duration. While some respondents did, in fact, open up and provide considerable elaboration, many did not. As indicated above, this was particularly the case for male respondents.

Background Information of Respondents

Each interviewee was asked a number of questions regarding their particular situation. These included questions related to marital status, number of children, length on Income Assistance, level of education, etc. The responses are very instructive in that they give us a good picture of the circumstances confronting many individuals on welfare. They also provide us with some correctives to many of the myths that exist about people on welfare.

AGE:

The overall age of the respondents was 38.4 years. Table 2 details average age by respondent category.

Table 2: Average Age of Respondents

Category	Average Age
Single Mothers Aboriginal	31
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal	29
Disabled Females Aboriginal	45
Disabled Females Non-Aboriginal	43
Disabled Males Aboriginal	37
Disabled Males Non-Aboriginal	51
Single Employable Females Aboriginal	40
Single Employable Females Non-Aboriginal	40
Single Employable Males Aboriginal	32
Single Employable Females Aboriginal	36
Total	38.4

It is not surprising that the average age of disabled welfare recipients (44 years for all categories of disabled individuals) would be somewhat higher than average. This reflects the increased difficulties and barriers disabled individuals face in the labour market. These problems are exacerbated at the low end of the income scale where the physical demands of labour may be higher and accommodations less available (Stienstra 2004).

It may be somewhat surprising that the average age of single mothers (30 years) is not lower. A pervasive welfare myth is that the income assistance system is abused by teenaged mothers who have children as a means of increasing their benefits. Such a conclusion does not seem supported by the data. Moreover, this data is consistent with other studies of poverty. Kerr and Beaujot's study of child poverty and family structure suggests that in 1997 only 9.7% of lone parents falling below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut off were below the age of 25. By contrast nearly 41% of lone parents were between the ages of 25 and 34 and another 50% percent were above the age of 35 (Kerr and Beaujot (2001, Table 2).

It is certainly true that many of the respondents had more children than the national average of 1.3 (Table 3). The average number of children in the household for all respondents was 2.2. This figure is not nearly as high as the welfare myths would suggest. As a whole the women interviewed represent a relatively mature group of women who are clearly struggling to piece together a sufficient income to provide for their children. The average number of children for male respondents was significantly lower for their female counterparts, reflecting the fact that child-rearing remains

predominantly the responsibility of women in the inner city. Male respondents, on average, had only 1.4 children living in the household with them, while female respondents on average had 3 children living with them in the household.

Table 3: Average Number of Children in the Household

Category	Average Number of Children in Household
Single Mothers Aboriginal	3
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal	3.3
Disabled Females Aboriginal	4
Disabled Females Non-Aboriginal	3.28
Disabled Males Aboriginal	0.6
Disabled Females Non-Aboriginal	1.75
Single Employable Females Aboriginal	3.7
Single Employable Females Non-Aboriginal	2
Single Employable Males Aboriginal	2.7
Single Employable Males Non-Aboriginal	1
Total	2.2

Time on Income Assistance, Work History and Education

The data reflects a relatively complex pattern. Overall, however, the data would seem to support the notion that individuals in the inner city rely on income assistance for extended periods of time. Paid employment, where it exists, is often a supplement to income assistance rather than vice versa. Individuals were asked two sets of questions related to the length of time they had been on income assistance. First, they were asked how long had they currently been on income assistance. Second, they were asked about previous periods when they had relied on income assistance. Table 4 sets out the length of time on income assistance for the current period.

Table 4: Length on Income Assistance

	0-2 years	3-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	More than 15 yrs
Single Mothers Aboriginal	8 (31%)	3 (12%)	8 (31%)	4 (15%)	2(8%)
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	2 (33%)
Disabled Females Aboriginal	2 (33%)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	2 (33%)
Disabled Females Non-Aboriginal	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)	2 (29%)
Disabled Males Aboriginal	6 (66%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Disabled Males Non-Aboriginal	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Single Employable Females Aboriginal	5 (35%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)	2 (14%)
Single Employable Females Non-Aboriginal	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)
Single Employable Males Aboriginal	10 (71%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)
Single Employable Males Non-Aboriginal	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)
Total	39 (41%)	15 (16%)	17 (18%)	11 (11.5%)	11 (11.5%)

Interestingly, 41% of the total respondent had been on income assistance less than two years. This may reflect the fact that LIIP's client base is disproportionately composed of individuals who are relatively new to the welfare system and are seeking assistance to deal with initial problems and difficulties. However, a closer look at the data suggests a more complex pattern. First, for single mothers and disabled individuals a much higher proportion of respondent had been on income assistance for much longer periods of time. When all categories are combined, 61% of single mothers had been on income assistance for more than 6 years and 29% for more than 11 years. For disabled respondents 38.5% of respondents had been on income assistance for more than 6 years and 23% for more than 11 years. For single mothers the extended duration of time on income assistance

represents the length of time needed to raise a family, while for disabled claimants it represents the lack of employment opportunities and accommodations for disabled individuals.

Men were generally on income assistance for relatively shorter periods of time. When all categories of male respondents are combined 88% of respondents had been on income assistance for less than 5 years and 63% of respondents had been on income assistance for less than 2 years. This should not, however, be interpreted as indicated that these men had successfully made the transition from welfare into paid employment. Rather, it seems to indicate that men move into a series of short-term, frequently low paid, jobs that interrupt their time on income assistance. Over the long term, however, these intervals of paid employment likely do not significantly lessen the overall reliance of these individuals on income assistance. Seventy-five percent of all respondents indicated that they had been on income assistance previously. In the case of male respondents 88% had been on welfare previously.

This is supported by the types of employment that had been taken up by individuals in the survey. Table 5 documents the employment history of the respondents. Nearly 70% of the respondents reporting having participated in some form of paid employment while 32.5% responded that they had never previously worked. Given the average age of the respondents it is remarkable that nearly 1/3 of the sample had not previously been engaged in paid employment. This high rate of non-participation in the labour market reflects the absence of jobs and economic opportunities in the inner city. This problem was particularly acute for women and for disabled individuals. Forty-two percent of female respondents had not worked while nearly 35% of disabled respondents had previously had

no employment. This compared to only 18% of male respondents reporting no previous employment. Again, the lack of accommodation for both childcare responsibilities and disability must be considered primary factors in explaining these differences. Men, particularly able bodied men, were better able to take advantage of short term labouring jobs than women and disabled individuals.

The types of jobs taken up by individuals also reflects the lack of good jobs for inner city residents in general and welfare recipients in particular. The largest concentrations of employment for female income assistance recipients were in the retail, food services, and childcare sectors. Nearly 44% of women respondents had held jobs in these areas. This primarily had involved jobs at fast food outlets, jobs at small shops and grocery stores. Another 11% of female respondents indicated that they had previously held clerical jobs as secretaries, receptionists or clerks. Another 11% reported having been employed in childcare. While some had worked for childcare centers, most reported simply having "baby sitting" jobs of one sort or another. Eighteen percent of female respondents reported jobs that were characterized as manual unskilled labour. These primarily involved jobs of a janitorial or custodial nature. A number of women reported having worked in laundries or cleaning in institutional settings such as hospitals, schools, or in private homes.

For men, on the other hand, the primary employment category was in the unskilled manual labour category. Fifty-five percent of men in the single employable category of income assistance had engaged in this type of work (57% of Aboriginal men and 50% of non-Aboriginal men). Even for disabled men this was the single largest category of employment with 45% of men in this category

reporting having engaged in this sort of labour. Typical of this category included jobs in construction, janitorial work, gardening (grass-cutting, etc.), and warehouse work.

Of note, very few respondents worked in industrial or skilled labour settings. Only 6% of respondents fell within this category. Even fewer respondents had experience in the so-called new economy job sector. This sector of the economy includes those economic enterprises and industries based on new information technologies. Many advocates of the new economy hold it out as providing a vehicle for improving the economic condition of those individuals who have been traditionally excluded from traditional manufacturing industries. Only two respondents (2.1%) indicated that they had held jobs in this sector. Both of these individuals had worked in call centers, which arguably fall within the low wage/low skill end of the new economy. A few respondents (4.2%) had held professional jobs. These typically involved jobs such as a community outreach worker, a court worker, and teaching assistant positions in local public schools. Importantly, these more "professional" type positions were all community based and directed towards servicing the needs of the local community.

Table 5 Employment History

Empl Type	Retail	Food Serv-ices	Manual Labor (un-skilled)	Indus-trial/ skilled labour	New Econ/ IT	Prof.	child-care	Fish-ing	Cler-ical	None
Single Mothers Aboriginal	4 (16%)	4 (16%)	4 (16%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	3 (12%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (16%)	8 (32%)
Single Mothers Non Aboriginal	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	1 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	1 (16%)	3 (6%)
Disabled Female Aboriginal	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (66%)
Disabled Female Non-Aboriginal	3 (43%)	1 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (29%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)
Disabled Male Aboriginal	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (56%)	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11%)
Disabled Male Non-Aboriginal	0 (0%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)
Single Employable Female Aboriginal	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	7 (50%)
Single Employable Female Non-Aboriginal	0 (0%)	2 (50%)	3 (75%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)
Single Employable Male Aboriginal	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	8 (57%)	3 (21%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	4 (29%)
Single Employable Male Non-Aboriginal	1 (16%)	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	2 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Totals	11 11.5%	16 (17%)	28 (29.5%)	5 (5%)	2 (2%)	4 (4%)	7 (7%)	2 (2%)	7 (7%)	31 (32.5%)

The lack of employment opportunities available to inner city residents on income assistance should not be taken as indicating that these individuals are uninvolved in their communities. Rather, a great many respondents indicated a record of volunteer participation in their communities. Sixty percent of respondents reported engaging volunteering in a wide range of community organizations. Moreover, as table 6 demonstrates, volunteer participation was relatively consistent throughout all categories of respondents. In addition, many of those individuals who engaged in volunteer work participated in more than one capacity. The average number of volunteer jobs taken on by individuals was 2. Those who volunteered engaged in a variety of activities. These included assisting neighbours and friends with baby-sitting, assisting disabled members of the community and the elderly, fundraising for sports teams, working at local schools, helping to organize local carnivals, working at local community organizations, drop-in centres, and hospitals.

Table 6: Volunteer Participation by Category

Category	Volunteer Participation	Avg. number Vol. Jobs
Single Mothers Aboriginal	15 (60%)	1.53
Single Mothers Non-Abor.	3 (50%)	1.66
Disabled Females Aboriginal	4 (66%)	2.0
Disabled Females Non-Abor.	6 (86%)	2.6
Disabled Males Aboriginal	5 (55.5%)	2.4
Disabled Males Non-Abor.	2 (50%)	1.5
Single Employable Females	8 (57%)	1.25
Single Employable Female Non-Aboriginal	3 (75%)	2.0
Single Employable Male Aboriginal	9 (64%)	1.6
Single Employable Male Non-Aboriginal	2 (50%)	3.5
Total	57 (60%)	2.0004

These findings are consistent with the experience of others who have looked at Winnipeg's inner city.

John Loxley, for example, writing about community economic development in Winnipeg, has argued that in the face of poverty and unemployment there is a tremendous degree of community participation and activity that takes place in the inner city (Loxley 2000).

This data suggests that individuals on income assistance engage in a wide range of work. That work, however, is largely unpaid. Where paid work is available it is usually short term and insufficient to permit the individuals to leave the income assistance system on a permanent basis. The data, however, does not support the conclusion that those individuals on income assistance do not want to work. Rather, their record of volunteer participation indicates a commitment to local communities. In part, the absence of supports and services in inner city neighbourhoods makes the availability of volunteer labour of this sort all the more vital for the sustainability of the community.

Reasons on Welfare

Table 7 sets out the reasons people identified for relying on social assistance. The responses to this question were fairly low, with only 58% of respondents providing an answer. The total response rate, therefore, makes the data somewhat less reliable. However, there are some interesting trends in the responses that were provided. First, and not surprising, for single mothers child care responsibilities were the single highest reason for requiring income assistance. Interestingly, overall factors related to illness and disability were the single greatest reasons for relying on income assistance with 18% of respondents citing these. Moreover, this was a factor not just for those respondents who identified themselves as disabled, but for others as well. Twenty-five percent of single employable males, for example, identified health factors as one of the reasons they were on income assistance (21% for aboriginal respondents and 33% for non-aboriginal respondents). This indicates that the overall levels of poorer health that characterizes inner city communities, and the general absence sufficient numbers of family physicians, has implications for the overall economic well-being of inner city residents as well.

Several individuals indicated that a general lack of available jobs, or job loss (lay-off, dismissal) had resulted in a reliance on income assistance. Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that this was a major factor in why they were on income assistance. Another 5% indicated that lack of education and job training was a reason for their being on income assistance. A number of individuals indicated that various transitions in their life were significant factors leading to unemployment. Marital breakdown, or violence in the family was a factor for 4% of respondents.

Others indicated that they had moved to Winnipeg from northern communities and had been unable to find a job. For these individuals the transition to urban life had been a difficult one. The loss of community and family support seemed to be significant factors in explaining the difficulty in adjusting to urban life. Finally, for some individuals, particularly men, having been released from jail was seen as a factor. For these individuals (4%), the transition from jail to life in the city had led to unemployment and a reliance on income assistance. Frequently, a lack of education and training was cited alongside the release from jail as explanations for being on income assistance.

Table 7: Reasons on Welfare

	Support Child	Health/ disability	Marital Break-down	Lack of Educ./ Training	Jail	Job Loss/ can't find job
Single Mothers Aboriginal	5 (20%)		1 (4%)	1 (4%)		
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal	4 (66%)					
Disabled Female Aboriginal	1 (16%)	1 (16%)				
Disabled Female Non-Aboriginal	1 (14%)	4(57%)	1 (14%)	1(14%)		
Disabled Male Aboriginal		3 (33%)				3 (33%)
Disabled Male Non-Aboriginal		2 (50%)		1 (25%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
Single Employable Females Aboriginal	2 (14%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)			3 (21%)
Single Employable Female Non-Aboriginal		1 (25%)				1 (25%)
Single Employable Male Aboriginal		3 (21%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)

Single Employable Male Non-Aboriginal		2 (33%)			1 (16%)	2 (33%)
Total	13 (13.6%)	17 (18%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	15(16%)

Table 8 sets out the educational background of respondents. It clearly shows that low levels of educational attainment continue to be a major problem for inner-city welfare recipients.

Table 8: Educational Attainment by Category

	Less than Grade 9	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Some Post-Secondary	Certificates/ Training
Single Mothers Aboriginal	5 (20%)	3 (12%)	4 (16%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)	2 (8%)	8 (32%)
Single Mothers Non-Abor.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	2 (33%)
Disabled Females Abor.	1 (16%)	3 (50%)	1 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Disabled Females Non-Abor.	1 (14%)	0 (0%)	2 (29%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)
Disabled Males Abor.	0 (0%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	3 (33%)	5 (55%)
Disabled Males Non-Abor.	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)
Single Employable Females Abor.	4 (29%)	1 (7%)	5 (36%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)
Single Employable Females	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	0	1 (25%)

Non-Abor.							
Single Employable Males Abor.	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)	4 (29%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)
Single Employable Males Non-Abor.	0 (0%)	1 (16%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)	1 (16%)	0 (0%)	2 (33%)
Totals	14 (15%)	12 (13%)	16 (17%)	20 (21%)	20 (21%)	5 (5%)	28 (29%)

This data clearly indicates the degree to which lack of educational achievement corresponds with a reliance on income assistance. Only 26% of the respondents had graduated from high school and of those 5% had gone on to some form of post-secondary education. Only one respondent reported having completed a university degree. By contrast, 66% of the respondents had not completed high school and 15% had not completed grade 9. Almost 30% of respondents indicated having some type of certificate or additional training beyond public education. However, 50% of those with some sort of additional certificate had completed grade 12 and another 25% had attained grade 11. Various certification programs, therefore, were overwhelming being used by those who had already received a relatively higher degree of educational attainment. For those with very little education, on the other hand, these training and certification programs had not been used very much.

Lezubski, Silver, and Black, in their study of inner city poverty in Winnipeg (Lezubski, Silver, and Black 2000) found that approximately 15% of inner city residents had less than a grade 9 education. This is consistent with our findings. However, based on census data Silver found that in 1996 44% of inner city residents had not completed high school (Lezubski, Silver, and Black 2000, p.36). Our data suggests that for income assistance recipients this figure is much higher with 66% of

respondents not having completed high school. Similarly, Silver reports that reports that 12.4% of inner city residents had a university degree. In our sample only 1 individual had completed a Bachelors degree, while several others had one or two years of a university or college program.

This data is highly suggestive. First, it clearly demonstrates that lack of education is a significant problem for inner city residents and that there is a high correlation between lack of education and reliance on income assistance. Adult education centres and other programmes for improving the educational opportunities for inner city residents must be key elements of any strategy designed to decrease reliance on income assistance (Silver, Klyne, Simard 2003). At the same time, the data also suggests that for inner city residents achieving grade 12 and/or some degree of additional certification may not be sufficient to move into gainful employment. This may because there is a lack of training programs geared towards moving into employment and/or the training programs that do exist are ineffective.

To a certain extent this is reflected in the sorts of certificates people have obtained. Nearly 21% of those with certificates have achieved some sort of food handlers or cooking certification. Another 17% have received clerical types of certifications (typing, office manager, etc.). Interestingly, another 17% had received some sort of certificate/diploma in computers and/or electronics. Clearly, though, this level of educational attainment is simply insufficient for these individuals to move into relatively high paying jobs in the information technology sector.

Experience With The Welfare System

This part of the survey dealt with individual's experiences with the welfare system. Of particular interest was their understanding of the system, the degree to which they found their caseworkers helpful, and the degree to which they had experienced forms of harassment, racism, or sexism. The first questions dealt with the respondents' knowledge of the welfare system. Individuals were asked to what extent they felt they understood the welfare system. Table 9 sets out their responses.

Table 9: Understanding of Welfare System

	No Answer	Not Well	Somewhat	Good	Very Well
Single Mothers Aboriginal		13 (52%)	2 (8%)	6 (24%)	2 (8%)
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal		3 (50%)	2 (33%)	1 (16%)	0(0%)
Disabled Females Aboriginal	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	1 (16%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)
Disabled Females Non-Abor.	1 (14%)	5 (71%)	0(0%)	1 (14%)	0 (0%)
Disable Males Aboriginal		4 (44%)	1(11%)	2 (22%)	2 (22%)
Disabled Males Non-Aboriginal		4 (100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Single Employable Females Abor.	6 (43%)	3 (21%)	1 (7%)	3 (21%)	1 (7%)
Single Employable Females Non-Abor.		3 (75%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Single Employable Male Abor.		5(36%)	2 (14%)	5(36%)	2 (14%)
Single Employable Male Non-Abor.	1 (16%)	4 (66%)	1 (16%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total	10(10.5%)	47(49.5%)	11(11.5%)	18(19%)	7 (7.4%)

It is clear from this data that most income assistance recipients are uncertain as to how the system operates. In some respects this is not surprising. Welfare systems are notoriously complex, with large numbers of programs and benefits each of which has its own criterion and regulations.

Nevertheless, given the length of time many of the respondents had been on income assistance it is remarkable that nearly 50% described themselves as having no or virtually no understanding of the system. Only 7.4% of respondents felt they understood the system very well and another 19% felt they had a good understanding of the system. For the vast majority of welfare recipients interviewed, their understanding of the system was partial at best.

This points to the dependency on the individual welfare recipients on their caseworkers to explain and provide information to them about their benefit entitlements. Most recipients on income assistance in our survey, however, indicated that they found their caseworkers to generally be unhelpful.

Table 10: Helpfulness of Welfare Officials

	No Answer	Not Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Very helpful
Single Mothers Aboriginal	2 (8%)	19 (76%)	3 (12%)	0(0%)
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal		4 (66%)	1 (16%)	1 (16%)
Disabled Females Aboriginal	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	1 (16%)	1 (16%)
Disabled Females Non-Aboriginal	1 (14%)	5 (71.4%)	1 (14%)	0 (0%)
Disabled Males Aboriginal	1 (11%)	6 (66%)	1 (11%)	1 (11%)
Disabled Males Non-Aboriginal		4 (100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Single Employable Females Aboriginal	3 (21%)	7 (50%)	1 (7%)	3 (21%)
Single Employable Females Non-Abor.		3 (75%)	0(0%)	1 (25%)
Single Employable Males Aboriginal		9 (64%)	2 (14%)	3 (21.4%)
Single Employable Males Non-Abor.		4 (66%)	2 (33%)	0(0%)
Totals	9 (9.5%)	63 (66%)	12 (12.6%)	10(10.5%)

Given that the welfare caseworker is the primary contact for individuals with the system it is incredible that 66% of respondents did not find their caseworker helpful or informative. Typical complaints included caseworkers that did not explain things fully, failed to inform clients of all their

entitlements, simply provided a listing of rules, or provided written material (pamphlets, brochures) instead of actually explaining things. Respondents indicated that workers were frequently rude and unwilling to go over points that were not initially understood. Many respondents also indicated that they felt that their workers did not believe them and treated them as if they were lying.

If individuals are not learning about the welfare system from their caseworkers, where do they receive their information. Table 11 sets out the sources of information utilized by individuals on income assistance.

Table 11: Sources of Information

	Friends/other recipients	Community organizations	Pamphlets & brochures	Personal Experience
Single Mothers Aboriginal	18 (72%)	7 (28%)	3 (12%)	6 (24%)
Single Mothers Non-Abor.	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	1 (16%)	4 (66%)
Disabled Females Aboriginal	3 (50%)	1 (16%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)
Disabled Females Non-Abor	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)
Disabled Males Aboriginal	5 (55.5%)	3 (33%)	3 (33%)	4 (44%)
Disabled Males Non-Abor.	1 (25%)	4 (100%)	0(0%)	3 (75%)
Single Employable Females Abor.	6 (43%)	1 (14%)	0(0%)	1 (14%)
Single Employable Females Non-Abor.	4 (100%)	1 (25%)	0(0%)	1 (25%)
Single Employable Males Abor.	11 (78.5%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	3 (21.4%)
Single Employable Males Non-Abor.	4 (66%)	1 (16%)	1 (16%)	2 (33%)
Totals	57 (60%)	26 (27%)	9 (9.5%)	28 (29.5%)

This data would suggest that there is a real need for more systematic and coherent delivery of information and advocacy services for recipients of income assistance. Sixty percent of respondents listed friends and other welfare recipients as their primary source of information about how the system operated. Another 30% indicated that their primary source of information was their own personal experience. If our sample is accurate in terms of overall levels of knowledge about the system, it is highly unlikely that individuals are receiving accurate or reliable information. Only 27% of respondents made use of community organizations and advocacy groups aimed at assisting welfare recipients. Very few individuals (9.5%) made use of pamphlets and brochures. These are usually available at community organizations and at the welfare office.

The current organization of the welfare office fails to adequately deliver needed information, both about the individuals' rights as well as their responsibilities. Individuals are frustrated when they genuinely attempt to live up to their obligations and believe they are doing what their worker has instructed them, only to find on a subsequent visit that they misunderstood and now face their benefits being terminated. At the same time, many individuals in the study reported having been told by workers that, while they could appeal a decision of the welfare office, there was little point to doing so as they would not be successful. This active discouragement of individuals from pursuing their rights is simply unacceptable. Many community groups provide some advice and assistance for welfare recipients. Generally, however, the available resources are nowhere near adequate to meet the need.

In addition to direct advocacy services of this sort, there is also a need for information pamphlets and handouts that are written in plain language and at a level that will be accessible to most welfare recipients. The majority of individuals in our survey had not completed high school. Some had only a grade 5 or 6 education level. As a result, literacy levels for this group of people will be lower than the general population and materials prepared for their use must reflect this.

Additional questions were asked to try and shed somewhat greater light on the relationship between individuals on income assistance and their caseworkers. Generally individuals complained that their experience on welfare had left them angry, frustrated, and with little self-esteem. Many individuals described their experiences in the following terms:

"it makes me feel alone, like I'm not worth anything"

"I feel low, like the bottom of the barrel"

"it makes you feel like less of a person"

"my worker acts like she owns the money. It doesn't make me feel right, it gets me mad"

"my worker is kind of degrading. I'm just getting out of jail and they even treat you better in jail. At least they explain things to you there and here they just give you a piece of paper and tell you to go."

"it makes me feel low, it gives me low self-esteem. It makes me feel helpless. There's not much you can do about it. I don't know if everyone else uses these words but they should because you leave there feeling very depressed."

"it makes me feel like dog shit"

More specifically, respondents complained of the "jail house" atmosphere of the welfare office, that workers were unavailable by phone and frequently didn't return phone calls, and that terms and vocabulary were frequently inaccessible and rarely explained in terms that they could understand.

Table 12 examines income assistance recipients' perceptions of their treatment. In particular, respondents were asked whether they had felt harassed by their workers, and whether they felt their workers treated them in a sexist or racist manner.

Table 12: Incidents of Harassment

	Harassment		Racist Treatment		Sexist Treatment	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Single Mothers Aboriginal	8 (32%)	13(52%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	2(8%)
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal	0(0%)	1 (16%)	1(16%)	1 (16%)	1(16%)	0(0%)
Disabled Females Abor.	2 (33%)	1 (16%)	1(16%)	1(16%)	1 (16%)	0(0%)
Disabled Females Non-Aboriginal	1 (14%)	1(14%)	1(14%)	1(14%)	1(14%)	0(0%)
Disabled Males Aboriginal	4 (44%)	5 (55%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	2(22%)
Disabled Males Non-Abor.	2(50%)	2 (55%)	2 (50%)	0(0%)	2 (50%)	0(0%)
Single Employable Females Abor.	6 (43%)	3 (21.4%)	2 (14%)	2 (14%)	3 (21.4%)	0(0%)
Single Employable Females Non-Abor.	3(75%)	1(25%)	0 (0%)	1(25%)	1(25%)	0(0%)
Single Employable Males Abor.	7 (50%)	7 (50%)	2 (14%)	4 (28.5%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)
Single Employable Males Non-Abor.	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	1 (16%)	1(16%)	1 (16%)	0(0%)
Totals	36(38%)	37(39%)	19(20%)	16(17%)	18(19%)	4(4%)

The response rates for this series of question, particularly for the race and gender dimensions of the question were fairly low. Nevertheless, some interesting trends emerge. First, although the majority of income assistance recipients find their caseworkers unhelpful and complain about their behaviour, nevertheless, a significantly lower percentage of respondents identify their caseworkers as harassing them. Indeed, the respondents are roughly evenly split with 38% saying they had not been treated in a harassing fashion and 39% saying they had.

On the question of racist treatment the numbers are even lower. Only 17% of respondents indicated that they had been the victims of racist treatment in the welfare office. One might expect a higher positive response rate from Aboriginal respondents. However, only 11 Aboriginal respondents or 16% of the total Aboriginal sample said they had experienced racist behaviour.

An even lower score (4%) was provided as to sexist behaviour on the part of caseworkers.

These results seem at odds with the statements made by many of the respondents as to how they are treated at the welfare office and how demeaning they find the whole experience. There are several possible explanations for this result. First, the incidence of harassing, racist and sexist behaviour may be greater than what has been reported. As indicated, there was a fairly high non-response rate to this question. It is difficult, however, to imagine why individuals would have been hesitant to answer these questions. Interviews were conducted away from the welfare office, individuals were told they would not be identified and their responses would be completely anonymous. In addition, the individuals conducting the interviews were both Aboriginal (one male and one female). Still, it is possible that individuals were concerned that answering this sort of question could endanger their welfare benefits at some future date.

Another explanation is that the respondents did not interpret the behaviour of welfare officials as deliberate harassment or racist/sexist behaviour, or that they are so used to this sort of behaviour that it is hardly worth mentioning to them. Several respondents indicated that they felt welfare case workers were overworked and that the entire system was structured in a way that did not provide adequate service. One respondent, in stating that he did not believe his case worker had harassed him

added, "they [case workers] just have bad attitudes and lack training." Another individual clearly saw a connection between the under-resourcing of the welfare system and the treatment he received. He stated:

"I remember when I was younger and I first got on the system. I was 18 and the social workers really wanted to know what was going on in your life and what was happening with you. Now they just want to give you your cheque and what your entitled to. I'm sure they are overloaded now but they used to sit down and talk with you. And now they don't explain what you are going to be entitled to."

It appears, then, that many income assistance recipients identify the root of their problems with the welfare bureaucracy not in terms of the personal characteristics and attitudes of their case workers, but rather in terms of the broader structure of the system itself.

A persistent issue for some welfare recipients, and particularly single mothers, is the question of home visits by welfare officials. Welfare officials frequently make home visits to determine whether or not lone parents are, in fact, on their own, or whether there is a "spouse" living in the house as well. The so-called "spouse in the house" rule and its methods of enforcement have produced much criticism and frequently are seen by welfare advocates as an unwarranted intrusion on the privacy of individual welfare recipients and a form of harassment.

Table 12a sets out the responses of single mothers to questions about home visits by welfare officials.

Table 12a: Home Visits by Welfare Officials

	Visit		Notice		Treatment		Felt had Choice	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Poorly	Well	Yes	No
Single Mother Aboriginal	14(56%)	9 (36%)	10(40%)	3(12%)	7 (28%)	5(20%)	3(12%)	10(40%)
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal	3(50%)	3(50%)	1(16%)	2(33%)	3(50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)
Totals	17(55%)	12(39%)	11(35%)	5 (16%)	10(32%)	5(16%)	3 (9%)	13 (42%)

Fifty-five percent of single mothers in the sample group had experienced home visits by welfare officials. Of those, only 5% had been given advanced notice of the visit and only 16% of respondents felt they were treated respectfully during those visits. Nearly 32% described their treatment as poor and a number felt that welfare officials had behaved in a threatening or invasive fashion. Moreover, many of the individuals felt they had no choice but to comply with the welfare official's request to enter their home. Forty-two percent said they felt they had no choice but to allow the visit, while only 9% indicated they felt they had a choice. Only one respondent indicated that welfare officials had made any effort to explain what her rights might be during the home visit, while 15 (48%) respondents indicated that they were not informed of any rights that they might have. This data indicates that home visits remain a problematic aspect of welfare policy. The women interviewed described themselves as feeling invaded and spied upon. Officials on these visits frequently conducted a search of the premises. Respondents indicated that the officials searched their refrigerator, went through closets, and searched bathrooms. This is usually justified by welfare officials as necessary in order to locate evidence of a man living in the house. The women involved, however, felt very angry

and intimidated by the process. Most indicated that they felt if they did not cooperate and comply their benefits would be cut off.

Transitions to Work: Obstacles and Support

It is clear from the data that has been presented that the current system of welfare administration is not assisting the majority of recipients beyond the provision of minimal financial assistance. It has long been a criticism of welfare systems that they are too passive, and that they fail to provide meaningful supports and assistance to facilitate a return to paid employment. It is also clear, however, that those on income assistance often find the experience demeaning and would prefer not to be on welfare. Individuals were asked a number of questions related to the obstacles that prevent them from finding work, the supports they see as necessary for them to find a job, and what sorts of changes they would like to see in the administration of welfare. They were also asked questions related to their experience with training programs.

Table 13: Obstacles to Paid Employment

	Child-Care	Educ./ Training	Welfare System	Lack of Jobs	Transport	Disability/ health
Single Mothers Aboriginal	16 (64%)	13 (52%)	4 (16%)	8 (32%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)
Single Mothers Non-Abor.	4(66%)	3(50%)	1 (16%)	3(50%)	1 (16%)	0 (0%)
Disabled Females Aboriginal	0(0%)	2 (33%)	0 (0%)	2 (33%)	0 (0%)	2 (33%)
Disabled Females Non-Aboriginal	1 (14%)	2 (28%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)
Disabled Males Aboriginal	0 (0%)	6 (66%)	0 (0%)	4 (44%)	0 (0%)	5 (55%)
Disabled Males Non-Aboriginal	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
Single Employable Females Abor.	1 (7%)	6 (43%)	1 (7%)	3 (21%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)
Single Employable Females Non-Abor.	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)
Single Employable Males Abor.	0 (0%)	6 (43%)	3 (21%)	3 (21%)	2 (14%)	5 (36%)
Single Employable Males Non-Abor.	0 (0%)	2 (33%)	1 (16%)	4 (66%)	3 (50%)	3 (50%)
Totals	22(23%)	44 (46%)	12(13%)	31 (33%)	7 (7%)	22 (23%)

Respondents identified a number of obstacles or barriers to obtaining paid employment. Interestingly, relatively few respondents saw the welfare system as a major impediment to obtaining a job. This contrasts with much of the literature around so-called “welfare dependency” which suggests that the welfare system itself creates impediments to individuals being able to successfully make the transition from welfare to work. Only 12% of respondents felt that the welfare system was one of the reasons they were unable to find a job.

The data suggests that a number of factors external to the welfare system are considered major problems in preventing income assistance recipients from finding jobs. One-third of respondents suggested that there was a lack of jobs available for them. The inner city is an area of economic decline where there are relatively few jobs available (Lezubski, Silver and Black, 2000). As discussed above, most income assistance recipients that do find work report having to settle for part-time work that is low wage and which is often short-term and temporary. Land is at a premium in the inner city. Many of the factories and industries that once operated in the inner city have moved. New industrial development takes place in industrial parks in the suburbs where land and services are more readily available at cheaper prices. Consequently, unemployment is not just a problem of an individual lacking the necessary determination to find a job, but rather is a structural problem of the inner city economy.

This is further reflected by the fact that 7% of respondents identified the absence of reliable transportation as an issue that contributed to their difficulties finding employment. Similarly, 6% of respondents stated that improvements to transportation were something that would facilitate them in finding a job (Table 14). These individuals frequently stated that the failure of the welfare system to routinely pay for bus passes made it extremely difficult to do an effective job search as they were often limited to establishments within walking distance of their home.

There were some clear gender differences in terms of the obstacles identified by individuals. Women, and particularly single mothers, consistently identified childcare as a major obstacle. They also tended to identify childcare as one of the supports needed if they were to move off of income

assistance. Sixty-five percent of single mothers identified childcare as an obstacle to employment while childcare was not mentioned as an issue by any of the male respondents. Similarly, 42% of single mothers identified the availability of affordable day care as a key support for returning to work while again no men listed it as an issue.

Training and education were also identified by every category of respondent as a major issue. Individuals seem to be very aware that their education levels are not adequate to secure full time stable employment. Overall 46% of respondents identified education and/or training as a significant obstacle to gaining employment and 34% of respondents identified improvements in this area as necessary in order to move into employment. As discussed below, a significant percentage (53%) of respondents had participated in some form of training program sponsored by the welfare system. Generally respondents found these programs to be of limited value and that they did not result in jobs.

For many respondents health care was a major issue. Not surprising, disabled individuals identified health issues as a major obstacle to finding employment. Forty-two percent of disabled respondents named their health as a significant factor preventing them from finding a job. However, many other categories of respondents also saw health care as an issue. Overall, health problems were identified by nearly 23% of respondents as a problem that hindered their ability to find work. Sixteen percent of those respondents who did not identify themselves as disabled cited health problems as a factor limiting their employability. For specific categories that actual percentages are considerably higher than this. No single mothers identified health issues. As this was one of the largest categories of respondents this has a significant downward effect on the overall percentage. For single

employable men and women, for example, 29% of respondents felt that health problems were an obstacle.

This data speaks to the need to begin addressing the root causes of poverty in the inner city. Changes to the welfare system are unlikely to produce significant changes in employment unless the structural problems in the inner city economy and the health care problems of the community are addressed. This means changes to a range of policies outside of the welfare system itself. Economic development needs to be rethought. Community economic development needs to be more actively supported with an emphasis on local production and the reinvestment of profits into the local community. Companies need to be encouraged to locate in the inner city, and where this is not possible, transportation systems need to be improved not just to permit workers from the suburbs to reach the downtown, but also to permit inner city residents to access jobs and educational resources beyond their immediate community. Educational levels and training programs need to be dramatically improved. Adult Education Centers have proved to be a successful mechanism for upgrading the skills and educational levels of adult learners (Silver, Klyne, Simard, 2003). The government needs to provide greater support for Adult Education Centres, particularly those that are Aboriginal agencies. Finally, health care in the inner city needs to be improved. Family physicians need to be encouraged to locate in the inner city and more community health centers need to be established. While it is widely recognized that there is a correlation between poor health and low socio-economic status, it is clear that health problems are particularly significant for welfare recipients.

Table 14: Supports for moving off Income Assistance

	Education	Day Care	Transp.	Full Time Empl.	Life Skills	Improved Health Care	More support from welfare	Don't Know/ NoAns.
Single Mothers Aboriginal	13 (52%)	9(36%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal	1 (16%)	4(66%)	2(33%)	1(16%)	2(33%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)	2 (33%)
Disabled Females Abor.	2 (33%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(16%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)
Disabled Females Non-Abor.	1 (14%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)	9 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (71%)
Disabled Males Aboriginal	4 (44%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2(22%)	1(11%)	2(22%)	2(22%)	0 (0%)
Disabled Males Non-Abor.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2(50%)	2 (50%)
Single Employable Females Abor.	2 (14%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	7 (50%)
Single Employable Females Non-Abor.	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2(50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Single Employable Males Aboriginal	6 (43%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4(29%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	2(14%)	2 (14%)
Single Employable Males Non-Abor	1 (16%)	0 (0%)	2(33%)	2(33%)	0 (0%)	2(33%)	3(50%)	1 (16%)
Totals	32 (34%)	14(15%)	6 (6%)	23(24%)	3 (3%)	7 (7%)	9 (9%)	22(23%)

Training Programs

Table 15 sets out respondent's experience with training programs.

Table 15: Training Programs

	Been on Training Prog.		Useful/Led to a Job	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Single Mothers Aboriginal	12(45%)	11(44%)	7 (58%)	5 (42%)
Single Mothers Non-Aboriginal	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	2 (66%)
Disabled Females Aboriginal	5 (83%)	1 (16%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
Disabled Females Non-Aboriginal	2(28.5%)	3 (43%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
Disabled Males Aboriginal	3 (33%)	5 (55%)	1 (33%)	2 (66%)
Disabled Males Non-Abor.	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Single Employable Females Abor.	8 (57%)	6 (43%)	2 (25%)	6(75%)
Single Employable Females Non-Abor.	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Single Employable Males Abor.	8 (57%)	6 (43%)	2 (25%)	6 (75%)
Single Employable Males Non-Abor.	5 (83%)	1 (16%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
Totals	50 (53%)	40(42%)	20 (40%)	27 (54%)

Note: Percentages for utility of training programs is calculated based on the number of respondents actually participating in training programs.

Just over 50% of respondents had participated in training programs of some sort or another. Of those, however, the vast majority (54%) did not find them useful and the training programs did not lead to a job. A number of respondents indicated that they felt the training program had been useful, but it did not lead to a job for them. It may be, therefore, that if we were only inquiring as to whether a training program had led to a job an even greater number would have responded "no".

Generally disabled recipients participated in training programs somewhat less than other categories (46%). However, this remains a relatively high rate of participation. Single mothers' participation rate was also slightly below average at 48%. The participation rate for welfare recipients classed as employable was the highest at 60%.

If one considers the length of time individuals in the survey have spent on welfare and the number of times they have been on and off the system it seems clear that training programs have not successfully placed these individuals into permanent long term jobs. Table 16 sets out the type of training individuals reported receiving. The data reveals that the single most common types of training programs included such things as job search/resume writing programs, clerical and food services for women, and construction and forklift operation for men.

Table 16: Training Experience by Type of Program

	Food Serv.	Resume/Job Search	Const.	Com-puters	Fork-lift	Clerical	Hair-dressing	Ind.
Single Mothers Aboriginal	1	2				2		
Single Mothers Non-Abor		1	1					
Disabled Females Abor		1				3	1	
Disabled Females Non-Abor						1		1
Disabled Males Abor			1	2				
Disabled Males Non-Abor	1	1			1			
Single Employable Females Abor		2						
Single Employable Females NonAbor	2							
Single Employable Males Abor	1	2	1	2	2			1
Single Employable Males Non-Abor		2		1	1			1
Totals	5 (10%)	11 (22%)	3 (6%)	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)

This data shows that there is a wide range and variety of training programs. However, it is somewhat surprising that the single biggest category of programs that individuals have taken is job search and resume writing skills. This demonstrates the belief that the reason income assistance recipients do not find jobs is a lack of job-hunting skills and/or determination on their part rather than an absence of good quality jobs. The perceived solution, then, is to impart a limited set of skills that will enable the income assistance recipient to be better equipped to find those jobs that are present in the labour market. The difficulty with this approach is that it assumes jobs are there when in many instances they may not be. In other instances there may be other problems/difficulties that prevent the individual from accessing jobs. As indicated in table 13 dealing with obstacles, most welfare recipients indicated that the biggest obstacles preventing them from finding jobs were an absence of a) skills, education, and training, b) affordable childcare, c) health issues and d) an actual lack of stable permanent jobs. If these are the obstacles individuals on welfare face, resume and job skill searches will not be of much assistance. Training people to better present themselves for jobs that do not exist, or teaching people to write resumes where their educational background is such that they are only qualified for low wage unskilled jobs does little to address the structural problem of unemployment for this group of individuals.

In other instances, training programs proved to be inadequate and quite often frustrating experiences for welfare recipients. A number of male recipients indicated that they had been sent on forklift training. All of those individuals commented on how angry and disappointed they felt when they learned that they could not get jobs as forklift operators. The training program run by

the welfare office did not meet industry standards and, consequently, major warehouses would not hire them unless they received additional training that was not available through the system.

Mackinnon has reported that the majority of welfare sponsored training programs are short-term in nature and, if any employment results, it is usually low-wage in nature (Mackinnon 2000, 62).

Conclusions

This research provides a relatively detailed look at a group of income assistance recipients in Winnipeg's inner city. As such it provides a demographic profile of this group. Several conclusions stand out:

- § Most welfare recipients are not young, but rather the average age is quite a bit higher than most stereotypes of welfare recipients.
- § Individuals in the inner city depend on welfare for a great proportion of their income.
- § Individuals on welfare in the inner city tend to have been on the system for a considerable period of time. This may not be in one continuous period, but rather reliance on the system is often broken up by periods of short term employment
- § Employment for these individuals is precarious at best. Jobs in the inner city are largely part time and temporary in nature. They are frequently low wage and low skill jobs.
- § The individuals in our survey had relatively low levels of education, which is a major factor in preventing them from securing better paying, more stable employment.
- § Many people in the survey identified health issues as a major factor that kept them from finding employment. This was not restricted to those who identified themselves as having a disability.
- § For single mothers childcare was a major concern and the lack of reliable, affordable childcare viewed as an obstacle to moving off of income assistance.

- § Individuals had very low levels of understanding regarding how the income assistance system operated. Their sources of information regarding the system were generally unreliable.
- § Welfare caseworkers were generally viewed as very unhelpful, frequently rude and occasionally harassing.
- § Generally, though, most welfare recipients did not say that their caseworkers acted in an overtly racist or sexist fashion.

These conclusions point to some interesting observations about the nature of the system. First, it seems clear that the income assistance system, at least as it is currently designed, does little to assist individuals to move off of welfare. Training programmes seem largely ineffective at successfully aiding people in making the transition off of welfare in a long-term fashion. Moreover, the system also seems ill-prepared to assist individuals to obtain the maximum benefits and access the programmes they are entitled to. Frequently respondents indicated that case workers appeared to deliberately withhold information about programmes, or misrepresent entitlements, and discouraged them from pursuing their cases further.

In some ways the inability of the welfare system to assist people off of income assistance is not surprising. There is, in some respects, a form of welfare dependency that has developed. That dependency, however, is not the sort of dependency frequently discussed by right wing critics of welfare. It is not the system that creates dependency. Rather, the system is a product of that dependency. It is the structural problems in inner city communities: crumbling infrastructure, lack of new investment, lack of stable long-term jobs, lack of health care facilities, lack of child care facilities, that lead people to poverty and a dependency on income assistance. Changes to the system, such as tougher job search criteria, fraud investigation units, tougher eligibility criteria,

workfare systems, mandatory retraining programmes will not address the fundamental problems facing those on income assistance. It may force the most vulnerable off of income assistance, but the effect of this will be to drive those individuals even deeper into poverty. The structural problems that need addressing, then, are not those of the system, but rather those of the community and of the economy. Indeed, income assistance recipients themselves appear very aware of this.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Welfare Rights Training Initiative

Questionnaire

Instructions for Interviewers:

Each person being interviewed must sign a consent form and a receipt for their \$25.00 stipend. An individual may stop the interview at any time and still retain the stipend.

These questions are designed to be open-ended. In other words, we are not looking for yes or no answers, but rather for the individual to answer the question as they see fit and to expand on their experiences. As an interviewer, therefore, it may be necessary to prompt the individual somewhat if their initial answer is not very revealing. Ask the individual to expand on something if it seems interesting to you. If, for example, the individual tells you that welfare workers have treated them terribly, but does not go on, ask them for more specific examples. Although ideally you want to keep to the set out questions as closely as possible, don't feel constrained by a "script". If you feel that a question has already been answered by the individual in their previous answers, skip it and go onto the next question.

1) Basic Background Information

- a) age
- b) gender
- c) Are you married/divorced, single, living common law?
- d) Do you have any children?
How many and what ages?
Do they live with you?
- e) How far did you get in school?
- f) Have you worked recently?
What sorts of jobs have you had over the past 5 years
- g) Are you currently on income assistance?

How long have you been on income assistance?

Have you been on income assistance continuously, or has it been on and off again?

What is the average lengths of time you spend on and off income assistance?

2: Experience with the income assistance bureaucracy

- a) How well do you think you understand the rules about welfare entitlements?
- b) Have income assistance officers been helpful in explaining the rules to you ?
- c) Where else have you learned about the welfare system:
 - i) personal experience
 - ii) other welfare recipients
 - iii) advocacy groups/community organizations (if so which ones)
- d) When you go to the income assistance office would you say you are treated well? With respect?

If no, how would you describe your treatment? How are you made to feel?

- e) Does your case worker explain things to you in language you understand?
- f) Have you ever experienced harassment/ racism/ sexism in dealing with the welfare office?

Can you give examples?

- g) How would you change the welfare office to improve things?
- h) Have welfare officials ever come to your home? Why?
 - How were you treated when this happened?
 - Were you given advance notice?
 - Did you feel you had a choice about letting them into your home?

3) Experience/knowledge of other resources

- a) Have you ever had your benefits cut off or reduced?
 - Have you been threatened with these things?
 - Have you ever been refused benefits?
- b) Did you appeal when this happened?
- c) Did your case worker tell you that you could appeal the decision?

- e) Were you ever given the names and addresses of any organizations that could help you?
- f) You ended up coming to LIIP (Low Income Intermediary Project) for help. How did you find out about them?
- g) Did you get help from anyone else? i.e. legal clinics, other community organizations, churches, etc.
(it may be that they used these other organizations in previous situations where they were having difficulty)
- h) How did you find out about them?
- i) Was LIIP able to help solve your problem?
- j) Did you feel you learned more about the system as a result of working with the people at LIIP?
- k) Would you feel more confident about dealing with the welfare bureaucracy as a result of that experience?

4 Why on Welfare/Income Assistance

- a) Tell me, in your own words, why you are on income assistance?
- b) Is it hard to get off welfare? What makes it so difficult?
 - i.e. lack of jobs?
 - lack of training/education?
 - child care responsibilities/absence of day care?
 - the welfare bureaucracy itself?
- c) What sorts of things so you think would make it easier/possible for you to get off welfare?
- d) What sorts of changes to the welfare system would make it easier for you to get along now?
- e) Have you ever been on a job training programme?
 - What was the training for?
 - Was it useful/did it lead to a job?
 - Were you treated with respect in the training programme
- f) Do you have any experience working with computers?
 - Do you have access to a computer?
 - Would you like more training on computers? Is this something you would be interested in?
 - Have any of the job training programmes you've been involved in offered this?