

From Dependency to Self-Sufficiency: An Appraisal of the Gateway Transitional Families Program

William M. Rohe and Rachel Garshick Kleit
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Abstract

This article presents a longitudinal evaluation of the Gateway Transitional Families Program, an innovative self-sufficiency program designed to help public housing residents leave public housing for their own homes. The evaluation followed participants and a comparison group over six years to isolate program impacts on employment and receipt of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, and housing assistance.

Many participants dropped out of the program. Difficulty in juggling educational and child-rearing responsibilities, noncompliance with program or public housing regulations, low wages while in the program, impatience with the length of the program, and staff shortages and turnover contributed to the dropout rate. Those who finished the program experienced modest increases in income, decreases in receipt of AFDC and food stamps, and reduced reliance on housing assistance relative to comparison group members. Furthermore, graduates were more likely than comparison group members to have bought a home.

Keywords: Homeownership; Low-income housing; Welfare

Introduction

The original goal of the public housing program, created in the 1930s, was to provide a way station for those who had fallen on bad times. Public housing developments were to be places where families could pay reduced rent while getting back on their feet (Bratt 1989). Once that was accomplished, residents were expected to move back into private housing. During the early years, the program largely fulfilled this vision.

In more recent times, however, public and assisted housing programs have been transformed from way stations into permanent housing for very low income families. Changes in admission policies, methods of determining rents, and other factors have precipitated this change. Today, much of the public housing stock is inhabited by long-term occupants (Bratt 1989; Hayes

1985). Rather than a way station, public housing has become a dead-end road.

This article presents a long-term, longitudinal evaluation of the Gateway Transitional Families Program, an innovative self-sufficiency program designed to help public housing residents move into their own homes. We followed program participants and a comparison group over a six-year period to isolate the impacts of the program on employment and receipt of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, and housing assistance.

Self-sufficiency programs

Self-sufficiency programs seek to provide residents of public or assisted housing with a comprehensive set of services to increase their incomes and help them move to private sector housing. The relatively short history of these programs begins with Project Self-Sufficiency, a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) demonstration program begun in 1984. This program provided additional Section 8 certificates to public housing authorities that agreed to develop programs to help single mothers achieve economic independence. Each program had to have the following core elements:

1. A coordinating committee composed of representatives of the housing authority and of major social service providers in the area
2. A procedure for conducting individualized assessments of participants' needs leading to the development of program plans
3. Case managers who not only help participants obtain the necessary support to complete the program, but also provide encouragement themselves

A total of 155 housing authorities participated in Project Self-Sufficiency, enrolling approximately 10,000 single mothers. In 1989, the Bush administration superseded Project Self-Sufficiency with Operation Bootstrap, adding 61 housing authorities. At the same time, HUD expanded the target population from female-headed households to families, enrolling 3,000 additional families.

In 1987, the staff of the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) in North Carolina developed a variation on Project Self-Sufficiency, the Gateway Transitional Families Program. After several years' experience with Project Self-Sufficiency, the staff saw the need for two additional program elements. First, they wanted to provide participants with escrow accounts to help them buy their own homes. A portion of each participant's rental payments would fund the accounts. Second, the staff wanted to freeze the AFDC and food stamp benefits of program participants so that any income gains were not offset by benefit reductions. Local congressmen introduced a bill including both these provisions and authorizing the Gateway program.¹

The latest federal self-sufficiency initiative is called the Family Self-Sufficiency Program. Authorized in the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, this program has many of the elements of the Gateway program, including a provision for escrow accounts. As of fiscal year 1993, all housing authorities were required to offer self-sufficiency programs and enroll a number of participants equal to the number of new public housing units and Section 8 certificates or vouchers received from HUD. Housing authorities can have this requirement waived on several grounds.² Currently, approximately 1,000 of the roughly 3,400 housing authorities nationwide sponsor Family Self-Sufficiency programs.

Although the logic of the self-sufficiency concept is compelling, we know very little about the effectiveness of these programs in helping families achieve economic independence. Will these programs fulfill their promise of weaning families from public assistance? Although several studies have tried to address this question, they all suffer from two critical shortcomings. First, they have assessed only the short-term impacts (one or two years); second, none has used a comparison group to isolate the impacts of the program from potentially confounding variables. The HUD Office of Policy Development and Research (1988), for example, looked at the impact of Project Self-Sufficiency on employment during its first two years and reported that the employment rate among participants increased

¹ Section 126 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-242, approved February 5, 1988) authorized the Public Housing Comprehensive Transition Demonstration in Charlotte, NC.

² The grounds for a waiver are (1) lack of accessible supportive services, (2) lack of funding for administrative costs, (3) lack of cooperation from state or local government offices, and (4) lack of interest on the part of eligible parties.

from 25 to 45 percent. Shlay and Holupka (1992), in studying a self-sufficiency program in Baltimore, reported that employment among program participants actually declined over the two-year period studied. The research indicated that participants substituted participation in education programs for time spent in employment.

A recent evaluation of the Operation Bootstrap program (Blomquist, Ellen, and Bell 1994) showed modest increases in employment. The proportion of program participants employed went from 40 percent before entering the program to between 45 and 51 percent two years after program entry. Blomquist and colleagues also reported a surprising increase in reliance on food stamps and no decrease in AFDC payments received by program participants. Finally, Rohe (1995), in an interim assessment of the Gateway Transitional Families Program, reported that 16 percent of the participants had graduated and moved from public to private housing.

Again, given the lack of comparison groups, it is impossible to tell whether the increases or decreases found in these studies can be attributed to the program or to other factors. We do not know how many of the program participants would have found jobs without the assistance provided by these self-sufficiency programs; likewise, changes in reliance on AFDC and food stamps are difficult to assess.

Gateway program

The objective of the Gateway program is to provide services, skills, and training to help public housing residents become socially and economically self-sufficient so that they can buy their own homes. The program's emphasis on homeownership is unique among self-sufficiency programs.

The staff publicize the program in newsletters and presentations at tenant council meetings. They request referrals from public housing managers, inform tenant leaders, distribute flyers, and send letters to residents. To qualify for the program, a family must earn less than \$12,500 per year (there is a separate program for those earning more). Applicants must be public housing residents or on the public housing waiting list. Those accepted from the waiting list were originally given priority for housing and jumped to the head of the list.

Upon entering the program, each family enters into a mutually binding contract with the housing authority. This contract specifies the services the family will receive, including remedial education, job training, treatment for substance abuse, family and peer counseling, and day care and transportation assistance. The contract is in the form of an addendum to the family's lease and specifies the family's participation in the plan for up to two years.

The program has two stages: a remediation stage and a transition stage. The remediation stage is designed to last two years. Its purpose is to provide participants with the skills necessary to achieve self-sufficiency. Typically, achieving this goal involves remedial education, day care assistance, and job training. Education and job training are provided in many fields, including medical services, computer operations, and automotive repair. Central Piedmont Community College provides most of this education and training, offering two-year associate's degree programs. Applicants who require more than two years of remediation to obtain a job paying at least \$8 per hour are not accepted into the program. Therefore, almost all participants have high school or graduate equivalency diplomas.³ A series of diagnostic tests determines participant job preferences and existing skill levels.

During the remediation stage, rents are frozen at the level participants were paying upon entrance to the program. Any increases in income do not result in rent increases. Similarly, AFDC and food stamp benefits remain constant even though family income might increase, as long as that income does not exceed 50 percent of local median.

The transition stage is designed to last up to five years. Its purpose is to allow participants time to strengthen their employment skills and increase their incomes. Rents are unfrozen and allowed to rise to 30 percent of the participant's income. Any rent paid over \$274 (the operating cost of the unit) goes into an escrow savings account. Thus, if a family's income resulted in a rent payment of \$350 a month, \$76 of that would go into the escrow account. The escrow account is meant to help the families save for a down payment on a home. In addition, participants receive services to help them buy a home, such as homeownership counseling and financial management training.

³ The current policy is not to allow people into the program who will need more than two years of remediation. This policy arose because some of the original participants, whom we track in our evaluation, did not have a high school degree or its equivalent and therefore had trouble meeting program goals.

At the end of the transition phase, CHA staff help the family find housing on the private market. The escrow account in combination with mortgage assistance from the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Partnership enables graduates to afford homeownership.

Gateway was originally managed by one staff member; since 1994 a manager has overseen two and a half full-time-equivalent caseworkers. The Charlotte Office of Employment and Training originally provided the staff to do the occupational testing, although Gateway staff took over this task in 1994. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Department of Social Services assigns additional caseworkers to each of the Gateway participants receiving AFDC. Child Care Resources Incorporated, a local nonprofit organization, provides child care services.

The Transitional Families Board oversees the implementation of the program. The board reviews program applicants, works to eliminate conflicting and contradictory requirements, determines the status of participants in the program, sets the operating budget, and creates linkages that will ensure the availability of housing and financing for those about to graduate. The board's 14 members, appointed by CHA, represent the agencies involved in providing services to Gateway participants. The board's membership includes social service providers, participants, and representatives of the business community. Child Care Resources, the Department of Social Services, and the local JOBS and Job Training Partnership Act programs all have standing seats on the board.

Research design

Our basic research design is longitudinal, following both the first 153 program participants (who began the program between January 1989 and June 1993) and 71 comparison group members over a six-year period (1990 through 1995). The comparison group is composed of those who applied for the program but either did not complete the application process or declined participation once accepted.⁴ We collected data in four ways: surveys

⁴ Bell et al. (1995) examine the use of nonparticipating program applicants as a comparison group in evaluating employment and training programs. They point out that a comparison group has to control for two types of bias: one due to self-selection to apply to the program and another due to self-selection to actually participate in the program. Among nonparticipating applicants, the group who applied and were accepted but did not participate allowed for the least biased estimates of program impacts compared with those who withdrew

of program participants and a comparison group, extraction of information from program files, semistructured interviews with key informants, and focus groups with program participants.

The research design called for each program entrant to be interviewed in person three times: soon after acceptance into the program; after finishing either remedial education or job training; and at the end of the data collection period, late in 1995. The members of the comparison group were also to be interviewed three times during the six-year study. Of the 153 original participants, we were able to interview 128, a response rate of 84 percent (see table 1). We were also able to interview 54 of the 71 comparison group members, a response rate of 76 percent.

Table 1. Numbers of Interviews in Each Wave

Group	Population	First Wave 1991 and 1992	Second Wave 1993 and 1994	Third Wave 1995
Comparison	71	54 (76%)	46 (65%)	37 (52%)
Program participants	153	128 (84%)	75 (49%)	72 (47%)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate proportion of population surveyed.

Not all of these respondents participated in each wave of the study. We were able to interview 61 percent of the 54 comparison group members and 41 percent of the 128 program participants three times (see table 2). Another 26 percent of the comparison group and 30 percent of the program participants had two interviews. Combining the proportions that took part in two or three interviews, 87 percent of the comparison group and 71 percent of

their applications or those who were randomly screened out by the federal process. At the same time, no nonexperimental group was completely without bias in its estimate of the impacts. Furthermore, nonparticipating program applicants are a better comparison group than one drawn from the general population, even one matched on both individual characteristics and prior earnings. If Bell et al.'s results are comparable to those of the Gateway program, we can use them to explore the possibility of bias in our nonexperimental results. In our comparison group, we control for the individual's interest in the program by including those who applied but for one reason or another did not enter the program. However, we do not differentiate in the comparison group between those who were accepted but elected not to participate and those who did not complete the application process. Therefore, using our comparison group may overestimate the program effects to a greater extent than if it only included "no-shows." At the same time, this is a better comparison group than one drawn from the general population, because it controls for a bias to apply for the program. Bell et al.'s is only one attempt to explore the differences of bias in using different types of nonparticipant comparison groups. Therefore, we do not know how generalizable their results are.

Table 2. Cases with One, Two, and Three Interviews

Group	One Interview	Two Interviews	Three Interviews	Total
Comparison	7 (13%)	14 (26%)	33 (61%)	54
Participants	36 (28%)	39 (30%)	53 (41%)	128
Graduates	4 (13%)	9 (29%)	18 (58%)	31
Dropouts	18 (33%)	15 (28%)	21 (39%)	54
Continuing participants	14 (33%)	15 (35%)	14 (33%)	43

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the proportion of interviewees with the stated number of interviews.

program participants participated in at least two interviews. These are the cases we use in estimating the impacts of the program.

We developed separate interview schedules for comparison group members, graduates, dropouts, and continuing participants. The questionnaires included items on demographic characteristics, employment status and income, types and amount of public assistance received, reasons for wanting to participate in the program, services the respondent received through the program, and satisfaction with the program.

We also extracted information on program participants from program files. These data allow us to assess how the program has met its enrollment and graduation goals. We know each person's start date, end date, and participation outcome (graduate or dropout). Thus, we have a complete accounting of the outcomes of all program participants.

In addition, we conducted semistructured interviews with representatives of the agencies involved in the program, including CHA, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Department of Social Services, the Charlotte Department of Employment and Training, and Child Care Resources. We conducted these interviews at least annually and discussed topics including the role of the agency in the program, staff time devoted to the program, special considerations given to Gateway participants, problems with the program, and progress of the participants through the program.

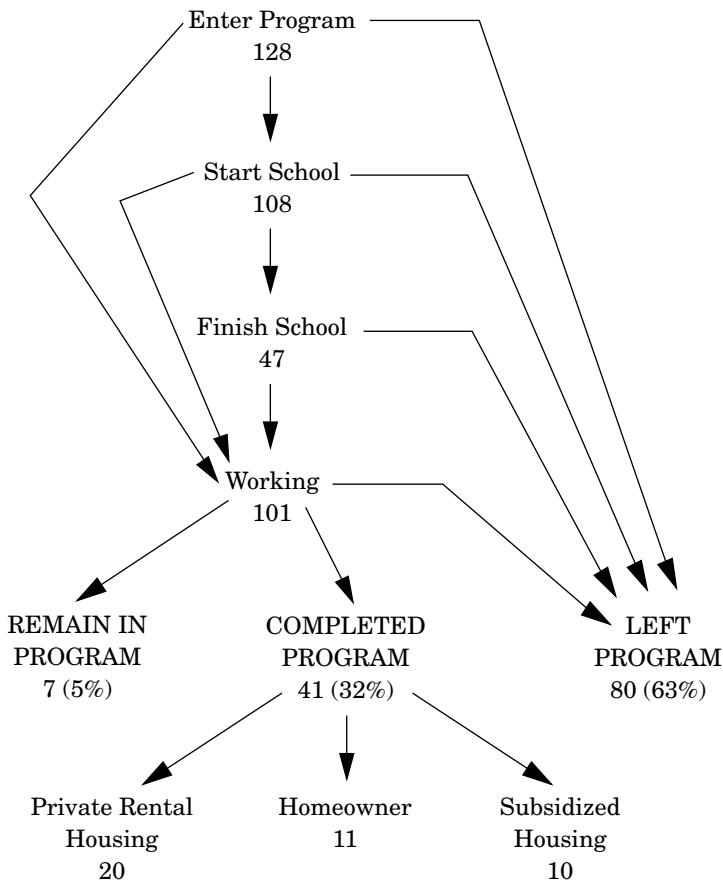
Finally, we conducted focus groups with program participants, program dropouts, program graduates, and people who applied for the program but did not follow through with the application

process. The focus groups discussed housing and employment status prior to entering the program, reasons for participating or not participating in the program, difficulties in staying with the program, likes and dislikes about the program, reasons for leaving the program, and suggestions for helping dropouts complete the program.

Participant performance in the program

To evaluate the impacts of the program, we must first assess participant performance. Few participants took a simple path through the Gateway program. Of the 128 participants who completed our survey, 20 never began an education program (see figure 1). In many instances, these people had full-time employment and did not want to quit their jobs to go back to school. In other cases, people had entered from the public housing waiting

Figure 1. Path through the Gateway Program



list and, once they got housing, dropped out without ever participating. The other 108 did start an education program sometime during their tenure in the Gateway program. Of those, 47 completed a program, while 61 did not.

Those who finished their education programs then either left the program or stayed in the program and went to work. If the rents paid by those who stayed rose above \$274, an escrow account was established. Roughly 101 entrants worked during the program, and about 41 had escrow accounts. By the end of our evaluation period, 80 people had left the program without completing it, 41 had graduated, and 7 remained as continuing participants. Thus, for those people we surveyed, the program had a graduation rate of 32 percent and a withdrawal rate of 63 percent. Eleven (or 27 percent) of the program graduates bought homes, 20 (or 49 percent) lived in private rental housing, and 10 (or 24 percent) were still living in subsidized housing.

These data reveal that participants had great difficulty in completing the program. People dropped out for many reasons: noncompliance with program or public housing regulations, lack of a living wage, impatience with the length of the program, an early program emphasis on nontraditional occupations, difficulty in juggling family and school responsibilities, and staff shortages and turnover.

Noncompliance with regulations

Program staff terminated a number of participants because they were involved with drugs, they failed to pay their rents, or they did not stay with their education or job training program. More than a third of the terminations were for illegal activity, and another third were for lease violations. The remainder occurred for failing to attend classes or to follow through with the agreed-upon program.

Lack of a living wage

Many women found that the combination of AFDC and food stamps was not enough to support their families while they attended classes. One woman pointedly discussed the problem: "I mean, you're going to send me to school, to put me in a house, and my children are hungry?" Gateway counselors discouraged participants from taking part-time jobs because the jobs will interfere with participants' educational programs. But many felt

they had to take jobs. One participant described hiding her job from her caseworker, rather than simply accepting that she was supposed to live on her benefits while going to school:

It's like you almost have to do independent and responsible things on your own to help yourself and your family financially. It's like you had to do stuff under the table, just so they won't kick you out of the program. But it's really a need, it's a necessity.

Another woman, newly married and with a new baby, did not want to go back to school immediately. Then, when her husband lost his job, she felt that she had to bring in some income:

Like I said, I didn't want to go to school right away, she [the baby] was just two months. And there she [the caseworker] was, threatening to throw me out of the program, telling me I might lose my apartment, and we didn't have anywhere else to go because he had lost his job.... Some of the rules they had collided with some of the things I wanted to do, such as work. I quit school and started working.

Impatience with program length

Many participants became impatient with the length of the program and dropped out to take advantage of more immediate job opportunities. Charlotte's unemployment rate is under 4 percent, so jobs are relatively easy to find. Many of these jobs, however, do not pay wages that will allow former program participants to become self-sufficient. In addition, a number of participants who finished the remedial education wanted to leave public housing as soon as they found a job, rather than taking advantage of the program's transitional stage and its escrow accounts. For example, one woman found a job that also would train her: "[The hospital] put me in their training program, paid me to learn the techniques, which I did, so I just kind of let it [Gateway] go. I lost interest in it."

Emphasis on nontraditional occupations

Many participants entered the program with thoughts of pursuing careers as day-care workers or beauticians or in other traditionally female occupations. The Gateway staff, however, were concerned that these occupations would not pay salaries high

enough to allow participants to move out of public housing and purchase their own homes. Therefore, during the first two years of the program, the staff advised the female participants to train for higher-paying, nontraditional occupations for women such as auto body repair and welding. Some did not want to study to work in a traditionally male occupation, as one woman made clear: “You know, I had some individual things I wanted to do. Why couldn’t they work with what I wanted to do?”

Many participants followed their caseworkers’ advice, only to realize that they were not really interested in their chosen occupations or that their prospects for getting a job in a male-dominated profession were bleak. One woman described her experience in the welding class:

A lot of us went to the welding class. I had some fantastic teachers, but I just wasn’t good. I didn’t know about getting out, changing my thing [her educational program]. I just stopped. There’s a lot of us that stopped because we felt we couldn’t do the welding or it wasn’t what we really wanted to do, so we dropped out.

Many of those who pursued traditional male occupations simply dropped out of the program, while others changed their career choices and started over in another curriculum.

Difficulty in juggling family and school responsibilities

The focus groups with program dropouts revealed that difficulty in balancing family- and school-related responsibilities was a frequent cause of withdrawal from the program. The pressure of trying to go to school, work, and raise a family all at the same time was enormous. Several women commented:

I couldn’t go to school ’cause I got off at five.... I couldn’t go to school ’cause I had two daughters to take care of after I got off from work.

When you have children, you just can’t drop this and go there, you know, be doing a lot of other things.

Several women left the program because childbirth interfered with their classes. One woman described what happened: “I had my baby the day I had a test. I had to drop out that quarter.”

Staff shortages and turnover

Staff shortages and turnover also contributed to the high drop-out rate. From the beginning of the program in 1989 until 1994, one staff member was largely responsible for administering the program and providing case management for as many as 80 participants. This staffing level did not allow for frequent assessments of how the participants were doing in their educational or job training programs. Nor did it leave much time for assisting participants in working through problems they encountered. Many participants dropped out of their educational or training programs long before the case manager found out about it.

To make matters worse, the original Gateway case manager left after two years. It took approximately six months to hire a replacement. That person also left after two years, and again it took about six months to hire a replacement. During the periods when the housing authority was hiring replacements, the participants were largely on their own. One of the first tasks of the new case manager was to see who was still enrolled in educational and training programs and who had to be terminated from the program. One program participant described the difficulty with staff turnover:

I had several caseworkers I didn't even get to see. They sent me a letter saying so-and-so is now going to be your new worker. You have an appointment such-and-such a time. OK, before that date come up, you get another letter: So-and-so is your new caseworker. You have an appointment on such-and-such a date. It happened to me three months in a row. And then when I finally did get a caseworker, do you know what she said? "Where have you been for three months?"

In 1994, CHA received a grant from the city of Charlotte for the Gateway program to hire three case managers. The Gateway participants now are receiving the benefits of a smaller ratio of clients to case managers. These changes, however, came too late for the people in our study.

Program impacts

Only 32 percent of program participants finished the program. Yet those who finished did benefit. They experienced increases in hours worked and hourly wages, reductions in dependence on public assistance and assisted housing, and increases in

homeownership relative to the comparison group. Program records and the panel survey of participants and a comparison group are the sources of the outcome measures used in this article. The program application provides the initial measures of hours worked per week and hourly wage rate, while the survey is the source for the final measures. The measures of the amounts of AFDC and food stamps received come from the surveys, as do the measures of receipt of housing assistance and homeowner-ship status.

Program entrants versus comparison group

Given the lack of random assignment in placing persons in the participant and comparison groups, we compared the characteristics of these groups to look for systematic differences (see table 3). The two groups are similar in terms of race, gender, monthly wage income, residence in public housing at application, AFDC receipt, and household composition. There is a significant difference, however, in the preapplication education levels of the two groups. Thus, we will need to control for this difference in the analyses of program impacts.

Program outcomes may be a result not only of self-selection to participate in the program, but also of self-selection to graduate or drop out. Therefore, we examined the data for preprogram participant characteristics that may be associated with a tendency to graduate. Although graduates had the greatest preprogram calculated monthly wage income, analysis of variance tests showed that graduates did not appear to be significantly different from dropouts or program participants in general in terms of family composition, welfare receipt, food stamp receipt, hourly wage, hours worked per week, or calculated monthly wage.⁵ At the same time, unobserved differences may exist that may be associated with the tendency to graduate.

Modeling program impacts

To examine the effects of the Gateway program on the variables of concern, we calculated descriptive statistics and estimated conditional change models. With the descriptive statistics, we calculated

⁵ Monthly wage income at application is the product of the reported hours and hourly wages for those who said they were working on their application forms multiplied by 4.33, the number of weeks in a month. Those who said they were not working had incomes of \$0.

**Table 3. Characteristics of Participants
and Comparison Group Members (Percent)**

Characteristic	Program Entrants (<i>n</i> = 128)	Comparison Group (<i>n</i> = 54)
Race		
White	1	0
Black	99	100
Sex		
Male	2	2
Female	98	98
Education ^a		
0–8 years	1	4
9–11 years	9	24
12 years	61	41
Some college	22	32
Associate's degree	3	0
4-year degree	4	0
Monthly wage income ^b		
\$0–200	46	47
\$201–600	19	9
\$601–1,000	27	40
\$1,001+	8	4
Resident of public housing when applied to program?		
Yes	47	50
No	53	50
Received AFDC when applied to program?		
Yes	56	59
No	44	41
Married at application?		
Yes	5	6
No	95	94
Children age 12 and under at first survey?		
Yes	91	87
No	9	13
Children age 17 and under at first survey?		
Yes	98	100
No	2	0

^a Significant difference between comparison group and program entrants ($\chi^2 = 90.284$, $\alpha > 0.01$).

^b For wages, *n* = 122 for program entrants and *n* = 47 for comparison group.

the mean changes in each variable of interest for each group. We used conditional change models to control for group differences.

In a conditional change model, the lagged value of the dependent variable at a time t_1 predicts the dependent variable at a later time t_2 . Wages at t_1 , for example, should be a good indicator of wages at t_2 . Therefore, a conditional change model controls for the value of the dependent variable at application. Conditional change models are especially well suited for the analysis of quasi-experimental panel data because they allow for the inclusion of several explanatory variables in addition to the value of the dependent variable at t_1 (Plewis 1985). In our regression analyses, we include dummy variables indicating program outcomes at the last interview (graduate, dropout, or continuing participant), with the comparison group acting as the reference category.⁶ We also include dummy variables representing education at t_1 to control for educational differences between program participants and comparison group members.⁷

Additionally, we control for the number of months between the first and the last observation to account for maturation. Some people left the program, either graduating or withdrawing, after two years; others stayed for five or seven. Therefore, we have great variation in the time between the first and the last observation. Controlling for time compensates for maturation among program entrants and the comparison group.⁸

⁶ The data used for the analysis of program outcomes and program impacts are slightly different. While both analyses examine the 128 program entrants who completed interviews, in the program outcomes, we categorized individuals by their ultimate program status as a graduate, dropout, or continuing participant as of the summer of 1996. In examining program impacts, we categorize program entrants according to their last interview. Thus, in the impact analysis, individuals may have ultimately become dropouts or graduates, but if at last observation they were still in the program, we include them as continuing participants for the impact analysis.

⁷ The rationale for controlling only for significant differences is that we believe that program entrants and people in the comparison group are essentially very similar, as table 3 indicates. At the same time, there was a nonrandom assignment for people to become program entrants or comparison group members. If they had been randomly assigned in a true experiment, then there would be no reason to control for group differences. To make a valid causal interpretation, it is necessary to control for all relevant initial differences between the groups. Since there is a significant difference between the groups in education, we control for that difference.

⁸ We used the PROC REG procedure to run the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model, and the PROC LOGIT procedure for the logistic regression models, both in SAS 6.11. We used the TOBIT program in LIMDEP 7.0 to run the tobit analyses.

We attempt to control for observed differences between all the groups that may account for program outcomes. However, unobserved differences between the groups may account for some of the effects. Therefore, the impacts discussed below may to some extent be the product of selection bias; that is, some unobserved factor may be responsible for a tendency to graduate rather than withdraw from the program. In some analyses, the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable may help to control for some of these unobserved differences.

Employment and wages

The most striking employment change was from part-time to full-time work (see table 4). The majority surveyed in each group were working either part time or full time when they applied to the program. A third or more of graduates, comparison group members, and program dropouts were working part time, while just under a third were working full time. This is in contrast to the 10 percent of continuing participants who were working full time at application. By last observation, the proportion of people working full time had increased for all groups. Among graduates, the proportion with full-time jobs increased from 27 to

Table 4. Proportion Working Part Time, Full Time, and Not at All at Application and Last Observation (Percent)

Group	Employment Status at Application			Employment Status at Last Observation			Change			<i>n</i>
	Full	Part	None	Full	Part	None	Full	Part	None	
Comparison	30	38	33	70	5	25	40	-33	-8	40
Graduates	27	43	30	93	3	3	67	-40	-27	30
Dropouts	31	33	37	63	17	19	33	-15	-18	52
Continuing participants	10	48	43	67	29	5	57	-14	-38	21

We conducted diagnostic tests on all the models. For the OLS models, we looked at influential cases and outliers, multicollinearity, and heteroskedastic variances. To identify influential cases, we examined bivariate data plots and calculated the studentized residuals, hat matrix, Cook's d_i , and $dfits_{ij}$ statistics. We used SAS 6.11 to run the VIF option in the PROC REG statement to look for multicollinearity. Last, we calculated the Breusch-Pagan test to look for heteroskedasticity. For the tobit models, we looked at heteroskedasticity. For the logistic regression models, we used the C statistic, deviance residual, and Pearson χ^2 tests.

93 percent, while among the comparison group, the proportion increased from 30 to 70 percent. Likewise, the proportion of continuing participants working full time increased from 10 to 67 percent. Program dropouts also experienced an increase in the proportion working full time, although that increase was smaller. The total proportion working (full or part time) increased among all groups. Graduates and continuing participants had the greatest increase, from 70 to 96 percent and 58 to 96 percent, respectively. Among dropouts, the increase was from 64 to 80 percent, while among the comparison group, the increase was somewhat smaller, from 68 to 75 percent.

Along with this increase in full-time work comes an increase in monthly wage income (see table 5).⁹ The comparison group had the smallest increase, \$245, while the program graduates had the largest increase, \$792.

Table 5. Mean Monthly Wages at Application and Last Observation (\$)

Group	At Application	At Last Observation	Change	<i>n</i>
Comparison	527	772	245	30
Graduates	491	1,283	792	28
Dropouts	285	945	660	38
Continuing participants	451	928	477	17

While these means indicate large changes in wage income among program graduates, monthly wage is a function of both hours worked and hourly wage rate. Thus, increases in income can be due to increases in either hourly wage or hours worked. Given that such a large portion of respondents moved from part-time to full-time work over the study period, we need to be careful in ascribing changes in income to the program and not to increases in the numbers of hours worked. That is, did the program help to increase hourly wage rates, or did people simply work more

⁹ For each case, we calculated the monthly wage income at application and last observation to evaluate the program's impact. Monthly wage income at application is the product of the reported hours and hourly wages for those who said on their application forms that they were working multiplied by 4.33, the number of weeks in a month. Monthly wage income at last observation is the product of the survey responses for hourly wage and hours worked multiplied by 4.33. Those who said they were not working had incomes of \$0.

hours? Changes in hourly wages indicate changes in labor productivity and human capital, while changes in hours worked may indicate fluctuations in the amount of time available for work. Therefore, we performed separate analyses of changes in hourly wage rate and in number of hours worked.

When they applied to the program, the members of each group worked, on average, between 28 and 30 hours a week (see table 6). At last observation, graduates were working, on average, 35 hours a week. The comparison group had no change in the number of hours worked, and dropouts experienced a slight decrease. Continuing participants increased their average hours worked by 2 hours.

Table 6. Mean Hours Worked at Application and Last Observation

Group	At Application	At Last Observation	Change	<i>n</i>
Comparison	28	28	0	33
Graduates	28	35	7	28
Dropouts	30	29	-1	42
Continuing participants	28	30	2	18

We used tobit analysis to control for the educational differences between program participants and the comparison group, the time between first and last observations, and hours worked per week at application. The great proportion of zero values in the dependent variable, hours of work per week, would cause ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to yield biased estimates. The tobit analysis takes into account not only the distribution of nonzero values in the dependent variable, but also the probability that an observation will have a nonzero value (Greene 1993; Long 1997). The results of the tobit analysis indicate that, holding all other variables constant, graduates on average worked 9.86 hours per week more than comparison group members (see table 7).¹⁰

¹⁰ In modeling hours worked, we included family structure variables that might influence the hours worked: marital status and the presence of small children. The parameter estimates for these variables were not significantly different from zero, nor did their inclusion in the model affect other parameter estimates. They did not add to the explanatory power of the model, perhaps because there is very little variation in the work and family structure of the people in the sample for this quasi-experimental design.

*Table 7. Tobit Analysis Results:
Hours of Work per Week at Last Observation*

Variable	Marginal Effects (Standard Error)
Intercept	-5.19 (7.37)
Group	
Graduates	9.86 * (3.99)
Dropouts	6.37 ** (3.78)
Participants	8.94 ** (4.63)
Comparison	—
Education at application	
More than 12th grade	6.32 (4.38)
12th grade	6.89 (4.20)
Less than 12th grade	—
Months between observations	0.38 *** (0.08)
Hours worked per week at application	-0.03 (0.10)
<i>n</i>	122

* $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

Increases in hourly wages also occurred for all groups during the study period (see table 8). At application to the program, all groups had average hourly wages between \$5.04 and \$5.50; graduates had the highest wage, and comparison group members the lowest. By last observation, the average hourly wage rate for all groups had increased. Graduates had the greatest average hourly wages, \$8.62, with program dropouts following at \$7.48.

Table 8. Mean Hourly Wages at Application and Last Observation (\$)

Group	At Application	At Last Observation	Change	<i>n</i>
Comparison	5.04	6.67	1.63	22
Graduates	5.50	8.62	3.12	24
Dropouts	5.11	7.48	2.37	29
Continuing participants	5.30	6.89	1.59	13

The comparison group had the lowest wage rate at last observation, \$6.67 an hour.

To better estimate the impact of the program, we must control for the educational differences between program participants and the comparison group, the time between first and last observations, and wages at application. We performed an OLS regression on the log of the hourly wage rate at last observation, including these variables as controls and dummy variables identifying the different groups. We also used the log of the lagged dependent variable.¹¹ The results indicate that the change in hourly wage rate for graduates is significantly different from that for the comparison group¹² (see table 9). Holding all other variables constant, the average wage rate of program graduates was 22 percent more than the rate for the comparison group.¹³

Changes in AFDC

While program graduates, dropouts, and comparison group members all experienced decreases in the proportions receiving AFDC benefits, graduates had the largest decrease (see table 10). At last observation, only 10 percent of program graduates received AFDC, compared with 41 percent of the comparison group and 33 percent of program dropouts. The proportion of continuing participants receiving AFDC, however, increased by 5 percentage points as some participants went on AFDC when they started school.

Likewise, graduates, dropouts, and comparison group members experienced reductions in the dollar amount of AFDC benefits

¹¹ We added 1 to the variable before we took the natural log so that we would not lose the zero values in the analysis.

¹² We tested the hypothesis that the effect of the lagged value of the hourly wage was constant—that is, that $\beta = 1$, where β is the coefficient for the log of the lagged wage. The t statistic calculated for testing is $(\beta - 1)/SE(\beta)$, where $SE(\beta)$ is the standard error. The calculated value of t is 5.7815 and the critical value is 1.96, so we reject the null hypothesis. There are not constant returns to scale for initial wage levels. Therefore, including the log of the lagged wage in the model controls for some unobserved heterogeneity, most likely correlated with graduating from the program.

¹³ If GRAD is the dummy variable for graduates, WAGE2 is the hourly wage at last observation, and β_1 and β_2 are intercept and coefficient from table 9, then $\ln \text{WAGE2} = \beta_1 + \beta_2 \text{GRAD}$, holding all other variables constant. For graduates, therefore, $\text{WAGE2} = \exp(\beta_1 + \beta_2 \text{GRAD}) = \exp[1.50 + 0.20(1)] = \5.47 . Similarly, for the comparison group, $\text{WAGE2} = \exp[1.50 + 0.20(0)] = \4.48 .

*Table 9. OLS Regression Results:
Natural Log of Wages per Hour at Last Observation*

Variable	Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)
Intercept	1.50 (0.32)
Group	
Graduates	0.20** (0.09)
Dropouts	0.09 (0.08)
Participants	0.03 (0.10)
Comparison	—
Education at application	
More than 12th grade	0.01 (0.10)
12th grade	-0.04 (0.09)
Less than 12th grade	—
Months between observations	0.01** (0.00)
Monthly wage at application	0.12 (0.15)
R^2	0.15*
Adjusted R^2	0.07
n	88

* $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

*Table 10. Proportion Receiving AFDC at Application
and Last Observation (Percent)*

Group	At Application	At Last Observation	Change	n
Comparison	44	41	-3	46
Graduates	33	10	-23	30
Dropouts	54	33	-21	54
Continuing participants	50	55	5	20

received (see table 11). Graduates had the greatest decrease, receiving on average \$62 less per month at last observation than when they entered the program. Comparison group members

Table 11. Mean Monthly AFDC Dollar Amount at Application and Last Observation

Group	At Application	At Last Observation	Change	<i>n</i>
Comparison	105	94	-11	46
Graduates	85	23	-62	30
Dropouts	134	86	-48	54
Continuing participants	111	133	22	20

received on average \$11 less per month, while dropouts received an average of \$48 less. Continuing participants had an increase of \$22.

Again, these are raw means. To control for the variables discussed above, we performed a tobit analysis on the level of AFDC benefits at last observation (see table 12). We controlled for

Table 12. Tobit Analysis Results: Monthly AFDC Dollar Amount at Last Observation

Variable	Marginal Effect (Standard Error)
Intercept	151.19*** (40.29)
Group	
Graduates	-72.15*** (26.60)
Dropouts	-27.91 (20.52)
Continuing participants	14.25 (23.81)
Comparison	—
Education at application	
More than 12th grade	-63.10*** (22.46)
12th grade	-73.66*** (20.87)
Less than 12th grade	—
Months between observations	-1.92*** (0.47)
AFDC per month at application	0.12* (0.06)
<i>n</i>	140

* $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

education at application and the individual's dollar level of aid per month at application. Dummy variables identified program graduates, participants, and dropouts; the comparison group was the reference category. The tobit results indicate that being a program graduate was associated with a significant decrease in AFDC benefits. On average, AFDC payments were \$72 per month less for graduates than for comparison group members. Neither continuing participants nor program dropouts showed a significant difference from the comparison group in the dollar amount of welfare received.

Changes in food stamps

As with receipt of AFDC, program graduates, program dropouts, and comparison group members experienced decreases in the proportions receiving food stamps between first and last observations (see table 13). Graduates experienced the greatest decrease, a reduction of 26 percentage points. The decreases for the comparison group and dropouts were only 9 and 8 percentage points, respectively.

Table 13. Proportion Receiving Food Stamps at Application and Last Observation (Percent)

Group	At Application	At Last Observation	Change	<i>n</i>
Comparison	60	51	-9	45
Graduates	53	27	-26	30
Dropouts	59	51	-8	53
Continuing participants	50	70	20	20

Changes in the mean monthly dollar amount of food stamps show a similar pattern. Program graduates had the largest decrease in food stamps, \$72, while dropouts experienced a very small decrease, \$2, and the comparison group no decrease at all (see table 14). Continuing participants had an increase of \$47 on average.

Again, we use tobit analysis to control for educational differences, the months between observations, and the initial monthly food stamp level at application (see table 15). The analysis reveals that being a program graduate is associated with a significant decrease in the amount of food stamps received. Graduates

had roughly a \$78 reduction in food stamps relative to the comparison group.

Table 14. Mean Monthly Food Stamp Dollar Amount at Application and Last Observation

Group	At Application	At Last Observation	Change	<i>n</i>
Comparison	112	112	0	45
Graduates	119	47	-72	30
Dropouts	125	123	-2	53
Continuing participants	97	144	47	20

Table 15. Tobit Analysis Results: Monthly Food Stamp Dollar Amount at Last Observation

Variable	Marginal Effect (Standard Error)
Intercept	122.56** (51.32)
Group	
Graduates	-77.62** (32.30)
Dropouts	-6.17 (26.35)
Continuing participants	27.89 (32.53)
Comparison	—
Education at application	
More than 12th grade	-41.94 (30.48)
12th grade	-44.38 (27.89)
Less than 12th grade	—
Months between observations	-1.49** (0.60)
Food stamps per month at application	0.20** (0.09)
<i>n</i>	148

* $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

Public and publicly assisted housing

Although both program graduates and program dropouts reduced their reliance on housing assistance, the decrease among graduates was the larger by far (see table 16). The proportion of graduates living in public housing decreased by 26 percentage points, while the proportion of dropouts decreased by 6 points. At the same time, the proportion of comparison group members relying on housing assistance increased by 11 points. All continuing participants were living in public housing at last observation because residency in public housing is a program requirement.

Table 16. Proportions Living in Public Housing at Application and Using Housing Assistance or Owning a Home at Last Observation (Percent)

Group	Public Housing Resident at Application	At Last Observation			<i>n</i>
		Use Assisted Housing	Change in Use of Assisted Housing	Own a Home	
Comparison	49	60	11	9	47
Graduates	58	32	-26	36	31
Dropouts	52	46	-6	11	54
Continuing participants	40	100	60	0	20

These changes in simple proportions may overstate the impact of the program. Because being on housing assistance is a dichotomous outcome, we used logistic regression to control for education, months between observations, and public housing status at application. The continuing participants have been omitted because they all live in public housing. The results indicate that program graduates were significantly less likely to rely on housing subsidies at last observation than the comparison group (see table 17). Program graduates were 0.3 times as likely to live in public housing as the comparison group, while the reliance on housing assistance among the dropouts was not significantly different from the comparison group.

Homeownership

Homeownership rates were much higher among program graduates than among members of the comparison group. Thirty-six

**Table 17. Logistic Regression Results:
Housing Assistance at Last Observation**

	Odds Ratio
Group	
Graduates	0.33**
Dropouts	0.74
Comparison	—
Education at application	
More than 12th grade	1.24
12th grade	1.10
Less than 12th grade	—
Months between observations	1.03**
Public housing resident at application	0.91
-2 log <i>L</i>	170.81*
<i>n</i>	132

* $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

percent of program graduates owned a house at last observation, compared with 9 percent of the comparison group (see table 16). Homeownership is a dichotomous outcome, and again we used logistic regression to control for each individual's education, the months between observations, and whether the person lived in public housing at the time of application. The results indicate that program graduates were 6.93 times as likely to own a home as comparison group members (see table 18). Dropouts were not significantly different from the comparison group in their odds of owning a home.

Conclusions

This article presents the first long-term evaluation of a public housing self-sufficiency program utilizing a comparison group to isolate program impacts. The results indicate that those who finished the program had increases in employment and income that were statistically larger than those among the comparison group. A full 93 percent of those who finished the program had full-time employment, an increase of 66 percentage points from the time of application. Among the comparison group, full-time

*Table 18. Logistic Regression Results:
Owning a Home at Last Observation*

Variable	Odds Ratio
Group	
Graduates	6.93***
Dropouts	1.73
Comparison	—
Education at application	
More than 12th grade	0.88
12th grade	1.06
Less than 12th grade	—
Months between observations	1.04**
Public housing resident at application	0.81
-2 log <i>L</i>	100.17**
<i>n</i>	132

* $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

employment increased by 40 percentage points. Program graduates also experienced a wage income increase of \$792 per month, and an hourly increase in wage rate of \$3.12 an hour. The results of a regression model indicate that, after controlling for several variables, graduates on average made 22 percent more per hour than the comparison group.

Program graduates also experienced statistically significant decreases in AFDC and food stamp payments, relied less on housing assistance, and were more likely than the comparison group to have bought a home. At last observation, 10 percent of program graduates were dependent on AFDC, compared with 41 percent of the comparison group. Graduates, on average, received \$71 per month less in AFDC payments than the comparison group. In addition, relative to the comparison group, program graduates experienced a \$72 decline in the amount of food stamp benefits received. Finally, program graduates were more than six times as likely to own a home and less than half as likely to rely on housing subsidies as the comparison group. Overall, although not all the program graduates became totally self-sufficient, the program had what might be described as a moderate impact on the incomes and AFDC and food stamp subsidies of program graduates.

The results of the evaluation also indicate, however, that a substantial proportion of program participants dropped out before completing the program. Only 32 percent of those who entered the program graduated. This high dropout rate greatly detracts from the overall success of the program and raises serious questions about its cost-effectiveness. As discussed in the body of this article, the reasons for this high dropout rate are many. Some of these have to do with the design and implementation of the Gateway program and can be addressed through program changes. Others have more to do with the characteristics and circumstances of the participants and may be harder to address.

Recommendations for self-sufficiency programs

The reasons for the high dropout rate suggest several changes in the Gateway and other similar self-sufficiency programs. First, self-sufficiency programs need to be adequately staffed. The Gateway enabling legislation, like the self-sufficiency programs that preceded it, provided no additional federal funding for case managers. The cost of the case managers was to be borne by CHA. Unfortunately, the housing authority's discretionary budget was severely limited, and it was willing to commit to only a single staff position to manage and provide case management for the program participants.

The results of our evaluation suggest that funding for a sufficient number of case managers is critical to the retention of program participants. Gateway participants needed the assistance of supportive caseworkers to navigate the many obstacles on the road to self-sufficiency. The caseworkers are particularly important given that the friends and relatives of the participants were often nonsupportive of their self-sufficiency efforts. Many participants required frequent contact with and encouragement from their caseworkers to remain focused on their goal. The caseworkers also helped participants develop solutions to problems, such as what to do when a child was sick and could not go to day care, or how to change curricula if they wanted or needed to.

If the program had been adequately staffed, it could have retained many of those who dropped out. When asked the size of a manageable case load, caseworkers suggested that they could work effectively with 35 to 40 participants at any one time. This case load would allow them to have monthly contacts with each

participant and to work more intensively with those who were experiencing difficulties.

A second recommendation is that self-sufficiency programs should offer participants a wider range of educational and training opportunities. This would have helped both to attract more participants to the program and to reduce the dropout rate. As mentioned earlier, most Gateway participants were strongly encouraged to enroll in one of the associate's degree programs offered by a local community college, which require students to take a full course load over a two-year period. The Gateway staff felt that these community college programs were the best way for the participants to attain a job that would pay enough to buy a home.

In focus groups with those who did not follow through with their applications, however, a frequent complaint was that they did not want to go back to school. Rather, they were looking for an on-the-job training experience in which they could learn a skill while bringing in much-needed extra income. Among those who entered the program and began the community college curriculum, the dropout rate was very high, and most of those who did finish took more than two years. Given the family responsibilities of virtually all the participants, the program needs to offer less demanding educational and training options.

On-the-job training that offered participants the opportunity to supplement their meager welfare payments would also help them provide for their families. In this scenario, not all the graduates would be able to purchase a home upon graduation from the program, but they would instead seek stable rental situations. The dream of homeownership was a powerful incentive for some of the Gateway participants, but many participants shared a more fundamental concern with providing a safe and secure environment for their children. Rather than set a lofty goal such as homeownership and fail, it may be better to set a more modest goal, such as a private rental opportunity. The program might offer separate tracks for those who aspire to homeownership and those who would be satisfied with moving to private rental housing. Those who want homeownership might take part in longer-term training programs, while those who want to rent could enter into shorter-term programs. Thus, homeownership might be one of several images that the program could provide to participants to motivate them to achieve self-sufficiency.

A third recommendation is to cluster program participants in adjacent units. One of the original ideas of the Gateway program designers was to assess how clustering program participants affects their success in completing the program. The program designers were interested in assessing the importance of peer counseling that might occur naturally if the participants were clustered. Thus, half the original participants were clustered in one section of a large housing development. Unfortunately, the opportunity to assess the impact of peer counseling broke down when many of the original participants dropped out of the program but remained in their units. In our focus groups with both participants and graduates, however, the idea of clustering was frequently mentioned and widely supported. We heard a number of stories of how friends, neighbors, and relatives were non-supportive of the improvement efforts of participants; social environments were simply not conducive to completing the program. Participants wanted to be in communities where neighbors would support them emotionally and practically in their efforts at upward mobility. Therefore, if at all possible, participants should be clustered to provide a supportive environment for the pursuit of self-sufficiency. This type of support could have aided in retaining more participants.

While these changes could have increased the graduation rate, we should be realistic about the difficulty of moving many public housing residents to complete self-sufficiency in a short time. Clearly, the participants in the Gateway program were among the most educated and motivated of CHA residents. Yet they still faced many personal obstacles that were often related to the reasons they needed public housing in the first place. Their reading abilities were generally low, and their family responsibilities were great. Some had or developed substance abuse problems or became involved with boyfriends who were not supportive of their self-sufficiency efforts. Others had health problems or children with health problems. These personal issues often derailed their self-sufficiency efforts. One is left with the impression that many of these women are in deep holes and that it will take them a long time to dig themselves out.

The somewhat disappointing success rate of the Gateway program, however, seems largely a result of the way the program was implemented rather than a result of a flaw in the basic program model. Although the task of moving public housing residents to self-sufficiency is more difficult than many of those involved had anticipated, the basic idea of providing people with a coordinated set of support services—including stable housing, education, day care, and transportation assistance—to allow

them to acquire the skills needed to obtain a decent-paying job still seems sound. The critical missing elements in the Gateway program appear to have been effective case management, a wider set of educational and training options, and a supportive social environment for program participants. With these changes, the program could very well achieve the ultimate goal of turning public housing into a way station rather than a dead-end road for low-income families.

Implications for welfare reform

The experiences of the Gateway Transitional Housing Program can inform current efforts in welfare reform. Both welfare reform and self-sufficiency programs focus on reducing the number of people dependent on public subsidies. The populations receiving housing assistance and welfare are often the same. Therefore, the lessons we learn from this housing self-sufficiency program may also be applicable to welfare reform.

First, two years for remediation is an unrealistic amount of time for gaining the skills to become self-sufficient. As one Gateway program staff member commented, "Two years is too short a time to get from \$0 an hour to \$9 an hour." Furthermore, Gateway allowed as much as seven years to become self-sufficient, and the program had a 63 percent dropout rate. Gateway participants were the most educated and motivated of public housing residents; for those who are less educated and less motivated, becoming self-sufficient could require longer than the five years allowed under welfare legislation.

Second, even those who completed the program were not necessarily making enough money to become self-sufficient. That 27 percent of Gateway graduates still received food stamps and 10 percent still received AFDC after they had left the program illustrates the difficulty. Although they had left public housing, a portion still had incomes low enough to receive welfare and food stamps.

Third, if self-sufficiency programs and welfare reform are really to help people increase their incomes, they must take into consideration the constraints on those the programs try to serve. One of those constraints is the single-parent status of many benefit recipients. In the Gateway Transitional Housing Program, about 95 percent of both program entrants and comparison group members were unmarried, and more than 90 percent were parents. For many, family responsibilities interfered with

attending school. Being a single parent meant that many were unable to complete their programs within the two-year limit. Missed classes due to family responsibilities created additional pressure for many program participants. Reliable child care is therefore a key ingredient in the success of either a self-sufficiency program or welfare reform. The Gateway participants were provided with standard day care service, but there was no provision for sick children. Thus, participants missed many classes while caring for sick children.

Finally, the expectation underlying both self-sufficiency programs and welfare reform is that a single mother can work and raise her children independently of public subsidies. While this is not impossible, for those with low levels of education the task becomes nearly nightmarish. In addition to providing adequate child care to bolster parents' attempts at self-sufficiency, it will be important to help these predominantly female heads of households create support networks with others like themselves. Gateway participants not only commented that being clustered would enable them to stay motivated, but also they talked about being able to share child care responsibilities. In the same way the peer-lending programs based on the Grameen Bank model promote responsible borrowing and saving behaviors in group settings, similar circles of people interested in self-sufficiency would allow cross-dependence, sharing of information, cooperation in family responsibilities, and support for each other's efforts. Going it alone may not be the answer to the problem of dependence on public assistance.

Self-sufficiency programs are still in their infancy. Program sponsors are still learning, often through trial and error, how to run effective programs. The appropriate use of the results of this and other early evaluations of self-sufficiency programs is to learn from the experiences and use that knowledge to make program improvements—not to proclaim a program a success or a failure prematurely. We truly hope that these results will be used in this way.

Authors

William M. Rohe is Dean E. Smith Professor of City and Regional Planning and Director of the Center for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Rachel Garshick Kleit is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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