

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS FOR SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS: AN EVALUATION OF THE CITY OF WINNIPEG'S COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMS

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**Abstract:** The City of Winnipeg's community services programs (CSPs) are examples of the "work experience" approach to helping social assistance recipients find employment. Like other evaluations of work experience programs, this assessment finds the CSPs effective and cost-beneficial, in the short run, in reducing dependency on social assistance. Unlike most program assessments, however, this evaluation measures participants' length of involvement in the program and finds there is an optimal duration of involvement. A quasi-experimental design is used to assess the program's net impact on participants' subsequent length of stay on assistance. Self-selection bias is assessed, and multiple-regression analysis is used to control for differences between program and comparison group members and to determine the unique impact of program participation and length of participation.

**Résumé:** Les Programmes des Services Communautaires (CSP) de la ville de Winnipeg sont des exemples de l'approche de «l'expérience de travail» qui souhaite aider les prestataires de l'aide sociale à trouver un emploi. De même que d'autres évaluations de programmes d'expérience de travail, cette évaluation trouve que les CSP sont efficaces et rentables, puisqu'ils permettent de réduire, à court terme du moins, la dépendance de ses participants sur l'aide sociale. De plus, à la différence des autres programmes d'évaluation, cette évaluation mesure pour chaque personne la durée de sa participation au programme, ce qui permet de conclure qu'il existe une durée optimale du programme. Au moyen d'un plan quasi expérimental, la portée du programme est déterminée en observant la durée pendant laquelle, à la suite de ce programme, le participant continue de recevoir les prestations sociales. On tient compte de l'effet de l'auto-sélection sur les résultats et on se sert de l'analyse de régression multi-

ple pour expliquer les différences qui existent entre les membres du programme et ceux du groupe témoin. Ainsi est-il possible de déterminer la portée réelle de la participation au programme et de la durée de cette participation.

The City of Winnipeg has been delivering two community service programs for a number of years. They provide short-term employment to the clients of its municipal social assistance program and deliver benefits to low-income seniors and community clubs. As part of its commitment to increase employment opportunities for social assistance recipients, the Province of Manitoba augmented the funding available to these two programs in the 1994/95 fiscal year and, between June 1994 and October 1995, carried out a net impact and benefit-cost evaluation of the programs. This article summarizes the final report of that evaluation. It includes a brief description of the two programs, a statement of the methodology that was employed to assess the programs' net impact on participants' length of stay on social assistance, and a presentation of the evaluation's key findings.

## THE PROGRAMS

The City of Winnipeg operates two employment programs for its social assistance recipients: the Community Home Service Program (CHSP) and the Community Service Worker Program (CSWP).

The CHSP provides low-income seniors and disabled persons maintaining their own home or apartment with free light housekeeping and yard and home maintenance services. The program screens and orients social assistance recipients and sends them to the seniors' residences on a regular basis to provide up to 1½ hours of service per visit. The employee makes three to four visits per day to different homes. The program provides the following services to its employees:

- regular employment of up to six months in duration
- coverage of transportation and work clothing expenses
- an initial orientation about employment expectations and work safety practices
- performance evaluations at the end of the first and second months of employment
- paid job search time of once per month
- information on available jobs in the private and public sectors
- marketing to private employers, as time permits

The majority of employees are paid a training allowance for the first month of employment of \$140 per week. A favorable evaluation at the end of the first month results in an increase to \$150 per week for the second month. Usually, the person is transferred to the city's payroll at the beginning of the third month and is paid minimum wage. Unlike with regular employment, there are no earnings exemptions under the CHSP; social assistance benefits are reduced dollar for dollar.

The CSWP provides caretaking and maintenance services to the city's community clubs. Typically, heads of families on social assistance who have some employment experience are screened, oriented, and placed with community clubs for up to six months' duration. They perform regular maintenance and upkeep duties such as cleaning, set up for indoor programs, painting and minor repairs, snow removal, rink flooding, and general grounds cleanup.

The CSWP provides the following services to its employees:

- full-time employment of up to six months
- coverage of transportation and work clothing
- an updated job resume
- an initial orientation about employment expectations and work safety practices
- notification of and referral to openings in training/education programs
- marketing with private- and public-sector employers

CSWP employees are paid six dollars per hour by the City of Winnipeg and their social assistance benefits, like those of CHSP employees, are reduced dollar for dollar.

## THE METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSING THE PROGRAMS' NET IMPACT

A quasi-experimental design was used to assess the programs' net impact on participants' subsequent dependency on social assistance. The "treatment" group comprised those who enrolled in the CHSP and CSWP between January 1 and November 30, 1994; the "comparison" group contained a random sample of social assistance recipients who were active in the regular income maintenance (IMC) caseload as of November 25, 1994. There were 115 CSWP and 365 CHSP in the treatment group and 364 IMC cases in the comparison group, for a total of 844 cases.

Because the CSP participants were not randomly drawn from the entire IMC caseload, the design relied on the measurement and statistical control of those background characteristics of the CSP participants and nonparticipants thought to influence a person's subsequent level of dependency on social assistance, in order to infer the unique impact of program participation. The background characteristics included sociodemographic characteristics of the person such as age, gender, marital status, number and ages of children, prior employment experience, and number and duration of all spells on social assistance between January 1, 1992, and the start of the first time on the CSP, or November 25, 1994, in the case of comparison group members.

Multiple regression analysis was used to control for the effect of these background characteristics on the person's subsequent level of dependency on social assistance and to determine the unique effect of participation in the CSPs. The ordinary least squares (OLS) approach was used first to determine which background variables were correlated with length of dependency on assistance. However, OLS requires that the data meet a number of assumptions, including constant variance and normal distribution of the dependent variable across values of the independent variables. These were not met by the dependent variable of the analysis — the percent of days spent on social assistance after leaving the CSPs — because of a large number of limiting values of "0" and "100." As a result, the "two-limit Tobit" regression technique was used to estimate the parameters of the independent variables. The Tobit is a maximum likelihood estimation technique for data with limiting values.

The analysis first tested for the presence of self-selection bias, using the Heckman, two-stage estimation technique. The first stage estimates the probability of being selected into the program based on the client's background characteristics, and the second stage estimates the impact of participation in the program on the dependent variable, corrected for any selection bias estimated in the first stage. The "Inverse of Mill's Ratio" ( $\lambda$ ) is the correction factor calculated by the first stage and entered as a control variable in the second stage of the analysis. Because this ratio was found to be statistically insignificant, the two-limit Tobit was used to estimate the impact of program participation on subsequent duration on social assistance. Both the Heckman and the Tobit techniques were estimated with the LIMDEP statistical package.

The key net impact of the evaluation was the change in the amount of time spent on social assistance after enrollment in the CSPs. Accordingly, it was necessary to estimate the amount of time participants actually spent on social assistance, and the amount of time they would have spent on assistance had they not participated in the CSPs.

To generate these estimated values for the two CSP groups, we evaluated the Tobit regression equation for each group by setting the value of the coefficients for the other group to “0” and by multiplying the coefficient by “1” for the group being evaluated. In the case of the variable representing membership in the IMC group, the same approach was used, thus generating estimates for the CSP participants of what they would have done had they been members of the IMC group. Also, in order to standardize the time periods over which days on assistance was estimated, the “duration of observation period” variable of the regression equation was set to 365 days for the follow-up period, and to the actual number of days of enrollment in the CSPs for the time spent in CSPs.

## THE EVALUATION RESULTS

### The Size and Composition of the Community Services Programs

Tables 1 and 2 describe the level of service provided by the two community service programs and the demographic composition of the participants.

Table 1 shows that in 1994/95, 534 people were employed in the CHSP and 172 in the CSWP, for a total of 706 participants. The CHSP generated 27,820 days of employment and the CSWP an additional 13,923 days, for a total of 41,743 days of employment. This was over double the 20,983 days of employment generated in 1993 by City of Winnipeg funding alone.

Table 2 reveals the markedly different makeup of the participants in the two programs. The CHSP employee is typically a single, childless individual under 25 years of age with less than a high school level of education who has spent, on average, 83% of the previous two years on social assistance. By comparison, the typical CSWP employee is married with one or more children and over 25 years of age. Like the CHSP participant, he or she has less than a high school

level of education and has spent the vast majority (89%) of the last two years on social assistance.

### Level of Involvement In the CSPS

Table 3 presents the number of days participants were enrolled in the two CSPs. In effect, it describes the level of "treatment" the participants received. CHSP participants spent an average of 60 days on the program; however, the median duration of employment was only 32 days. By comparison, both average and median duration of employment in the CSWP were 105 days, close to double the average duration in the CHSP and over three times its median duration. As will be noted below, the length of time in the CSPs is correlated with participants' subsequent dependency on social assistance, but at a declining rate.

**Table 1**  
**Program Outputs of the CHSP and CSWP for the 1993 Calendar and 1994/95 Fiscal Years**

Type of Program Output	CHSP		CSWP		TOTAL	
	1993	1994/95	1993	1994/95	1993	1994/95
<b>1a. Number of Participants Employed</b>	312	534	117	172	429	706
<b>1b. Full-time Equivalent Positions<sup>a</sup></b>	54	111	30	56	84	167
<b>2. Days of Employment</b>						
- including foremen and dispatchers	13,420	27,820	7,563	13,923	20,983	41,743
- excluding foremen and dispatchers	11,593	23,152	—	—	—	—
<b>3. Weeks of Employment</b>						
- including foremen and dispatchers <sup>b</sup>	2,684	5,564	1,513	2,785	4,197	8,348
<b>4. Services Provided</b>						
- number of home visits	33,819	62,760	n/a	n/a	n/a	62,760
- number of different community clubs served	n/a	n/a	39	53	39	53

<sup>a</sup> These counts were obtained by dividing the total days of employment, including foremen and dispatchers, by 250 days. <sup>b</sup> These counts were obtained by dividing the total days of employment, including foremen and dispatchers, by 5 days.

## The Program's Gross Impact on Subsequent Employment and Social Assistance Dependency

The *gross* impact of a program is the level of performance of its participants on the key outcome indicators, after leaving the program. The *net* impact of a program is the *difference* in level of performance

**Table 2**  
**A Sociodemographic Profile of CHSP and CSWP Participants**

	CHSP (N = 115)	CSWP (N = 365)
<b>A. Age</b>		
18–24	61.9%	29.6%
25–34	26.3%	34.7%
35–44	10.2%	24.4%
45+	1.6%	11.3%
Average Age	24.7	31.4
<b>B. Gender</b>		
Male	57.0%	96.5%
Female	43.0%	3.5%
<b>C. Marital Status</b>		
Single	76.4%	3.5%
Sep/Div/Widowed	5.3%	2.6%
Married/Common Law	18.3%	93.9%
<b>D. No. of Children</b>		
None	91.8%	16.5%
One	3.8%	31.3%
Two	2.7%	25.2%
Three +	1.7%	27.0%
<b>E. Highest Level of Education</b>		
1–8	4.7%	10.4%
9–10	40.3%	38.3%
11–12	46.6%	41.7%
Trades/C.C.	4.1%	3.5%
University	4.3%	6.1%
<b>F. Employed in Last Two Years?</b>		
No	62.7%	57.4%
Yes	37.3%	42.6%
<b>G. % Time Spent on Assistance in Two Years Prior to Enrollment in the CSPS</b>		
1–25%	2.5%	0.0%
26–50%	10.9%	8.7%
51–75%	18.1%	6.1%
75–100%	68.5%	85.2%
Average %	82.6%	89.8%

on the key outcome indicators between those who did and those who did not participate in the program. Properly estimated, only the net impact measures the incremental change in behavior due solely to the program.

**Table 3**  
**Days of Employment in the CHSP and CSWP**

Days of Employment	CHSP (N = 281)	CSWP (N = 61)
1-10	22.4%	9.8%
11-20	14.9%	3.3%
21-40	18.5%	19.7%
41-60	10.0%	4.9%
61-100	12.1%	9.8%
101-278	22.1%	52.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Average # of Days	60	105
Median # of Days	32	105

*Note.* These data are based on those who started between January 1 and September 30, 1994, of whom all but four had left by August 1, 1995.

**Table 4**  
**Results of the Six-Month Follow-up Survey of CHSP Participants**

A. Outcomes	% (N = 140)
1. Found employment	59
2. Returned to school	33
3. Found employment and/or returned to school	74
4. Used social assistance	61
5. Used unemployment insurance	5
6. Used social assistance and/or unemployment insurance	61
B. Of Those Who Found Employment	(N = 82)
- Average # weeks worked	16
- Average # hours/week	31
- Average wage rate	\$6.63
- Weekly gross earnings	\$209
- Percent qualifying for Unemployment Insurance <sup>a</sup>	35% (21%) <sup>b</sup>
- Average # eligible weeks of benefits	20
- Average weekly benefit	\$135

<sup>a</sup> In Winnipeg, 18+ weeks of employment of 15+ hours per week is the qualifying period.

<sup>b</sup> 21% of the 140 persons interviewed.

Table 4 describes the proportion of CHSP participants who had found employment or gone on to further training within six months after leaving the program. (Too few CSWP participants had left the program six months prior to follow-up survey to provide a basis for generalizing to the study population.) It shows that 59% had found employment and 33% had returned to school within six months of leaving the programs. Those who found employment had worked an average of 16 weeks, or 67% of the follow-up period, and earned an average wage of \$6.63 per hour. Their level of employment qualified 35% of them for unemployment insurance benefits, although only 5% had applied for those benefits in the six month follow-up period.

Table 5 shows the percentage of CSP participants who returned to social assistance after leaving the CSP and the percentage of follow-up time spent on assistance. Because participants were monitored over varying follow-up periods and because the length of the follow-up observation period greatly affects the observed level of dependency, the results are presented by length of the follow-up period. They reveal that the longer participants are tracked, the more likely they are to return to social assistance. For example, within three months of leaving the CHSP only 48% had returned to social assistance, whereas 93% had returned to assistance in the year following exit from the CHSP. For those in the CSWP, the return rates

**Table 5**  
**Level of Dependency on City Social Assistance after Leaving the CHSP and CSWP**

Length of Follow-up Observation Period	CHSP			CSWP		
	//	Percent Ever on Assistance	Percent of Time Spent on Assistance	//	Percent Ever on Assistance	Percent of Time Spent on Assistance
1-91 days	23	48%	40%	30	70%	83%
92-182 days	57	54%	65%	35	77%	89%
183-274 days	78	83%	56%	26	81%	81%
275-365 days	130	87%	47%	8	88%	62%
366-563 days	77	93%	49%	16	94%	34%
Total	365	80%	54%	115	79%	67%

*Note.* These data are based on all those who enrolled between January 1 and November 30, 1994, for the period ending August 1, 1995.

are higher, initially. Within three months, 70% had been on assistance. Offsetting this trend is the change in the percentage of total time on assistance, which, with both the CHSP and CSWP participants, first increases and then declines.

### Net Impact of the CSPS on Social Assistance Dependency

Even though the vast majority of CSP participants return to social assistance within the year following exit from the programs, their participation in the CSPs actually reduces the amount of subsequent time they would have spent on assistance. This outcome is first seen in Table 6, which presents the final regression equation results of both the OLS and Tobit estimations.

The coefficients in Table 6 have a straightforward interpretation. They represent the amount of change in the dependent variable caused by a unit change in the independent variable, after controlling for the effect of all other variables in the equation. Thus, for example, the Tobit coefficient of -81.19 for the variable “being in the CHSP” means that CHSP participants spent 81% fewer days on social assistance after leaving the program than did those in the regular IM caseload. Similarly, the value of -18.60 for the “being in the CSWP” variable indicates that those in the CSWP spent 18.6% fewer days on assistance than their IM counterparts. Both these coefficients are statistically significant.

Several other findings of Table 6 are worth highlighting. First, those with at least a grade 12 education and prior employment history spend less subsequent time on social assistance, whereas those who spent more time on assistance prior to joining the CSPs spend more time on assistance after leaving the CSPs. In effect, prior dependency predisposes the participant to future dependency. Second, the duration of one’s time in the CSPs reduces the subsequent level of social assistance dependency, but at a declining rate. This is seen by the “-” coefficient attached to the “total days of employment” variable and the “+” coefficient attached to its squared term. The fact that the squared term is statistically significant means that participation in the CSP leads to diminishing marginal returns to lowered social assistance dependency. It also means that there is an optimal period of participation in the CSPs, beyond which the cost of an extra day of employment is greater than the benefit of less subsequent time on social assistance. The optimal period of employment is presented in Table 8.

**Table 6**  
**Results of the Regression Analyses of the Percent of Time Spent on City Social Assistance after Leaving the Community Service Programs**

Variable	OLS		Tobit	
	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value
<b>Constant</b>	+113.11	6.6	+100.81	+6.3
<b>Client Characteristics</b>				
- Grade 12 education	-7.19	-1.9	-6.94	-2.0
- Prior employment history	-9.26	-2.7	-12.24	-3.8
- Deemed employable	+10.52	+1.5	+10.70	+1.6
- Marginally employable	+6.44	+0.8	+15.80	+2.2
- Single marital status	-70.71	-1.9	-6.47	-1.7
- Separated/divorced	-13.30	-2.0	-14.28	-2.3
- Age	+0.19	+1.0	0.31	1.6
- Two children	+6.86	-1.1	-6.75	-1.1
<b>Prior Social Assistance History</b>				
- Duration of observation period	+0.008	+1.4	+0.01	+2.2
- Percentage of observation period on assistance	+0.19	+3.5	+0.28	+5.7
<b>Compared to Being in the IMC</b>				
- Being in the CHSP	-59.46	-3.7	-81.19	-5.5
- Being in the CSWP	-28.75	-2.5	-18.60	-1.7
<b>Characteristics of CSP Spell</b>				
- Total days employed	-0.23	-1.9	-0.47	-4.1
- (Total days employed)	+0.003	+0.7	+0.001	+2.3
- Had two CSP spells	+17.59	+1.7	+29.81	+3.1
- Left CSP for employment	-8.08	-1.7	-18.97	-4.3
- Was let go from the CSP	+12.44	+1.1	+14.67	+1.3
- Left CSP for medical reasons	+22.36	+2.9	+28.87	+4.0
- Left CSP due to move	-23.61	-2.1	-36.03	-3.3
- Left CSP in March 94	-25.77	-1.5	-30.29	-2.0
- Left CSP in May 94	-16.34	-1.2	-16.09	-1.2
- Left CSP in June 94	-14.52	-1.4	-15.78	-1.7
- Left CSP in Aug 94	-11.54	-1.5	-11.82	-1.6
- Left CSP in Oct 94	-12.24	-1.7	-11.68	-1.7
- Left CSP in Feb 95	+15.91	+1.4	+28.57	+2.7
<b>Characteristics of Time After Leaving the CSP</b>				
- Duration of observation period (CHSP)	+0.01	+2.6	+0.03	+4.0
- Duration of observation period (others)	-0.08	-2.3	-0.11	-3.1

**OLS Results**

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.35

F = 15.9; d.f. = 27; p = < .001

**Tobit Results**

Sigma = 40.53, t value = 33.5;

p = < .001

Table 7 presents the results of the evaluation of the Tobit regression equation described in Table 6, for two time periods: the time in the CSP and the one-year period after leaving the CSPs. For the time period during which the CSP participants were in the program, those in the CHSP spent 45 fewer days on assistance than they would have had they not participated. Those in the CSWP spent 28 fewer days on assistance. During the one year after exit, CHSP participants spent 97 fewer days on assistance and CSWP participants spent 64 fewer days. In total, the CHSP participants spent 46% fewer days and the CSWP participants 27% fewer days on assistance than they would have had they not been in the community service programs.

Although not shown in this report, the level of savings generated by these reduced days on assistance recoups the costs of delivering the programs within 1.4 years for the CHSP and within 2.3 years for the CSWP. These are exceptionally short payback periods, and are based on a benefit-cost framework that did not measure such benefits as the value of the work done by the participants. Thus, the two CSPs are highly cost-beneficial.

### Optimal Duration of Employment in the CSPS

One of the key findings of the regression analysis presented in Table 6 was the nonlinear effect of days of employment on subsequent dependency on social assistance. With longer periods of employment in the CSPs, the gains in terms of shorter subsequent stays on assistance get smaller. Thus, at some point the fairly constant cost of another day of employment exceeds the declining benefit of a shorter stay on assistance. Table 8 summarizes these costs and benefits for different days of employment in the CHSP and the CSWP. As can

**Table 7**  
**The Net Impact of the CSPS on the Length of Time Spent on Social Assistance During and After the Period of Time Employed in the CSPS**

Comparison	Change in the Average Number of Days On Assistance		
	During CSP Stay	In the One Year after Leaving	Total
CHSP vs. IMC	-45 (-67%)	-97 (-41%)	-142 (-46%)
CSWP vs. IMC	-28 (-25%)	-64 (-28%)	-92 (-27%)

be seen, the costs begin to outweigh the benefits at about 65 days of employment in the CHSP and at about 50 days of employment in the CSWP. Compared to the median days of employment of 32 days for the CHSP and 105 days for the CSWP, these findings indicate that the CHSP program could be made more cost-effective by encouraging participants to remain longer in the program. Conversely, the CSWP could be made more cost-effective by shortening the period of employment.

These results reveal the benefit of being able to measure key characteristics of the program, such as level of participant exposure, in assessing its effectiveness. Where net impacts are sensitive to the level of exposure or “treatment,” and particularly when level of program exposure generates diminishing marginal returns, the results allow program planners to enhance program effectiveness by picking an optimal level of exposure.

## CONCLUSION

Human Resources Development Canada’s *A Review of Programs for Integrating Social Assistance Recipients into the Workforce* (1996) lists work experience programs as one of the seven types of approach

**Table 8**  
**Net Savings for the CHSP and CSWP by Number of Days Employed in the CSPs**

<b>A. CHSP</b>			
<b>Days Employed</b>	<b>Total Savings<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Total Costs<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Net Savings</b>
60	\$2,119	\$2,025	+\$94
65	\$2,142	\$2,154	-\$12
70	\$2,159	\$2,279	-\$120
<b>B. CSWP</b>			
<b>Days Employed</b>	<b>Total Savings<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Total Costs<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Net Savings</b>
45	\$2,531	\$2,435	+\$96
50	\$2,625	\$2,654	-\$29
55	\$2,674	\$2,864	-\$190

<sup>a</sup> Total savings = (net social assistance benefits paid out, if in the IMC) - (net social assistance benefits paid out, if in the CSP). <sup>b</sup> Total costs = (net benefits paid out while in the CSP) + (net payroll) + (other direct costs) + (indirect costs).

that governments have tried in order to move people from welfare to work. The City of Winnipeg's community services programs are clear examples of this approach.

In its review of four work experience programs, the HRDC report found gains in employment and reduced social assistance dependency for the voluntary and more enriched programs, but only in the short run. The one mandatory, no-frills program had no impact on earnings or dependency, in either the short or the long run. By comparison, the city's no-frills, low-cost community service programs lead to substantial reductions in subsequent dependency on social assistance and recoup their delivery costs during the first year after enrollment. For those in the CHSP, their level of dependency on social assistance in the one-year period after leaving declined by 41%. The dependency of CSWP participants declined by 28% over the same period. The savings generated by these reductions in dependency lead to recouped program costs in 1.4 and 2.3 years for the CHSP and CSWP, respectively. Thus, there appears to be merit in including such community service programs in the options available to social assistance recipients.

Unlike most program evaluations, this evaluation did measure the strength or intensity of the treatment received by the program participant. It found that the effect of duration of employment on subsequent dependency on assistance was nonlinear, leading to smaller incremental reductions in dependency with each additional day of employment. As a result, the evaluation was able to determine the optimal number of days of employment for both programs.

A key unanswered question is whether the initial reductions in social assistance dependency are maintained over time. As this evaluation tracked people for 1 1/2 years at most, the longer-term impact of the initial participation is not known. Yet a number of longer-term follow-up evaluations of the U.S. welfare-to-work programs (Friedlander & Burtless, 1995) have found either that the strength of the program intervention diminishes over time or that the performance of those not exposed to the program catches up to that of the participants, resulting in no net program impact. The author hopes to collect supplementary data on participants' social assistance dependency since August 1995, when the original monitoring ended, to assess whether the initial gains are maintained.

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