

Chapter 1

Development and the Hardest to Serve

People who stay at Development are too insecure about their own capabilities to look for another job. People here have low self-confidence. They don't think they can do anything else.

—Joan Chance, homeless project manager, Development

This is a job work, job readiness program. In other words, you learn how to work, you learn how to behave. You learn how to accept authority, all those things that people who are disenfranchised have for some reason not learned. We teach them and they go out and look for a job.

—Joe Jenkins, human resource director, Development

I think they only pay for training when it leads to a poor-paying job. Any training that leads to well paying jobs you have to pay for yourself.

—Ruth Fallows, educational kits department, Development

NAMING THE HARDEST TO SERVE

When Henry Thompson and Ruth Fallows asked their case managers at the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) about skills training, they were referred to Development, one of nine training programs in the city that specifically targeted the Transitionally Needy (TN). Like similar General Assistance (GA) welfare categories in other states, the TN category had a short yet tumultuous history. A state-funded welfare category for economically disadvantaged, single adults between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, it was created in 1984 to provide food stamps, medical insurance, and ninety days of cash assistance each year to economically needy individuals who did not fall under the purview of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The category was amended in a 1994

attack on welfare; it was collapsed with the Chronically Needy, the state's other GA category, and receipt of TN cash benefits for all GA recipients was scaled back from ninety days a year to two months every two years (County Assistance Office 1992). In 1995, only eleven years after its conception, the category was completely abolished by state legislators caught up in the nationwide frenzy to reform welfare.

But back in 1992 when Henry and Ruth requested assistance, state money was still being funneled into supports and job training programs for TNs. According to state mandates, programs were to focus on the "hardest to serve," an identity defined by one or more of the following characteristics:

- recovering substance abuser
- no recent work history
- ex-offender
- homeless
- score below seventh grade on literacy assessments
- limited knowledge of English

Like Henry and Ruth, participants of TN training programs state-wide reflected these criteria. According to records compiled in the state capital, from 1987 to 1993, 35 percent of TN program clients throughout the state were recovering substance abusers, 32 percent had no recent work history, 27 percent were ex-offenders, 21 percent were homeless, 20 percent scored below seventh grade level on literacy assessments, and 4 percent were limited in their knowledge of English (Bureau of Employment Training Programs 1993).

AN INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

Over the past twenty years, the Transitionally Needy category had sustained Development. Consequently, the identity of TN was closely interwoven with Henry and Ruth's move from the welfare rolls to work in the old factory building that housed Development's educational kits department. At Development, being a TN implied that Henry and Ruth were among the hardest to serve of the welfare population. At its most basic, it meant they lacked both stable work experiences and knowledge about the workplace. These implications had precedent at Development. Originally incorporated in

1974 as one of fifteen sites nationwide designed to test the effects of a strategy called supported work, Development was described by its founders as “a demonstration program which provided subsidized-work opportunities for former criminals, ex-drug addicts, young school dropouts, and women who had been receiving welfare for long periods of time” (Grinker 1979, 12). Like other 1970s-era subsidized-work programs throughout the country, Development’s supported work borrowed on ideas from public-service employment and sheltered workshops to provide the most economically marginalized individuals with opportunities to learn the expectations of work, gain work experience, and overcome fears of entering the labor force. During the program’s initial stage, those objectives translated to the assignment of the agency’s yearly allotment of 120 ex-addicts, recovering alcoholics, ex-offenders, AFDC mothers, and youth to work crews that were responsible for sealing abandoned buildings in the neighborhood, renovating the houses of low-income home owners, maintaining Development’s grounds, operating the company’s furniture shop, installing carpets, and painting the building. Each work crew, closely supervised by staff supervisors, stayed at Development for a maximum period of eighteen months (Ball 1984; MacDonald 1980). As Kenneth Auletta wrote in *The Underclass* (1983, 22), an investigation of supported work programs across the country, Development’s model incorporated “three programmatic techniques designed to make participants initially comfortable with the world of work and to gradually increase their ability to succeed in that world: peer-group support, graduated stress, and close supervision.”

This national version of supported work was heavily researched. Evaluated by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), the initial findings on Development’s supported work were less than positive. The program’s demonstration phase was marked by particularly low retention and high termination rates. In fact, the program’s retention rate was the lowest of all fifteen national sites and its rate of firings was the highest. Interviewees described Development as “a particularly tough program with respect to discipline” (Skidmore 1984, 84). But despite the mixed evaluation and a 1982 funding cut that ended this large-scale demonstration phase, Development’s managers remained committed to the concept of supported work. They continued the project by building a broad funding base from state, local, and private sources, in-kind donations and profit from its small businesses on site. These six for-profit-businesses included:

- an educational kits department, where Henry Thompson, Ruth Fallows, and six other former welfare recipients assembled reusable educational kits for a science museum downtown
- a weatherization unit, where Andy Johnson and five other men, three of whom were from the welfare rolls, weatherized area residences under contracts with city housing agencies and the local gas company
- a redistribution center from which Juan Martinez sold new and used building materials to low-income home owners
- an archive storage facility for center-city businesses
- a copying and binding service for local businesses
- a recently renovated forty-six-unit transitional housing complex, providing care management and support services to its formerly homeless tenants

According to Bill Perkins, Development's founder and director, the businesses provided supplemental income to broaden the company's funding base, offered supported work slots for trainees, created jobs for graduates and community members, and contributed to the development of the local economy. The agency's comptroller, who had been with Development since its inception, added:

We broke away in 1978. Now it's more business oriented; before it was just a funded agency. In '80 when Reagan got in, the funds were cut. We were originally to contribute one-third of the funds. Now we earn two thirds from fees for service and other businesses. It was planned, so we didn't have to rely on public funding. (Mike Small, Comptroller, Development)

Development's Corporate Model showed an integrated system in which the training and small businesses utilized and supported each other to accomplish the corporation's mission, "to empower people in need to attain the hope, motivation, and skills necessary to reach their fullest human potential and highest level of personal and family self-sufficiency" (Development fact sheet).

When I arrived at the agency in April 1992, both the TN program and corresponding beliefs about cultural deficiency were still much alive. They were embedded in this lofty mission and reflected in the agency's public relations materials. A brochure about Development's services described its target population as "at risk," and "having little to no work history and lacking for the most part employable skills." The state government also encouraged this continued emphasis on the "hardest to serve." State report forms, submitted each

month by Development's staff members to a state level task force on employment training, instructed program operators to "list the number of participants with characteristics shown. Duplicate count if participant has multiple characteristics." These forms offered additional descriptors to characterize the "hardest to serve" that included:

- ex-offender
- homeless person
- person who reads below the seventh grade level
- person with limited or no fluency in the English language
- person with few or no marketable occupational skills
- person with emotional or mental health problems
- recovering drug or alcohol abusers
- victim of domestic violence
- high school dropout
- minority youth (aged 18–25) without full-time employment experience
- displaced homemaker

According to staff lore, more was better, and case managers made consistent efforts to fit program applicants and participants into as many of these categories as possible. In practice then, unlike other training programs that screened out individuals according to prescribed criteria, Development was encouraged to seek out participants with multiple barriers in order to maintain funding levels.

THE REALITY OF THE HARDEST TO SERVE

This "hardest to serve" nomenclature was broad, and the eighteen former welfare recipients who worked at Development reflected this expanse. Twelve had no recent work history, six were recovering drug abusers, three spoke little to no English, three scored lower than grade seven in reading and math, four were high school dropouts, two were ex-offenders, and one had been homeless. Both Ruth and Henry lacked high school diplomas. Henry dropped out of the tenth grade to work in a factory down the street. Ruth got pregnant in ninth grade and didn't return to school after the birth of her only son. Because they had been out of work during the previous year, Development's case managers had also counted them as part of the

“no recent work history” category. Most of their co-workers in the kits department also fit into multiple categories. Noreen Diaz, a short, compact woman with bleached blonde hair, worked beside Ruth and Henry in the old warehouse. Noreen had attended school in Puerto Rico until the seventh grade, and her last full-time job had been a three-year stint in a toy factory twenty-three years ago. At forty-one with three adult children, she qualified as a high school dropout, as a displaced homemaker, and as a person scoring below seventh grade on literacy assessments. The others also had a long checklist of hardest to serve attributes. Josefina Burges, tiny as a bird with a tongue that chirped Spanish like a loquacious sparrow, was a newly hired member in the department. Josefina spoke virtually no English, and although she had worked in a cafeteria in Puerto Rico, at twenty-one she fell under the limited English, minority youth without full-time employment who scored below seventh grade on literacy assessments. Maria Lopez was also Puerto Rican, but unlike Josefina, she spoke nearly fluent English. Maria, young and shapely with neatly curled shoulder-length brown hair, was the “looker” of the group. Maria was a TN because at twenty-two, she was a minority youth without full-time employment. Edith Jenkins, now twenty-seven, was one of two African American women in the department. Dressed in reds, yellows, and greens, Edith often referred to herself as a “rasta man.” She had used drugs since she was a teenager, an addiction that caused her to drop out of school in tenth grade, and later catalyzed the breakup of her family. Edith’s parents were willing to raise her fourteen-year-old son and eleven-year-old daughter, but they couldn’t cope with Edith’s drug abuse and wouldn’t allow her to stay in their home. Edith, homeless for two years before she found work at Development, could be counted as homeless, a recovering drug addict, and a high school dropout with few or no marketable skills. Barbara Wilson, also African American, had had a more promising start. She had graduated from high school and spoke warmly of her retail work in local department stores. But her jobs had been through temporary agencies, and now twenty-five years old, she voiced concern that her dark skin and pockmarked face would decrease her marketability. Barbara fit under minority youth without full-time employment experience. And the list of the multiple labels and multiple categories went on and on.

But regardless of their histories, Development offered these people the same prescription for a perceived lack of work ethic and work experience. Joe Jenkins, Development’s new Human Resource Director explained:

This is a job work, a job readiness program. In other words, you learn how to work; you learn how to behave. You learn how to accept authority, all those things that people who are disenfranchised have for some reason not learned. We teach them, and they go out and look for a job. (Joe Jenkins, human resource director, Development)

At Development, Henry's twenty years in a textile factory, one of many that had been the economic mainstay of the neighborhood in his youth, weren't relevant. Neither was the fact that Ruth Fallows and Barbara Wilson had a combined twelve years of work experience, that Josefina Burges lacked English language skills, not work experience, or that Edith Jenkins was plagued by her drug addictions, not by an inability to follow directions or work in a team. The theme, that trainees at Development didn't know how to work, and as a correlate, didn't how to behave or to accept authority, had followed Henry, Ruth, and their co-workers from Development's demonstration phase to this more recent reincarnation. It was embodied in the beliefs and opinions of Development's case managers, the design of the agency's training sessions, and in the social organization of the workplace.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE HARDEST TO SERVE

I got my initial introduction to the imposed identity of TN recipients during my first visit to Development in April 1992 when James Taylor, the manager of the agency's small Human Resources department, gave me a tour of the facility. Walking through the halls of the agency's low-slung classroom building, we passed a crowd of men and women, ranging in skin tones from white to brown to black, hovering near the time clock. Taylor referred to them as trainees from the welfare office, adding in a lowered voice that they clock in, but "we don't see them all day. A friend clocks them out." I wasn't immediately sure what he meant, but I soon heard his suspicions about the trainees echoed in the comments of counselors, trainers, and job developers. Accusations of untrustworthiness and irresponsibility were common in interviews and informal conversations with these supervisors. Nava Gopalan, an Indian woman with a master's degree in social work, had been hired as a counselor to work with Development's younger clients. She talked about the program's trainees in terms of their gender.

I think the girls realize the need to graduate. Men drop out to work. I think they find hanging out on the street corner they make ten times

more money than [working at] McDonald's. One student has been in and out of jail. It's very difficult to me; he may be driving a new car, but he can't be out of the ghetto. (Nava Gopalan, counselor, Development)

For John Harris, an employment counselor and part-time job developer who had just obtained his undergraduate degree in social work, ethnicity was a concern. In Harris's opinion, it was his Puerto Rican clients who lacked knowledge and skills. "Working with Hispanics who haven't been in this country for too long . . . they really need a lot of guidance and instruction," asserted Harris. "They don't come with skills. The language skills, there's an educational barrier even in their country."

For other staff members, welfare status alone provided rationale for the deficiencies they perceived in their TN clients. Theresa Randle had been hired as a counselor at Development one and a half years before my arrival. Tall, thin, and in her late forties, Theresa was African American herself. But she was from the Bahamas, a member of the old guard who advocated a bootstraps philosophy of personal improvement. According to Randle, her clients didn't live up to her standards.

You can always tell people on welfare. Did you ever notice, they never open the blinds? Their houses are dark; they're afraid someone will peer in. Welfare will pay; why pay the electricity if you know you can get help once your bill is more than five hundred dollars? Gas too. Most people have no experience beyond welfare. They live check to check. They don't realize they could do better. (Theresa Randle, counselor, Development)

Schooled in a social-work tradition grounded in theories of cultural deprivation, Randle and her colleagues on Development's administrative staff, in the counseling department, and in management believed that the welfare recipients, both those in training and those like Henry and Ruth who found employment at Development after their six months of training, were devious, weak, and inexperienced; they were also in dire need of the work experience and counseling that the agency provided.

SOCIALIZATION FOR WORK

These preconceptions did not initially pose a problem for Henry, Ruth, and their colleagues. Development had been a route back

into the labor force for them all. Henry had been out of work so long that he was beyond restless; he was desperate to fill his days. Development had been his second choice. Since his preference—an electronics course at the local community college—had not been funded, he took the training slot at Development and rationalized that anything was better than nothing. Ruth had been laid off from her last job two years ago, and as sole support for herself and her son Jake, she found herself relying too heavily on her brother's largesse. Development had been a second chance for their co-workers as well, and they each had their own stories about enrolling in Development's TN Program. For Noreen Diaz, Josefina Burges, Maria Lopez in the kits department, and even Maria's husband Tomas, who found work as a crew supervisor at Development after training, location had been a concern. Development was in the neighborhood, and as Spanish speakers in a city thick with ethnic animosity, the proximity made them feel safe. Sam Jessup, who worked as a crew supervisor in Development's redistribution center, was impressed that the agency saved him a training slot while he was in drug rehab. When he finished his forty-day treatment program, Development had been his first stop. Will Chandler, another crew supervisor, confided that he had been lured by Development's training stipends, the highest in the city he had been told.

Despite these differing motives, they all welcomed their case managers' referrals, and when the staff at Development prescribed an hour of job-readiness, an hour of computer-assisted learning, and four hours in a work crew each day for their unemployment ills, they didn't question the package. Each component, the emphasis on group counseling, the individualized, computer-based tutoring, and the supported work, was based upon the supposition that as welfare recipients, they lacked the middle-class norms, experiences, and coping mechanisms that employers required. According to the company's director, Development's broad-based reliance on the supported work model was based upon two premises. "We don't cream," he asserted. "Our basic philosophy is everybody deserves a chance." He continued, "For some people just being in the day-to-day job environment is important."

COMPUTERS IN THE LEARNING LAB

Henry and Ruth spent the sole hour of explicitly didactic training each day in Development's computer lab. The lab housed ten computers, all arranged in a row against the room's yellow and brown

walls. According to Bill Perkins, the agency's director, the room was designed to counter welfare recipients' prior lack of success in formal educational settings.

Our clients don't like school. They may have had bad experiences. Work doesn't seem like school. We can spoonfeed the school part. Even better with the advent of the computer, if you don't use them [computers] as games. Computers in the learning lab help people learn they're not stupid. We're not telling them, the box is. A real learning curve is around the idea of learning, [which brings a] change of respect of yourself. (Bill Perkins, Director, Development)

Karen Casey, Development's computer lab coordinator, added some insights.

Any anxiety dwindles away pretty quickly. Some people tell me that they're anxious. I tell them I've had five-year-olds sit down and work on these computers. Lots of people come here and think that they can't learn; then they can't. A lot of people are breaking down barriers. This is a noncompetitive atmosphere. You're only competing with yourself. . . . I try to concentrate here on learning is fun. (Karen Casey, lab coordinator, Development)

Casey was right about the lab. People liked working there. It was crowded all hours of the day with men and women sitting mesmerized in front of computer monitors, reading text, typing words in blanks on the screen, and choosing from lists of possibilities. The problem was that the time there was always too short. "All you get is one hour of computer lab every day," Henry complained. "Because there are too many people." As Carla Whitaker, Henry's colleague in the kits department, spelled out, the computer lab closed promptly at 4:30, the same time Development's employees left work. "I can't go [to the computer lab] because we're working all day. They should keep it open two hours after work." But Development wasn't a place where people stayed late. Despite its rhetoric, Development wasn't a community center. It was a workplace in the inner city and its trainees, trainers, counselors, administrators, and assemblers alike punched out and left each afternoon at 4:30.

Even if staff members had been willing to stay, Carla's suggestion would not be easy to implement in a neighborhood where drug dealers took ownership of the sidewalks once the sun set. Field notes taken after a walk outside the compound reflect the strong feelings that the area engendered.

Ronnie James, the agency's fifty-eight-year-old maintenance man, told me that work crews were outside cutting the grass earlier in the morning, and so I walked around the building in the hope that I might watch them work. I peered across the street to an abandoned field that Development had twice tried, without success, to transform into a park. It was empty, littered with broken bottles and overgrown with weeds. I walked around the perimeter of the compound hoping I'd find the crews along my way. The building's walls were covered with blue, green, red, and yellow swirls of names tagged in spray paint, the medium of choice for these urban statements of identity. The first three floors of windows were boarded up, and razor wire hung from the compound walls.

I was alone in the back of the compound except for a refrigerator that lay on its side next to tires that had been dealt out like a hand of cards on the bare windswept field. The emptiness was silent and desolate. Two cars drove past while I walked; I was careful to keep my distance.

Coming back around to the front, I saw Ronnie cleaning broken glass from the pavement with a piece of cardboard. He joked saying, "Next time, Miss, don't break the beer bottle here," and added that broken glass on the sidewalks is a frequent problem in the summer. Inside the compound, Walt Smith, newly hired by the Archives Department, sat on a shaded step, eating a sandwich and drinking a soda. I joined him on the stoop, and we talked about the razor wire that decorated the old factory building. "But that won't stop them," Walt commented, referring to potential thieves. "They're like monkeys." (June 26, 1992, field notes, Development)

The neighborhood was indeed the source of much concern among Development's staff members. This was a place people avoided. Daytime in the neighborhood had an eerie feeling; nights were not a place for the living. As a journalist for the local newspaper wrote, "[T]he commercial center of the neighborhood was skid-row ratty and rundown, especially at night, though it wasn't as scary as a lot of the row house streets. It sat in eternal darkness and gloom under the El, and the tracks were supported by an archway of rusted iron crab legs, a symbol of the city's industrial death" (Lopez 1994, 9). Despite Carla's optimism, no one would be using Development's computer lab after sunset for some time to come.

LIFE SKILLS

The remainder of the five hours of Development's training day was dedicated to reforming Henry, Ruth, and their colleagues, purging

them of bad habits and instilling new values and standards of behavior. Life Skills was the classroom venue to explore their marginalization from the economic mainstream. According to Life Skills instructors, the hour-long class was dedicated to helping poor men and women both become aware of their own deficiencies and learn new, more successful ways to approach work and life. As illustrated in the course outline (Chart 1.1), during the six weeks of Life Skills, sessions moved from an analysis of the psyche to an orientation to the workplace.

Chart 1.1. Life Skills Course Outline

Week 1: Life Skills

- Day 1:* Orientation
- Day 2:* Drawing of recent past/today
- Day 3:* Who determines your future? What barriers hold you back?
- Day 4:* Values, needs, and wants
- Day 5:* Resources vs. constraints

Week 2: Life Skills

- Day 1:* Transitional analysis
- Day 2:* Parental state
- Day 3:* Adult/child state
- Day 4:* Reviewing the tapes
- Day 5:* Goal setting

Week 3: World of Work

- Day 1:* Defining work/working to live
- Day 2:* Attendance/Punctuality
- Day 3:* Accepting criticism
- Day 4:* Getting promoted/fired

Week 4: World of Work

- Day 1:* Anger/Stress
- Day 2:* Recreation and work
- Day 3:* Budgeting/making the best of your lifetime
- Day 4:* Discrimination at work
- Day 5:* Review of the week

Week 5: Job Development

- Day 1:* Applications
- Day 2:* Resumes

- Day 3:* Resumes
- Day 4:* Cover letters
- Day 5:* Review week

Week 6: Job Development

- Day 1:* Job search, how to look for a job
- Day 2:* Job search, how to read ads
- Day 3:* Appointments
- Day 4:* Interview, speak, dress, act
- Day 5:* Interview practice

The following, from field notes taken during the third day of week one in Life Skills, provides a glimpse into the sessions. While particular to one group meeting, the interaction was characteristic of all the Life Skills classes I saw and all those attended by Henry and Ruth one year earlier.

1:00 P.M., Helena Gay, a stylish African American woman in her late twenties, facilitated a conversation about obstacles and goals with the six men who were attending her Life Skills class. The men, one white and five African American, sat scattered in poses that ranged from outwardly attentive to casual deference.

On the board, Helena, who had been employed as a case manager at Development for the past year, had written the following steps:

Talking about excuses that get in your way

1. Discussing your goal
2. Achieving your goal
3. Identifying obstacles
4. Overcoming obstacles
5. Evaluating your progress

She read through the five steps aloud, and then asked the men to talk about their goals. Barely prompted, Charles Henderson, a large man with shaved head and dark spectacles, began talking about “obstacles in the way of puttin’ money away.” He spoke with ease, as though accustomed to this public soul searching. “I don’t really want to do this. I’m scared to do this. I was throwin’ a lot of obstacles in my way [of] building something. So I’m gonna’ do it. I’m kind of tired of this place. I’m kind of tired of the people here. Everybody’s ready to leave; they just don’t know what they’re gonna leave to. People get relaxed with the program.”

Tyrone Brown, smaller in build, spoke as soon as Charles stopped. “You need two hundred no’s for one yes. It just took me two no’s [to stop my search for a job]. Annette got a job. That’s what it shows, being persistent. People want to sit back and see how it goes for other people.”

Ten seconds of silence passed until Helena paraphrased Tyrone's comment with, "There's the motivation, watchin' other people." Looking around the group, Charles queried, "Who else got a job?" Tom Clark, sitting in the back of the room, replied "Mohammed," and Charles responded with "That's not a job; it's a tradeoff." Someone added that Mohammed found a free apartment, for which he traded maintenance work.

Helena asked, "What about you, Robert?" Robert James, a tall, thin man, took a minute and then responded with, "I know what my obstacles is. I start somethin' and don't finish it. And somethin' else I learned at Development. Just because this guy say he's gonna get me a job, that doesn't mean I'm gonna stop." Helena paraphrased, commenting on the importance of persistence and followup. Charles spoke up again. "A lot of people say I can get a job, but can I keep it? I get that big paycheck. A lot of reports have been comin' back, a lot of people goin' out and gettin' a job, get that big paycheck. They go back to drugs. Talk about goal. A lot of people say the goal is gettin' a job. I think of that sign in the lunchroom, *Anyone can get a job. It's keepin' one that's important.*" Tyrone added, "I learned that I can never get too comfortable. I need resources, 'cause that kind of job can go away."

No one stepped in, and the ensuing silence seemed to stretch on for minutes. Helena finally asked, "What about you, Blake?" to the only white man in the group. Blake Danner, a large man who with his unruly brown hair and plaid flannel shirt more closely resembled a young woodcutter than a resident of the inner city, waited a few seconds before beginning. "Keeping a job. Nothin' will hold me back. The problem is getting a job in the first place." Helena asked pointedly, "Have you been looking?" Blake said he had submitted his resume "to my off-site," a Catholic relief center where he had been doing office work and computer inputting for the past three months. It was common knowledge among the Human Resource counselors that Blake was only targeting his off-site training site for possible employment, refusing to send resumes to other companies. Helena commented, "You have enough resumes to send them to other places. Well, Blake, I'll tell you, if they're not talkin'," referring to the center, "you have to let them know that you're valuable." "They did say they'd like me to stay through," Blake persisted. Helena asked if the center has any money to pay him. Blake shook his head no, saying, "They don't have funding."

Helena looked around, waited another minute for someone to begin speaking, and when no one volunteered, asked, "Anybody else? How will you evaluate progress? By keeping your job?" Tyrone took the floor again, saying, "Gettin' on my subject, I'm gonna get me a nice full-time job. I had a part-time job. I couldn't do the things I wanted to do. Not enough money. I had a nice stable job. Kids. I got divorced. I need a nice stable job." Helena asked Tyrone about ob-

stacles, and Tyrone, referring enigmatically to his history of substance abuse, responded, "I have a couple of bad habits, but I have them under control." Helena continued, "Are you doing anything to keep them under control? You know that that is an obstacle. What do you think could help you overcome that?" Tyrone, reciting the litany he had memorized from the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings that many of the group members attended, stated, "changing my peoples, people, places, and things."

After what seemed far longer than the minute or two of silence that followed, Helena responded with, "Anybody can interject, can share here." Charles took the floor. "A big thing is changes, people you hang with. You may have one percent resistance left and meeting a person may make it go. Gee, it'd be good to be straight. I got to stop hangin' with you, you got to stop hanging with me." Helena paraphrased, "You have to change it," and Charles continued, "It's hard being an addict. It's a lonely type thing. Straight people don't want to be around you. They don't want to trust you." Helena asked, "What are you going to do?" Tyrone interjected, "Another obstacle is not giving up." Changing topics, Charles commented directly to Tyrone now. "A personal observation, you get mad quick. You get mad at Will [the men's work crew supervisor]. Sometimes I think you're gonna kill him. You have to be like a willow tree. You got to learn how to bend, not break. These ain't slavery days."

The conversation continued in the same vein for fifteen more minutes. Each man articulated his goals and barriers, and Helena closed with, "Well everybody's shared today." As the men stood up to leave, they commented that the last several sessions had been like twelve-step meetings. On his way out, Charles summed up their thoughts. "For the last couple weeks, you've been really diggin' into our cases." (May 6, 1992, field notes, Development)

In addition to "diggin' into [their] cases" in the therapy-like sessions, Life Skills also included videotapes of the motivational speaker Les Brown and confessionals by former clients who returned to share wisdom concerning life postwelfare. But regardless of the particular topic or format, the sessions were all designed as opportunities for men and women to reflect on their experiences and those of other trainees, and for Development's trainers and case managers, as representatives of middle-class norms, to advise them in their move toward economic stability. Trainers outlined procedures for opening a checking account, highlighted the benefits of property insurance, and shared strategies for obtaining job leads. For Frank Young, a young African American physical education major who taught Life Skills classes at Development, the trainees' problems were "maybe ninety percent the system, ten percent the individual." But while

barriers may be structural, at Development, it was the individual that was prodded and poked, pushed, and pulled. Like Helena Gay, in Frank Young's Life Skills classes, he stressed that "you have to do your ten percent."

SUPPORTED WORK

While Life Skills sessions attempted to teach Ruth and Henry how to negotiate the demands of life and of work, Development's work experience was the vehicle to teach them how to work. Assigned to work crews in various departments at Development, they were guided and monitored by crew leaders, many of whom had been hired by the company after completing training themselves. Some trainees, suited up in navy blue work coveralls and gloves, painted steel H-shaped bars with bright orange paint. Others, such as Mia Sanders and Joan Coltrane, were placed in the kit department, where they counted and bagged small scissors, springs, and Q-tips for future kit assembly. For their work support, Henry and Ruth had been placed in work crews not unlike that of the three-man work crew cleaning Development's boiler room one spring morning in 1992. Tomas Lopez, Maria's husband, was the crew's leader. A twenty-two-year-old Puerto Rican man, Tomas had been hired straight out of training and had worked as crew supervisor at Development for the past year.

Tomas filled two buckets with water and brought them back toward the steps where I stood in the boiler room. His three-man crew waited quietly as he added liquid from plastic containers marked AMMONIA and DETERGENT to the water. The closed, dark space of the basement-like room was filled with the boiler itself, which stood low and wide in its center. Last week Will Chandler's crews had painted the room's floor. This week Tomas's crew removed the newspaper coverings from the boiler's pipes. During their work experience today, the men were washing down the floor for the third time.

Despite his two years in the United States, Tomas's English ability was still negligible. His crew, all African-American, spoke no Spanish, and so they communicated through bits of Pidgin English and gestures, relying on their knowledge of the task at hand to get the job done. Like a flock of birds in flight, they moved silently, working in tacit synchrony and coordinating rhythm and tasks. First Tomas hosed, then two men soaped while the other squeegeed the floor. After about ten minutes Tomas was called out of the room, and while he was gone, the men's dance continued. One hosed the floor; the

other two squeezed the water into the corner drain. (August 10, 1992, field notes, Development)

This scene was like other work assignments, variously described by crew supervisors and case managers as “working in the warehouse, mixing paint . . . receiving, shipping, and also dealing with customers.” “Work on the first floor, cleaning, stack the cabinet[s], work in the fifth floor with the trash.” “Doing general maintenance of the building, sweeping, cleaning.” Like Blake Danner in Helena’s Life Skills class, a few clients had been given work experience slots with Development’s clerical and administration staff, and a few were able to access work experience off site with area nonprofits. Because of budget constraints however, these outside placements were drastically reduced in 1992 and 1993.

During my time at the agency, two contracted training programs, one to train security guards and the other to train individuals for jobs as radon inspectors, were the only deviations from Development’s supported work. In each case, Development staff members obtained training manuals from a company or industry representative, trained a few participants who had tested into the cohort, and took responsibility for job placement, along with the clients themselves. While one security company gave the trainees priority when hiring (although it didn’t assure employment), employment in the radon industry was far less certain. In fact by the end of the radon classes, the agency failed to place any of the trainees into jobs in the radon industry. Instead, nine of the original ten trainees found employment in telemarketing and housekeeping. Only one man, Richard Price, remained. Proud that he had taken the GED test during his tenure at Development, Richard was awaiting his scores and networking to find a job when we talked. He was relying on Catherine Peace, a consultant at Development, to help him find work, but had not yet received feedback from this contact or from a radon company.

By official definitions, Development’s work experience had been successful in preparing welfare recipients for the workforce. Between 55 percent and 60 percent of its 1992 graduates found employment at wages averaging \$6.44 an hour, a rate substantially higher than the state-mandated goal of 50 percent placement in jobs that pay at least \$.75 more than minimum wage. More importantly, 75 percent of those men and women placed in jobs, or 30 percent of Development’s total training participants, were still in their jobs after the ninety days required by the state. The project had been acclaimed by state monitors as one of the best TN projects statewide and was awarded a Governor’s Achievement Award

in 1991. In practice, Development's training mirrored the findings of a 1984 evaluation of the demonstration phase conducted by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). During my research at the agency, its most vocal supporters were men and women with few options outside the project.¹ As the next section illustrates, they included ex-addicts who found work at the agency and women whose clerical training and subsequent employment at Development afforded them a long-sought-after sense of self in the workplace. But Henry, Ruth, and many of their colleagues were conflicted about their own successes. Despite their time at Development, they knew they still lacked the technical skills and certification needed to become competitive in the labor force, and over time, they became increasingly angry that they hadn't been able to acquire either at Development.

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF WORK

After every training cycle, Development hired a small percentage of the trainees to work permanently in one of its several on-site businesses. Men and women clamored for the opportunity to stay at Development; trainees talked with admiration about graduates who had been fortunate enough to be offered full-time jobs as office assistants, training supervisors, kit assemblers, or warehouse workers. By my arrival in 1992, eighteen, or 40 percent of Development's forty-five full-time employees, had first participated in the agency's training. Referred to as "roll-overs" by DPW case managers, these men and women had been at Development from a period of less than one year to longer than ten years, and their salaries ranged from \$4.50 to \$6.00 an hour.

In spite of the envy of their juniors, Henry Thompson and Ruth Fallows soon realized that no matter how long or how hard they worked in Development's Educational Kits Department, they would always be seen as less than. But it was not the work itself that defined their status positions at the company. According to a management consultant at Development, work in the kits department

requires attention to detail. No box can be overlooked. Maybe they [the graduates] take those skills for granted. They aren't looking at what they do as skills. They are more responsible in pressure times and there is pressure. That's also something everyone can't do. And in kits they have several different kits and a lot of different materials in each one. It's not like assembly line work. (Catherine Peace, consultant, Development)

Ray Smith, the kits department supervisor, was responsible for developing work assignments. But Henry and Ruth organized and accomplished that work in collaboration with the other women in the department. They divided tasks, prioritized activities, and completed them as they saw fit. In fact, for the former welfare recipients, Development was a place where, as Ruth explained, “No one’s looking over my shoulder.” In fact, none of the work at Development, providing clerical support, weatherizing area houses, supervising work crews, or assembling educational kits, was more routine than most jobs. None was assembly line; none was separated into discrete activities in the fashion of classic Taylorism.²

It was not the work, but the social organization of that work that defined Henry’s and Ruth’s status at the company. Through a two-tiered system, Development divided its employees into salaried and hourly positions that were differentiated by pay and benefit packages. Salaried staff included the agency’s managers, counselors, and support staff, who were hired either in response to a newspaper ad or through social contacts with the executive director. While race and ethnicity were often signs of this higher status, they were not the sole markers. Instead, difference was constructed through a melding of characteristics. For counselors, many of whom were African American or Puerto Rican with at least a bachelor’s degree, education was high on the list. But not all salaried employees had these educational credentials. Other men and women, ethnic whites from the nearby neighborhood, were friends of Bill Perkins, Development’s founder and director. They had what social scientists call *social capital*, and social capital (it) went a long way at Development. French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1997, 51) defines *social capital* as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.” At Development, this “durable network” had been developed through informal sports contacts that webbed around the agency’s director. Dick Jones, business manager in the company’s Archives Department, coached Bill’s son Andrew in football. Helen Anderson, Archives’ office manager, explained that her son also “played football with Andrew. I met Dick that way, and Bill.” Ron Duncan, the systems coordinator, “played golf” with Bill, who had been his golfing coach at college.

Like the counselors, the credit of these salaried staff members translated to:

Chart 1.2. Development's Personnel Policies

SALARIED WORKERS

- 6.67 hours/month accrued paid vacation
- tuition reimbursement of up to \$600/year
- three paid administrative leave days/year
- ten paid holidays/year
- leaves of absences for disability/maternity, military, personal, paternity, bereavement, and jury duty
- paid health insurance for employees, spouses, and their children age nineteen and under
- paid life insurance and an accidental death policy
- participation in a pension plan

HOURLY WORKERS

- no vacation
- no tuition reimbursement
- no paid leave
- ten paid holidays/year
- no paid leave
- paid health insurance for themselves after one year on the job
- paid life insurance after one year
- participation in a pension plan
- a quarterly bonus based upon attendance*

*The quarterly bonus was awarded as follows:

- Individuals with 100 percent attendance received a \$200 bonus;
- Individuals with a 99–98 percent attendance received a \$160 bonus;
- Individuals with 97–96 percent attendance received a \$120 bonus;
- Individuals with a 95 percent attendance received a \$100 bonus.

- 6.67 hours of accrued paid vacation each month,
- tuition reimbursement of up to \$600 per year,
- a maximum of three paid administrative leave days per year,
- ten paid holidays per year,
- leaves of absence for disability/maternity, military, personal, paternity, bereavement, and jury duty,
- paid health insurance for themselves, their spouses, and their children age nineteen and under,
- paid life insurance and an accidental death policy,
- participation in a pension plan.

Ruth and Henry, on the other hand, brought only their welfare reciprocity, inner city residence, and lower-class status to Development. Those characteristics hadn't translated into much of value. They and the other sixteen men and women who arrived at Development via its training program, as well as nine other African American and Puerto Rican employees, had hourly positions, a sub-